James Edwin Campbell
19th Century African American Poet

Grades 6-8

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Resource Materials
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    by Michelle O’Malley, PhD
  Learning about Poetry by Christina Veladota, Ph.D.
  Additional Resources
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Student Materials
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James Edwin Campbell

Selected Poems

Overview
James Edwin Campbell was an African American poet, who was born in Pomeroy, Ohio, in 1867. He penned his early verses while studying at Pomeroy High School (now known at Meigs High School) and published his first book of poetry, Driftings & Gleanings, in 1887. This book is written in Standard English, while his second collection, Echoes from the Cabin and Elsewhere (1895), employs the rich dialect of the African Americans in the Appalachian region in which he was raised.

Lesson Objectives (Ohio English Language Standards Reference Numbers)
By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:
• Determine what two of Campbell’s poems (one in Standard English and one in Black English) say explicitly and make logical inferences, as well as cite specific textual evidence. RL 6-8: #1
• Determine central themes and analyze their development, summarizing key supporting details and ideas. RL 6-8: #4
• Interpret words and phrases, including connotative and figurative meanings. RL 6-8: #4
• Analyze the structures of the poems and understand how specific word choices shaped meaning or tone and how specific phrases and stanzas relate to each other and the whole. RL 6-8: #5
• Write arguments to support claims, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. W 6-8: #1
• Prepare information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, organization development, and style. W 6-8: #2
• Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting or trying a new approach. W 6-8: #5
• Use visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of a presentation pertaining to the poems. W 6-8 #
• Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing and speaking, including capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. L 6-8: #1
• Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. L 6-8: #3
• Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials as appropriate. L 6-8: #4
• Demonstrate an understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. (Demonstrate an understanding of Black English dialect from an historical context as well as word usage.) L 6-8: #5

**Student Activities**

Students will complete the following activities in Session 1
• Read silently the biography of James Edwin Campbell and answer questions posed by the teacher
• Listen to the teacher or a student read “Two Styles of Writing” and participate in discussion about Standard English and Black English
• Divide into small groups, read “Before the Fire” and then complete worksheet as a group

Students will complete the following activities in Session 2
• Review “Two Styles of Writing”
• Discuss the concepts of Standard English and Black English
• Divide into small groups, read “Song of the Corn” and then complete worksheet as a group

Students will complete the following activities in Session 3
• Complete writing activities pertaining to “Before the Fire” and “Song of the Corn” as assigned by the teacher
• Make class presentations

**Materials Needed**
• A dictionary and thesaurus for each small group
• Copies of all handouts and worksheets for each student.
• Sheets of poster board or a chalkboard
• Access to the Internet for research or access to encyclopedias and maps of the United States
• Preselected geography and science books from the library that contain information for research outline in the *Let’s Write and Present* activities

**Teacher Preparations**
• Read over the biography and obituary of James Edwin Campbell to become familiar with his story.
• Read *Recognizing Dialect in Creative Writings* by Michelle O’Malley, PhD
• This lesson plan is divided into three sessions; however, you can combine the sessions for a longer class period or omit some activities for shorter sessions.
• Read over the worksheets and possible answers (some questions are open-ended and there are no wrong answers.)
• Collect materials
• Review Let’s Write and Present activities and determine how you might adapt them to your students. For example, in Activity 4, each student in the small group writes a paragraph; however, more creative or advanced students might write a full-page report instead. Additionally, some of the activities can be team taught by social studies, history, and science teachers.
• Read Learning about Poetry by Christina Veladota, PhD. Pay special attention to the information about personification, homonyms, and synonyms.

