“Catch the Fire” by Sonia Sanchez

**Theme**

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| **Language, Music, and Vernacular in African American Poetry** |

**Standards**

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| **Common Core*** Literature 2) Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
* Literature 5) Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
* Craft and Structure 4) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
* Knowledge and Ideas 4) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
* Types and Purposes b) Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
* Production and Distribution of Writing 4) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Standards of Learning for Virginia*** 9.4.d) Compare and contrast the use of rhyme, rhythm, sound, imagery, and other literary devices to convey a message and elicit the reader’s emotion
* 9.4.e) Analyze the cultural or social function of a literary text.
* 10.4.c) Interpret the cultural or social function of world and ethnic literature.
* 10.4.h) Explain the influence of historical context on the form, style, and point of view of a literary text(s).
* 10.4.k) Compare and contrast how literary devices convey a message and elicit a reader’s emotions.
* 11.4.d) Interpret the social or cultural function of American literature.
* 11.4.e) Analyze how context and language structures convey an author’s intent and viewpoint.
* 11.4.g) Interpret how the sound and imagery of poetry support the subject, mood, and theme, and appeal to the reader’s senses.
* 12.4.h) Use critical thinking to generate and respond logically to literal, inferential, and evaluative questions about the text(s).
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**Lesson Body and Sequence:**

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| **STUDENT WILL DO** | **TEACHER WILL DO** |
| **Background Information** |
| Sonia Sanchez (b. 1934) is known for her theatrical and musical performances. She is a poet, activist, playwright, editor, and teacher. Sanchez has published over a dozen books of poetry and numerous plays, short-stories, children’s books, and discographies. Sanchez has won countless awards including the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and Pew Fellowship in the Arts. During the Thursday Keynote Speeches at the 1994 Furious Flower Conference, Sanchez read “Catch the Fire,” a poem devoted to social change. As you watch the video and read the poem, pay attention to how Sanchez uses musical elements in her performance. | Introduce Sanchez. Discuss her poetic style, how it differs from many poets, and the issues she tends to focus on in her body of work.  |
| **Reader Response Questions** |
| 1. What are you passionate about? What is your fire?
 | These questions are designed to help students begin to think about the issues that will be discussed further in the lesson.  |
| 1. How does your family or community add or detract from your passion? Is there anything you’d like to change? Explain.
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| 1. What social justice issue/s do you care deeply about?
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| 1. Is there a role model, leader, or family member that has informed you about your social justice issue? Explain.
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| 1. How does your history help make you who you are?
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| **History and Culture** |
| 1. Sanchez’s poem incorporates political reform, listing influential political figures such as Nat Turner, W. E. B. DuBois, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela. How does her act of naming these figures influence the fire?
 | Review the figures in “Catch the Fire,” their time period, and their movements.  |
| 1. “Catch the Fire” alludes to movements throughout history, like Nat Turner, slavery (“slaveships”), and “sit ins and marches.” How do you think this heightens the theme of the poem? Can you think of any figures you would add to this list?
 | Review allusion. |
| **Poet’s Craft and Structure** |
| 1. Sanchez sings parts of this poem in the 1994 video, and if you look at the written poem, there are certain parts that are capitalized (“CATCH YOUR FIRE…DON’T KILL / HOLD YOUR FIRE…DON’T KILL). Do you think that this visual performance helps to change the way we read it and vice versa? Why do you think Sanchez chose to capitalize these words?
 | Review structure and how Sanchez’s performance poem is different from the majority of poems that are read in high school. In the majority of poems, the poet must perform on the page and not the stage.  |
| 1. Notice how the poem is centered on the page, creating instances where there is only one word in a line. As you read the poem, pay attention to the lengths of the lines. Do they change the way you read the poem? Are your eyes more drawn to one line because of its length as opposed to another? How does this influence your reading of the poem? Explain.
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| 1. Rhetoric is language that is meant to be persuasive or have a heightened effect on the reader. Sanchez uses questions like “Where is your fire? I say where is your fire? / Can’t you smell it coming out of our past?” What do you think she’s trying to do by questioning her readers? How do these questions relate to the rest of the poem?
 | Review rhetoric and its uses.  |
| 1. What do you think is the importance of Sanchez using pronouns like “you,” “us,” and “our?” Does she effectively bring you into her fire? Explain.
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| **Reading and Writing Connections** |
| Think about something that you’re passionate about. In at least ten lines, write about your fire using some of the techniques Sanchez uses in her poem (rhetoric, structure, imagery [the way she creates a picture], and allusion [references to various people and events]). | Review figurative language. These Reading/Writing Connections are designed to encourage student choice and acts as the formative assessment for the lesson. Students should be able to utilize skills and concepts discussed in the lesson to complete either of the connections.  |
| Writing in the form of a speech, an advertisement, or a poem, convince someone to join your fire.  |

**Materials**

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| * Printed copy of poem (optional)
* Computer or tablet
* Paper/Pencil (Optional—Teachers may decide to have students complete all activities on their computer or tablet).
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