

Grade  
Level:  
Adaptable,  
grades 3-5

# Fannie Lou, Let Your Voice Be Heard

English/Language Arts, Music, Black History, Women's History, US History

*This is a two-part lesson plan that can span more than one class period, depending on grade level and available instruction time.*

## Learning Objectives:

- To demonstrate how a poem can tell a story
- To identify particular story elements within a poem
- To identify how words—spoken and sung—engage audiences
- To recognize how an author's point of view is expressed through the poetic form
- To enhance students' vocabularies through the exploration of key concepts (e.g. stanza, line, point of view, perspective, conflict, and setting)

## Necessary Materials:

- Fannie Lou Hamer BrainPOP episode (available for free on the Find Your Voice website)
- "Fannie Lou, Who Are You?" and "Fannie Lou: She-ro" Poems and Questions for Analysis by Valerie D. Fairley
- Poetry journal for each student

## Background Knowledge:

You may wish to enhance/refresh your knowledge of Fannie Lou Hamer by consulting this [Biographical Sketch of Fannie Lou Hamer](#) before introducing the "Fannie Lou, Let Your Voice Be Heard" unit.

## Instruction Steps:

### Part One: Poetic Performance

#### Anticipatory Set

**Step One:** To pique student interest in Fannie Lou Hamer, and to provide general background information about her, view the Fannie Lou Hamer BrainPOP episode. This episode is available for free through the Find Your Voice website.

**Step Two:** Preview the unit for your class. Explain that during this unit, students will learn about Fannie Lou Hamer, an historical figure who made her voice heard and brought about important social, political, and

economic change. Further, explain that they will explore poetry and learn about ways to tell stories through poetry. At the end of the unit, they will create their own narrative poem and recite it out loud for the class!

## Direct Instruction

**Step Three:** Provide an example of a poem that tells a story and engages an audience by reciting the poem, "Fannie Lou, Who Are You?" or "Fannie Lou: She-ro" to your class. As you recite this poem, be careful to model voice, articulation, physical presence, evidence of understanding through storytelling, and dramatic appropriateness. Ask the students what their general reactions were to the poem and record these reactions on the board.

If possible, you could also partner with the school music teacher or a parent volunteer to set the poem to music. If you do so, encourage the students to engage with the rhythm and beat of the song—dancing or clapping along as they feel moved.

## Independent Practice

**Step Four:** As students retrieve their poetry journals, write these three questions on the board:

What did you notice about the **words**?

What did you notice about the **way the teacher spoke**?

What did you notice about the **way the teacher expressed herself nonverbally** (through facial expressions and physical gestures)?

Explain what each question means and encourage students to record their observations in their poetry journals while you recite the same poem a second time.

## Peer to Whole-Class Engagement

**Step Five:** Recite the poem a second time. When you are finished, ask students to discuss their observations in pairs—using the questions on the board as a guide.

**Step Six:** Have the class come back as a whole and share their partnered observations with the larger class. Record these alongside the earlier observations, noting how they are digging deeper. This deeper dig is called a “Poem Analysis.”

## Part Two: Poetry Analysis

### Direct Instruction

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**Step Seven:** Distribute the text of the poem, with the questions for analysis. Instruct students to place the text of the poem inside their poetry notebook. Label and explain the core elements of the poem (including its stanzas and lines) on a larger projected version of the text.

**Step Eight:** Next, explain to students that although this is a poem, it still provides a clear narrative, or story about the life of Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer. This is what is referred to as a “Narrative Poem,” ask students where they find evidence of a story being told within the poem. Encourage them to specify stanza and line in their responses.

### Guided Practice

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**Step Nine:** Guide the students through the first three questions for further analysis. Encourage each student to respond with specific evidence (stanza and line) from the poem:

- Who is the **main character** in the poem?
- What is the **setting** of this poem?
- What was the **conflict/problem**? How was it **solved**?
- \*Who is telling this story? What words/phrases help you determine this?

**Step Ten:** \*Before you get to the fourth question, provide a bit more explanation of the “point of view” concept. Explain to students that one way to express your point of view or to let your voice be heard is to write about a topic. Sometimes, authors choose

speakers or narrators for their poems. This means that the voice narrating the poem is telling the story from their point of view or the way the character sees things. Return collectively to the poem, “Fannie Lou, Who Are You?” and ask the students to consider question four: Who is telling this story? What words/phrases help you determine this? As the students consider this big question, write the phrase “point of view” on the board, define it, and draw a thumbnail sketch of an eye to provide a visual representation for this abstract concept.

If students are having difficulty answering this abstract question, you can use supporting questions like: An author’s point of view shapes his/her opinion. What is the topic of the poem? What is the speaker’s opinion of Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer? What words or phrases helped you to determine this? Be sure students are clear by the end of the discussion that Fannie Lou Hamer is not the author of the poem, Valerie D. Fairley is, but Fairley is writing the poem from Hamer’s perspective.