Procedures
Session 1
• Explain to the students that they will be learning about African American poet, James Edwin Campbell, and looking at two of his poems. Pass out copies of his biography and have them read it silently or assign paragraphs for oral reading.
• When the students have finished reading, ask the following questions of the class at large. Allow them to refer to the biography for answers.
  1. What year was James Edwin Campbell born and when did he die? How old was he when he died? 1867-1896, died of typhoid age 28
  2. What war had just ended when Campbell was born? Civil War
  3. Is it likely that some of Campbell’s relatives had been slaves? Yes
  4. Where was he born and what body of water is near his hometown? Pomeroy, Ohio, near the Ohio River
  5. What mountains are near his hometown? Appalachian Mountains
  6. Where did Campbell’s father work? Salt works
  7. Who can describe how salt was made in Pomeroy? Salt water extracted from wells that tapped an underground ocean was boiled, leaving salt crystals behind.
  8. What other industry was in Pomeroy at the time of Campbell? Coal mining
  9. What was the name of the first school in Pomeroy in the early 1800’s? Pomeroy Academy
10. What was the next name of Pomeroy Academy? Pomeroy High School
11. What is the name of the school today? Do you think the school today is in the same building as in the early 1800’s? Meigs Local High School. It is not located in the same school building that Campbell attended.
12. What school did Campbell and other black children attend before they were high school age? Kerr’s Run Colored School
13. How many grades did that school have? 8
14. What does the word “segregation” mean in this biography? White children and black children were not allowed to go to school together.
15. Did the people of Pomeroy Academy have to let Campbell and other African American high school students into the segregated school? No, there was no law requiring it yet.
16. After he graduated from high school Campbell published his first book of poems. What is the name of that book and when was it published? Driftings & Gleanings (1887)
17. What else did Campbell do immediately after graduation? Passed the teachers exam and began teaching school.
18. What other writing work did Campbell do? Edited two newspapers and wrote for magazines and newspapers around the country.
19. What school appointed Campbell as its first president and where is it located? What is it called today? West Virginia Colored Institute, which is West Virginia State University today near Charleston, WV.
20. Why did Campbell leave West Virginia Colored Institute and where did he go? He wanted to become a full time writer, and he move to Chicago.
21. Why was Campbell home just before he died? He came to the area to do readings from his new book.
22. What was the name of his second book and when was it published? Echoes from the Cabin and Elsewhere (1895).
23. What was the difference between Campbell’s first book and his second book? The first book was in Literary English and the second book was in Black English, or dialect.

• Read aloud “Two Styles of Writing” to the students or have a student read it aloud. Lead a class discussion about Standard English and Black English dialect. Refer to Recognizing Dialect in Creative Writings by Michelle O’Malley, PhD for discussion points.
• Explain that in today’s session you are going to take a closer look at one of Campbell’s poems written in Standard English, “Before the Fire.” Have students silently read the poem first. Then the teacher will read it aloud.
• Explain to the students that they will learn about homonyms, synonyms, and personification, which are all three in the poem. [NOTE: If these are new concepts or some time has elapsed since last discussing them, it might be better to introduce or review them the day before starting the Campbell lessons. Refer to Learning about Poetry by Christina Veladota PhD for further information if needed.]
• Divide the class into small groups of no more than 5 students. Distribute the “Before the Fire” worksheets. Explain to the students that they will be working together to answer the questions, and that some questions will
not have a right or wrong answer, but will instead require their opinions and ideas.

- Support students within their small groups and offer suggestions and help when they request it. Encourage them to think through the context of the poem for clues and to use the dictionary when necessary.
- After the small groups have had time to do the worksheet, go over it with the class and discuss the answers, asking for input from the groups for comparison of answers and ideas.
- Have a student read the poem aloud once more while students follow along in the text.

Session 2

- Review “Two Styles of Writing”
- Discuss the concepts of Standard English and Black English. (Refer to Recognizing Dialect in Creative Writings by Michelle O’Malley, PhD for suggestions.)
- Explain that in today’s session you are going to take a closer look at one of Campbell’s poems written in Black English, “Song of the Corn.” Distribute the poem and have students silently read the poem first. Then the teacher will read it aloud.
- Divide the class into small groups of no more than 5 students. Distribute the “Song of the Corn” worksheets. Explain to the students that they will be working together to answer the questions, and that many questions will not have a right or wrong answer, but will instead require their opinions and ideas.
- Support students within their small groups and offer suggestions and help when they request it. Encourage them to think through the context of the poem for clues and to refer to the Standard English translation provided.
- After the small groups have had time to do the worksheet, go over the worksheet with the class and discuss the answers, asking for input from the groups for comparison of answers and ideas.
- Have a student read the poem aloud while students follow along in the text.

Session 3

[NOTE: This session can be done as a one-time class session, or as a long-range project, depending on time constraints and student ability levels.]

- Review with students Campbell’s biographical information. Remind them of the time period in which he lived, the location where he was born, his career as a writer and educator, and finally how he died.
- Review the three concepts of homonyms, synonyms, and personification.
• Review the concept of “decoding” dialect and discuss some of the words in the “Song of the Corn.”

• Divide the class into their small groups once again. Assign each group a different writing activity from Let’s Write and Present. Provide any necessary resource materials they might need such as poster board or a section of the chalkboard, maps of the United States, preselected library books, etc. that pertain to the activity you have assigned them.

• If Session 3 is a one-time class session, leave enough time for the students to present their research and writing to the class. If a longer amount of time is needed, the presentations can be done on the following day.

