



National Council of Teachers of English

A Professional Association of Educators in English Studies, Literacy, and Language Arts

## March Madness Poetry Tournament

### Concept

The idea is to create a basketball tournament-pairing chart like the [NCAA](#) does each year in March using poetry and determine a final winner by reading the poems. **Choosing the poems and who will read them are the big decisions.** Locate 64 poems and pair them off, just like basketball teams. Read two poems each day and let the students vote on the "winner." Do this until you have a final four and the final winner.

Read about the [2009 NCAA Tournament](#) and get a [bracket paring chart](#) to **start your own tournament today!**

### Conducting the Tournament

#### Teacher Selects the Poems

The teacher selects 64 poems and reads them in pairs---one pair each day. The students select the one they like best. This poem is then declared a winner and advances along the tournament bracket. Another day and another match-up occurs and so on until all poems are read once. The second round of play starts then. Again, select two of the first-round winners in the proper order and brackets and read these again. Again, the class votes and so on until the final four and eventual winner are selected.

#### The Students Selects the Poems

The teacher lets the students select their favorite poems and then creates the tournament brackets. Two students read their poems in front of the class. The class votes and the winning poems advance to the next round. The process continues until the final four and eventual winner are selected.

#### Combination

The teacher and students select the poems. In the fall the teacher could prepare the students for the March Madness Tournament by suggesting poems and having the students start thinking of poems to include. A combination of the teacher and students read the poems.

There are many options for when the final four poems are selected after several rounds and weeks of play. One example is a Final Four event staged in the gym or classroom and the student body votes. The teacher, students or administrators could be reading the poems for the finals.

### Selecting Poems

There are endless options for selecting the poems. A few examples include:

- Locate poems written by poets found in all four compass directions in the US---East, West, North, and South similar to the basketball brackets.
- If 64 is too many, just start at 32, the second round in the 64 field.
- Break it into two sections, representing the two sides of the tournament. Poems that are a little "harder" are on one side and "easier" poems on the other.
- Create themes for each day of poetry such as death, humor, love, growing up, sports, and others.

### Examples

Read what [teachers have done](#) with their March Madness Poetry Tournaments. 

#### What Teachers are Saying

What do Auden, Frost, E.E. Cummings, Eve Merriam, Langston Hughes, Sandra Cisneros, Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, Walter de la Mare, Edwin Hoey, Stephen Spender, Emily Dickenson, Robert Burns and Walt Whitman have in common? They all wrote poems nominated by my kids for the tournament. The quality of the poetry the kids nominated knocked me out. I was unsure of what I would get, so I had several poems ready to plug in but didn't need 'em. I'm embarrassed that I so underestimated my students' judgment! I'm glad I tried my experiment.

I'd do this again, but try to "play" another class—64 poems in one class is a lot! The kids have really enjoyed it. Good luck figuring it all out. I got observed during a match and the principal went nuts—he was thrilled.

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