### Independent Practice/ Peer Review

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**Step Eleven:** Encourage students to create their own narrative poems by brainstorming individually or in pairs about a story they would like to tell, which will include a setting, characters, and conflict, and which will express a point of view. Unlike stories the class is used to, however, this story will unfold in lines and stanzas--the poetic form.

### Group Share

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**Step Twelve:** Once the students have drafted and edited their narrative poems in pairs, prepare them to recite their poems before the class by returning to their analysis of your earlier performance of the “Fannie Lou, Who Are You?” poem, specifically noting how poems that are performed engage their audiences through vocal and facial expressions as well as physical gestures.

### Closure

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**Step Thirteen:** Recap what students have learned from analyzing the “Fannie Lou, Who Are You?” poem, specifically:

- Poems unfold in lines and stanzas
- Narrative poems tell a story

## Find Your Voice Highlights

Students recognize poetry as a form of self-expression, a means of telling a story, and of considering alternative points of view. Students gain practice communicating in prose as well as nonverbally, as they consider the performative power of facial expressions and physical gestures. Students are inspired by Fannie Lou Hamer’s example to speak up, speak out, and let their voices be heard.

- Stories have conflicts that are solved by characters
  - Stories have settings
  - Poems express a point of view
  - Words—spoken and sung—hold performative power to engage audiences
- pairs, and perform their poems before the class.

**Assessment of Student Learning:** Students will engage in a guided narrative poem analysis and record their reflections in poetry journals. Students will also create their own narrative poems, edit these poems in

### Lesson Plan Author: Valerie D. Fairley

Valerie D. Fairley is a native of Moorhead, Mississippi. During her childhood in the Mississippi Delta, her grandmother, Minnie would often attend meetings where Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer was the featured speaker. Her grandmother would share information about this remarkable woman who wasn't afraid to stand up against the Jim Crow laws of the South. Later, she began to read and study the life of Mrs. Hamer and became fascinated with the courage that she exemplified during such turbulent times in Mississippi's dark history. Mrs. Fairley obtained a Bachelor in Elementary Education from Mississippi Valley State University. She received a Masters and Specialist in Elementary Education from Delta State University. She did further studies toward a Doctorate in Teacher Leadership from Walden University.





## Fannie Lou, Let Your Voice Be Heard

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Poems and Discussion Questions

### **Fannie Lou, Who Are You?**

by Valerie D. Fairley

#### **Fannie Lou, Fannie Lou**

##### **Who are You?**

I'm the lady from Ruleville  
Who decided to vote  
In Indianola, Mississippi  
So please take note,  
I didn't back down and I passed  
The literacy test, paid the poll tax  
And laid that to rest.

#### **Fannie Lou, Fannie Lou**

##### **Who are You?**

I am the woman who was brutally beaten  
In Winona's jail  
Laid up a month or two  
But lived to tell  
I'm the delegate who spoke at the 1964 Democratic Convention  
And did I fail to mention  
Brought the cruelties of Mississippi to  
World-wide attention.

#### **Fannie Lou Fannie Lou**

##### **Who are You?**

I'm the businesswoman who started Freedom Farm  
To feed the hungry families and raise the alarm,  
I'm the one who started the pig bank, helped nearly 200  
Families rise through the rank  
I helped secure decent housing along with other unknown things  
Even help furnish a garment factory with sewing machines

Yes, I'm Fannie Lou Hamer, that's who I am.  
A woman from Ruleville, Mississippi who took a stand  
I'm here in spirit so here's your chance.  
I'm handing you the baton, so take a stand  
Stand for the rights and freedom of every boy, girl, woman, and man.



## Fannie Lou, Let Your Voice Be Heard

### **Fannie Lou: She-Ro**

by Valerie D. Fairley

She rose from the flatlands of the Delta  
To gain international fame  
Fannie Lou Hamer was her name.

She registered in Indianola  
and was beaten in Winona  
thrown off Marlow's plantation by its owner.  
She rose to international fame  
Fannie Lou Hamer was her name,

She spoke before the National Democratic Convention in 1964  
Stood proudly and proclaimed, Mississippi's indignities and shame  
Rose to international fame  
Fannie Lou Hamer was her name.

She helped feed the hungry and secure decent houses for the poor  
Bought Freedom farm and did so much more  
You asked me what's her name?  
Fannie Lou Hamer say it loud and make it plain  
A Mississippi She-Ro who rose to International fame.



**Fannie Lou, Let Your  
Voice Be Heard**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Questions for Poetry Analysis**

**1. Who is the main character in the poem?**

**2. What is the setting of this poem?**

**3. What was the conflict/problem? How was it solved?**

**4. Who is telling this story? What words/phrases help you determine this?**