“Before the Fire” – Teacher’s Edition
Let’s Take a Closer Look
Skim read “Before the Fire.” While reading, circle any unfamiliar words. List them on the lines below, using the back of the sheet if necessary. Discuss among the group all unfamiliar words. How many can the group define through the context of the poem? Write the definitions below. Use a dictionary to find definitions for any words left on the list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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First Stanza
1. In Campbell’s time, homes were often heated with fireplaces. How is the word “before” used in the title? In front of the fire.
What words in this stanza tell you the narrator is sitting in front of a fireplace?
Wide-mouthed hearth

2. What causes the shadows on the walls and floor? (Hint: the second stanza gives more clues.) The flames of the fire

3. A “whirling dervish” is a dance done by some Middle Eastern religious groups requiring the dancers to rapidly spin in a circle. The narrator also says the shadows “flit.” How might flitting shadows compare to shadows doing a “dervish-like dance?” Use the dictionary if necessary.
Flitting shadows are quick and bouncing off the walls here and there; the dervish-like-dance shadows are making circles on the floor and seem to remain in the same place.

4. Homonyms are words that are pronounced and spelled alike, but have different meanings. The word “strain” can mean to pull or stretch something in a
painful way. Campbell uses a homonym for “strain” in the poem. Can you define its meaning in the poem? (Hint: the adjective “minor” is also a homonym, and in this case has to do with music.) A phrase of music that has the minor key, or in other words sounds sad or “spooky.”

5. A synonym is a word with the same or similar meaning of another word. Does the word “wail” have any synonyms? Use a thesaurus to find some. Cry in pain, scream

6. Campbell writes about “long imprisoned sunbeams” in the first stanza. Can you guess what this means? (Hint: all three stanzas have references to imprisonment that might offer clues.) The sun’s energy is trapped in the logs to be released by fire

7. After a closer look at the first stanza, do you need to revise any of the definitions you wrote above?

Second Stanza
8. Personification is a writing technique that gives human qualities to objects or ideas such as fear, jealousy, rocks, or even cars. Campbell uses personification in the second stanza. List words and phrases in the stanza that point to an object or idea taking on human qualities. [Hint: Campbell sometimes indicates personification by turning some common nouns into proper nouns (nouns that name a particular person, place or thing) through capitalizing their first letter.] Time is young, Earth wears a flush (blush) and Youth has the flush, too. Crime is born. Hate is dark-browed and Ruth is tear-stained. The sun is a tyrant. A woodsprite can speak. Flames race up the chimney and clap the hand and snap their fingers. They also assault the wall. Sunbeams are set free. Flames have spirits and sunbeams have souls.

9. How does the narrator indicate the passage of a long period of time? (Hint: Campbell uses certain words that denote time and phrases that imply an ancient time period.) Words such as æons and ere and phrases that say time was young and Earth wore the flush of youth.

10. What might the “flush of Youth” mean? (Hint: Flush is a homonym with multiple meanings.) Can you come up with a synonym for flush that Campbell might have used instead? (Hint: Use the thesaurus.) Can refer to blushing, which creates pink cheeks. Youth is often associated with pink cheeks; “in the pink” means in good health.

11. The word Ruth in this stanza does not mean a female who is crying. The word is a homonym. Find another definition of the word that might explain why Ruth is “tear-stained.” Ruth is the opposite of “ruthless,” meaning without remorse. In
this case Ruth means sad about something that’s been done, regretful, and does not refer to the Ruth of the Bible.

12. Why might the sun be called a “tyrant” in the poem? He has imprisoned the beams of sunlight into the different trees.

13. What does the word _ash_ mean in this stanza? Is it a homonym or a synonym? _Ash_ is a homonym. In this case it is talking about a type of tree, and not the remains of something that has been burned.

14. Use a thesaurus to find synonyms for “expiate.” _To atone, pay the price for some wrong doing_. What might Campbell have meant by an “unknown sin” and who might have committed it? This is up for debate! Let the students discuss.

15. How did the narrator come to know about the Sun’s imprisoned sunbeams? A supernatural being called a Woodsprite told him in a dream.

16. After a closer look at the second stanza, do you need to revise any of the definitions you wrote above?

**Third Stanza**

17. Use a thesaurus to find synonyms for _glee_. _Happiness_ Does glee have a homonym? Yes, it can mean happiness, or a type of singing group.

18. Campbell uses personification again in the third stanza. What objects are personified and what human features do they possess? See list in question #8

19. Can you determine what word Campbell means by the reduction of the word ‘sault? What do you think the line, “Or ‘sault the wall in storming bands” means? This is a reduction of “assault” and the flames are like marauders assaulting a wall of an enemy’s fort or castle.

20. After a closer look at the third stanza, do you need to revise any of the definitions you wrote above?

21. Circle the words that have homonyms. Be prepared to defend your answers. bear car dog foot fork extra sink smell guitar oven television

22. Write synonyms for the following: scary = _______ frightening _______ angry = _______ mad _______

pretty = _______ beautiful _______ sofa = _______ couch _______

hog = _______ pig _______ treacherous = _______ dangerous _______
“Song of the Corn “ – Teacher’s Edition
Let’s Take a Closer Look

Skim read the Standard English version of “Song of the Corn.” While reading, circle any unfamiliar words. List them on the lines below, using the back of the sheet if necessary. Discuss among the group all unfamiliar words. How many can the group define through the context of the poem? Write the definitions below. Use a dictionary to find definitions for any words left on the list.

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Questions
1. Where did corn come from? _____ Central America

2. Why was corn used more often than wheat in the Appalachians? Hilly terrain made it difficult to grow large amounts of wheat – it requires flatter land for cultivation and harvesting. Corn can be grown in small patches on hillsides and harvested more easily.

3. What is the purpose of a work song? To keep workers in rhythm with each other to more efficiently complete tasks requiring group efforts. It also helped with passing the time on tedious tasks.

4. What two animals steal corn seeds and sprouts from the farmer in the poem? Crow and chipmunk.

5. Why does corn only need hoeing for the first part of the summer? As the corn plant matures, it is large enough to provide shade over the weeds and grass, depriving them of sun and slowing down their growth.

6. What are corn knives used for? Cutting tough corn stalks.

7. What do farmers do with corn stalks after they remove the ears? Collect them in teepee like formations called shocks.

8. In the poem, who is husking the corn? The boys and girls. Sam and Reuben are featured.
9. What do they use to husk the corn? Husking pegs

10. Who is Betsy in stanza 9? Probably a mule, but could be a horse.

11. Where will the corn be ground into cornmeal? Thompson’s Mill

12. What is corn pone? Cornbread. Usually cooked in a frying pan

13. Who is eating the corn pone in the poem? Mammy’s children

14. What else are they eating and drinking? Ham, eggs, and strong coffee

15. Can you think of a children’s story that has a similar plot to the “Song of the Corn?” (Hint: It has to do with an animal that grows food for her babies.) The “Little Red Hen” takes the reader through the process of growing wheat and the children are fed in the end

16. List the Standard English word for the following Black English words found in “Song of the Corn.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black English</th>
<th>Standard English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hits</td>
<td><em><strong><strong>it’s</strong></strong></em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fur</td>
<td><em><strong>for</strong></em>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ur</td>
<td>___of_______and___a____and___your___wa’m = _<strong><strong>warm</strong></strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>larf</td>
<td><strong><strong>laugh</strong></strong>____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fas’</td>
<td><strong><strong>fast</strong></strong>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dars</td>
<td><strong><strong>there’s</strong></strong>__</td>
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<tr>
<td>a’r</td>
<td><em><strong>air</strong></em>______</td>
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<tr>
<td>hyuh</td>
<td><em><strong>hear</strong></em>_____</td>
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<tr>
<td>eatin’</td>
<td><em><strong>eating</strong></em>_____</td>
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<tr>
<td>chyuh</td>
<td><em><strong>chair</strong></em>____</td>
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<td>wid</td>
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<tr>
<td>dat</td>
<td><em><strong>that</strong></em>_____</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Circle any dialect words that you have heard before among family, friends, or that you might use yourself.
Grinding Stones

Let’s Write and Present Our Findings: - Teacher’s Edition

The teacher will assign one of the following activities to each group for a class presentation. It is suggested the teacher duplicate and then cut this page into sections with one activity per section, and then give each group an activity that matches their skill levels.

Activity 1:
Is there some scientific truth to the poem, “Before the Fire?” Use additional resources such as online articles and science books to research your answer. Be prepared to defend your conclusion to the rest of the class using documented scientific evidence. List your resources on the back of this sheet.

Activity 2:
On a poster (or the chalkboard) draw several vertical columns. Write the following homonyms in the first column along with the words’ various definitions in each of the other columns. Leave room at the end of the chart for the class to offer additional homonyms to the list. bear, rose, can, book, bark, fire, pound, wave

On another poster (or section of the chalkboard) draw several vertical columns. Write a synonym in the first column along with words with similar definitions in the other columns. Consult a thesaurus for ideas. Leave room at the end of the chart for the class to offer additional synonyms to the list. garbage, angry, rapid, job, construct, gorgeous, house, frightening

Activity 3:
Each group member will write a paragraph about one of the following topics. Members will then read their paragraphs to the class in a group presentation. Be sure to include how the topic relates to James Edwin Campbell. Also, list your sources of information, and do not plagiarize the information you find.
Topics:
Location of Pomeroy, Ohio
The states through which the Ohio River runs
States that include the Appalachian Mountain Range
How salt was made in the early to mid 1800’s in the US
A brief history of West Virginia State University
The cause of the typhoid epidemics in Chicago

Activity 4:
Using personification, write phrases about some of the following ideas and objects on the back of this sheet. Some examples are - “justice is blind,” “the pines whispered in the wind,” “the violin cried a mournful tune.” Read them to the class, and ask for other examples of personification. winter flowers floods time noise drums opportunity wind car

Activity 5:
As a group, select an occupation and write a work song about it. The song should have at least three stanzas, a rhythmic refrain and rhyme in the same pattern as “Song of the Corn.”

Activity 6:
The members of your group have arrived on Earth from the planet Earthnym. The language on Earthnym is similar to Standard English; however, it has its own unique dialect. Your job is to create the Earthnym Glossary. Change the following Standard English words from Earth, into the Earthnym dialect based on the examples provided. (Hint: Compare the Earth word to the Earthnym dialect and see what has been taken away or added to the Earth word, then do that with the word you are to change into Earthnym dialect.)

For example, if dog is dogly on Earthnym, then hog is hogly and fog is fogly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earth word:</th>
<th>Earthnym dialect:</th>
<th>Change to Earthnym dialect:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Porch</td>
<td>Porchun</td>
<td>Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep</td>
<td>Kee’</td>
<td>Sheep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoring</td>
<td>Snorbop</td>
<td>Pouring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat</td>
<td>Grupeat</td>
<td>Remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted</td>
<td>Wantedglink</td>
<td>Heated</td>
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</table>

Explain the Earthnym dialect to the class. See if they can change these Earth words for addition to the Earthnym Glossary. Refer to the list above for the dialect’s rules of grammar and explain to the class what they are.
Evaluation

After the three sessions, students will be able to complete the James Edwin Campbell Quiz with 70% accuracy.

James Edwin Campbell Quiz

1. Where was James Edwin Campbell born? Pomeroy, Ohio
2. What is the mountain range near his home? Appalachians
3. What river flows through his hometown? Ohio River
4. What war had just ended when he was born? Civil War
5. What are the two writing styles he used in his poetry? Standard English, Black English Dialect
6. Besides writing, what else did James Edwin Campbell do for a career? Educator
7. What is the name of the university where he was the first president? West Virginia State University. (West Virginia Colored Institute also acceptable.)
8. How did he die? typhoid
10. How many books did he write? 2
11. Circle the homonym. cook bake eat
12. Write a synonym for tragic. Sad
13. Which demonstrates personification? Circle the right phrase.
   The wind howled as it blew through the canyon.
   The wind was very loud throughout the canyon.

Write in Standard English the following phrases in Black English:
14. The chillen larf at de party.
    The children laugh (or laughed) at the party.
15. I hyuh dat yo’ am sick.
    I hear that you are sick.
16. Hits time fur ur hawg to eat de co’n.
    It’s time for your hog to eat the corn.
17. De gyurl am a’mos froo cuttin’ the cloth.
    The girl is almost through cutting the cloth.
18. What is a work song?
A song that helps workers stay in rhythm with each other on jobs done by a group at the same time. It can also be a song sung together by workers to help pass the time.

19. Name a type of work song. Sea Chantey, songs of gandy dancers, military cadences are all acceptable.

20. What is a husking peg? Hand tool for husking corn.

Resource Materials

Recognizing Dialect in Creative Writings
Michelle O’Malley, PhD

[Note to teachers: When discussing the following dialect content, consider having the students look at one of the Campbell poems so they can learn to identify these concepts based on an actual poem. Not all of these concepts will be appropriate for all grade levels, but the information might be useful for your better understanding of the dialect use in general.]

The content of this curriculum challenges both teachers and students to view Appalachia from a fresh perspective and to acknowledge it as a creative, dynamic force. James Edwin Campbell’s story and his body of work, while first demonstrating that the region’s creative forces have been at work - sometimes in obscurity - for over a century, perfectly illustrate the themes of mountains, music, history, language and ethnicity. Campbell’s work lays claim to his unique place in African-American/Appalachian regional history.

More specifically, Campbell not only produces unique poems and stories but also does so from a very unique place – a unique geographic place, a unique personal place and an important linguistic/cultural place. In the late 19th century, black American writers who wrote in dialect primarily represented the speech of the southern black experience: the Gullah of the Sea Isles and the Plantation English of the deeper south where African languages, English, Spanish and others contributed to a distinct pidgin that soon developed into a Creole specific to the southern plantation culture.

Campbell’s work stands out, not only for its quality and content focus, but also for its language form. While readers can identify aspects of early forms of “black English”, one also finds significant, and quite early, use of Appalachian English – written in an ‘eye-dialect’ so that readers are invited to read the works out loud, thereby
experiencing the melodic components of Campbell’s compositions while still reveling in the beauty, the pain, the lyrics of the J.E. Campbell body of work.

In practice, we can often pick out the primary vowel features of Appalachian English, monophthongization of /ay/, fronting of /u/ and /o/, and vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, for example. But other examples of vowel changes as a result of rhotic influence are written to represent a very “Black English” sound – specifically, the Black English of the plantation south...

Additionally, the use of dialect in historical writing serves to engage the reader on a more personal level by offering closer access to the speakers and their thoughts. And by reading the pieces aloud, consumers are able to participate in the events depicted!

Finally, the value of recognizing/using/teaching dialect through poetry and short stories teaches our students to appreciate the language forms of their communities and families. These activities are also good vehicles for teachers who choose to introduce the idea of ‘code switching’ – the practice, employed by many, of transitioning from one language variety/dialect to another depending upon the context or situation. Students can be made to feel more comfortable with their primary dialect in speaking situations and, at the same time, continue to be motivated to use a more formal variety of the language for school projects and/or student-teacher interactions.

**Important Terminology:**

**Dialect** – dialect includes unique vocabulary and phrases as well as pronunciation patterns and grammatical forms that diverge from Standard American English (SAE).  
**Code switching** – this is the process of switching from one dialect/language to another  
**Pronunciation/”accent”** – this is one component of a dialect. “Accent” refers to how we pronounce certain vowels or consonants or where we place word stress, for example.  
**Syntax/grammar** – this refers to any “rule” for phrase or sentence construction as well as the use of subject-verb agreement or irregular verb forms in ‘regular’ environments...  
**Appalachian** – a reference to anything from the vast, 13-state region (from Mississippi to NY) that is defined as Appalachian  
**Black English/AAVE** – African American Vernacular English or Black English is a specific dialect of English and one that is represented in Campbell’s poems  
**Gullah** – this language form developed in South Carolina and Georgia during the era of slavery in the US.  
**Phonology** – diphthong, monophthong, rhotic, deletions, stopping, insertions, vowel mergers, tensing, raising...
**Plantation English** – mixture of the speech of the plantation owners, their overseers, and the slaves brought to them from Africa. Even before the Africans landed on the east coast of North America, they were already using a pidgin that developed on the western coast of Africa as a result of the English-speaking slave traders and the Wolof, Hausa, Bambara, etc. speakers of the interior living in close quarters for extended periods of time...

**A Sense of Place** – a theme that permeates Campbell’s body of work is, perhaps, BEST illustrated by the language forms he chooses to employ: a mixture of Standard English, Appalachian English and Black English/AAVE.

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**((Dialect)Features of Black English:** These items are frequently observed in the speech of today's speakers of Black English as well as many Southern English varieties – including some Appalachians. These may not *all* be present in Campbell’s poems, but many *will be* observed.

**Phonology**

**Final consonant deletions** – For example, ‘cold’ goes to ‘col’ or ‘pond’ goes to ‘pon’

**“stopping”** – sounds that require continuous airflow are stopped. For example, ‘they’ goes to ‘dey’ or ‘this’ goes to ‘dis’

**Final “s” deletions** – For example, ‘50 cents’ goes to ‘50 cent’ or ‘3 girls’ goes to ‘3 girl’

**Vocabulary**

“Aint” – does NOT mean “is not”.... Instead, examine the following:

- “He ain’t leave no keys.” – He didn’t leave any keys.
- “I ain’t got no cards.” - I don’t have any cards

**Syntax/grammar**

**Habitual “be”**: the verb ‘to be’ is used without inflection in the present, habitual tense. For example, ‘He be tall’ or “She be happy”.

**Uninflected “to be” in continuous constructions**: Present continuous tense uses ‘be’ plus the -ing ending on the main verb. For example, ‘He be runnin’ or ‘she be sleepin’ for statements about what’s happening now.

**Inversions** – “What time it is?” , “How you can do that?”

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**((Dialect) Features of Appalachian English:** This is just a ‘taster’ of some of the most common features of Appalachian English today. Some of these are evidenced in the Campbell poems, and others are available for additional study/review by students living among and using these forms regularly.
Phonology
r-full: the letter ‘r’ is produced in all environments
r-insertions: sometimes an ‘r’ is inserted where it is not represented in spelling. For example: ‘wash’ goes to ‘warsh’
monophthongizations on diphthongs like in “light”, “like”, “might”, “mine”... these words employ a diphthong when pronounced by most speakers in the Midwestern region. In many rural Appalachian varieties of English, those diphthongs become monophthongs – so ‘light’ goes to ‘lat’ and ‘might’ goes to ‘mat’ and so on...
weak syllable deletions: in many rural dialects, and in rapid speech most anywhere, the weakest (fastest and most quiet in speech) syllable in a multi-syllable word is often deleted. For example, ‘remember’ goes to ‘member’, ‘suppose’ goes to ‘spose, and ‘confessed’ goes to ‘fessed
consonant deletions: They->‘ey and them-> ‘em
tire/fire as “tar/far”: Common vowel + ‘r’ production in Appalachian varieties

Vocabulary
Positive “anymore”
Yet = still
LOTS of Scots and German nouns and verbs

Syntax
a-prefixing: a-huntin’ and a-fishin’
double modals: might could

“The car needs washed.” Vs “The car needs washing.”
s-adding on the verb when 3rd person subject is plural:
The dogs walks... The people goes...

Learning about Poetry
By Christina Veladota, PhD

Some Poetry Basics
[Note to teachers: When presenting the following poetic terms, you should have the students look at one of the Campbell poems so they can learn to identify these concepts based on an actual poem. Not all of these concepts will be appropriate for all grade levels.]

• When reading a poem, read it as if it is written in prose. If a line is enjambed, then let your eye move to the next line without stopping. If you encounter an end-stopped line, then pause as you would with prose.
• The word enjambment refers to a line of poetry that does not end with a comma, period, or any other punctuation.
• **An end-stop** refers to a line of poetry that ends with a punctuation mark.
• **Line break** refers to where the poet chooses to end a line of a poem and move to the next line.
• A **stanza** refers to the unit of lines in a section of a poem. Think of it as the equivalent of a paragraph. Some poems are broken into several stanzas, while some are made up of only one stanza. Stanzas come in many lengths. Some poems use one stanza length throughout; others use a variety of lengths. Uniform stanza length tends to make a poem appear more formal than a poem that uses a variety of lengths.
• **Tone** refers to the attitude of the speaker in a poem. Does the speaker seem happy? Sad? Reflective? Angry?
• **Syntax** refers to the word order in a poem. Many times, the word order in a poem will be the same as you encounter it in speech and in prose. Other times, the word order will be turned around, which can enhance / change the meaning. Used with **enjambment**, unexpected **syntax** can surprise the reader.
• **Rhyme scheme** refers to the organization of rhyme in a poem. There are a lot of rhyming patterns out there. Some examples are abba, aabb, abab. These describe possible **quatrain** rhyme schemes. Depending on the length of the stanza, the scheme could be different. Not all poems rhyme!
• **Imagery** refers to the pictures the poet “paints” in words. What do you “see” in the poem? Sometimes the use of **similes** and **metaphors** help create these pictures. A good image helps you access one (or all) of your five senses and helps convey the **tone** of the poem

**What is a Simile?**

The basic definition of a simile is that it’s a comparison of two things using the word **like** or **as**. Remind students that when using a simile in a poem, the poet can conjure up images that are often surprising to the reader.

For example: *The moon is like a silver coin in the sky.*

**What is a Metaphor?**

A metaphor is a comparison of two things that does not use the words **like** or **as**. Remind students that metaphors can create more powerful images than similes. Metaphors suggest that one thing *is* the other thing and not merely similar to it.

For example: *The moon is a silver coin in the sky.*

**What is Personification?**
Personification is a figure of speech that gives human traits to an inanimate object (a thing), an animal, or an idea.

For example: *The leaves danced in the wind*.

**What is an Antonym?**

An antonym is a word that has the opposite meaning to another word.

Examples: *day / night*  *true / false*  *dark / light*

**What is a Synonym?**

A synonym is a word that has the same (or similar) meaning to another word.

Example (same meaning): *street* and *avenue*  
Example (similar meaning): *stop* and *yield*  

**What is a Homonym?**

A homonym is a word that is spelled and pronounced the same way, but has different meanings. (For our purposes, we will not address homophones or homographs.)

Example: *bear* is an animal or can mean to carry something

**What is Alliteration?**

The word alliteration refers to the repetition of consonant sounds.

For example: “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.”

**Tips for Reading a Poem:**

- Read the poem once through without worrying about understanding it. If possible, read it aloud.
- Read it a second time. Circle or underline repeated words, phrases, or ideas.
- Circle or underline related images such as parts of the body (hands, eyes, feet, hair, etc.), or different types of weather (wind, rain, sunshine, snow, etc.).
- Think about why these things or ideas are repeated, or used often.
• What is the basic action of the poem? The *basic action* of the poem is similar to the plot of a story. What is happening in the poem? When considering this, don’t worry about finding a meaning yet.
• Who is the speaker of the poem? The speaker in a poem is equivalent to the narrator in a short story or novel; it’s the voice or character that’s telling the story.
• Identify similes in the poem.
• Identify metaphors in the poem.
• What is the tone of this poem? Is it happy, sad, fearful, or is there some other kind of emotion conveyed through the language and imagery? Identify a line or two that illustrates the tone.
• Does this poem rhyme? If so, what is the rhyme scheme?
• What about syntax? The word syntax refers to word order and sentence structure. Some poets employ syntax that is different from ordinary speech. Do you see examples of this in the poem?
• Does this poem have a set structure to it? Are the stanzas uniform all the same length? If so, why do you think the poet chose this structure? If not, why not?
• Consider what you think this poem is about.

**Additional Resources**

1. Wikipedia Entry (contains a few inaccuracies such as cause of Campbell’s death. He died of typhoid, which often causes pneumonia-like symptoms.)

2. Poetry Foundation

3. Article about the acquisition of Campbell’s first book, *Driftings & Gleanings* at Ohio University Libraries. Both of Campbell’s books are in the Archives and Special Collections Department of Alden Library at Ohio University.

4. Excerpts from Campbell’s dialect book, *Echoes From the Cabin and Elsewhere*

5. *African American Poetry of the Nineteenth Century*. Page 306
James Edwin Campbell Obituary

The Pomeroy Tribune-Telegraph, January 29, 1896

J. EDWIN CAMPBELL DEAD!

HE HAS SUNG HIS LAST SONG ON EARTH.

HIS SOUL TAKES ITS FLIGHT AT THE TURN OF THE NIGHT.

James Edwin Campbell, dialect poet and story writer is dead. His soul took its flight from earth at midnight Sunday night. He was conscious to the end and died as a weary child going to sleep.

He came to the home of his parents Mr. and Mrs. James Campbell of the First Ward from Chicago about a month ago on a holiday vacation not feeling well. Some two weeks ago he was taken with grip and a racking pain in the head. A week ago Monday he manifested symptoms of pneumonia and took to his bed. Typhoid symptoms and peritonitis followed. Thursday his condition became alarming and his wife, who is a teacher in Wilberforce College, was summoned
by wire to his bedside. He grew gradually worse from day to day and died in collapse.

Deceased was born in Pomeroy, 28 years ago the 28th of last September. He graduated from the Pomeroy High School with the class of 1884 and afterward taught in various parts of the country. On August 5, 1891 he was married to Miss Mary E (sic) Champ, a refined and educated lady, of New Athens, Ohio. She is a graduate of Marietta College, class of ’87, and is a teacher of considerable note. She is a daughter of J. A. (sic) Champ connected for many years with the summer (sic) school at Parkersburg.

While a teacher of marked ability, Campbell achieved more fame in his dialect writings. The readers of this paper are familiar with the character of his work, it having had the pleasure of publishing many of his productions. His dialect poetry has attracted widespread popularity. He went to Chicago last summer and made a decided hit in the western literary metropolis with his melodious jingles. Mr. Campbell has written two books of poems, a collection of his best work. One, “Echoes from the Cabin and Elsewhere,” he published since going to Chicago, and while employed on the literary staff of the Chicago Times-Herald. In the past few months he had been called upon to read from his works in various places in Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. His last public appearance was in the Baptist Church in this city on the evening of January 2, when his audience was carried away with his recitations. At that time he appeared to have a long and successful life before him. He had reached a position in his profession where his reputation as a writer made his literary wares of ready sale at good prices. He was better known and more highly appreciated abroad than at home. While his writings were mostly humorous, pathetic and true to life, it required a person of some literary ability to get the real meat out of his works, particularly his dialect work. His first work “Driftings and Gleanings” was published in 1887 at Charleston, W. VA. In his introduction to this work Mr. Campbell says: “The poems or perhaps it is better to say verses, have been written just when the mood was upon me. Some were composed after I had retired and would ring in my ears like Mark Twain’s

“ ’Punch brothers, punch with care,
Punch in the presence of the passenjare,’”

until I would be obliged to get up and write them down. Some of them were written when I was a schoolboy, attending the Pomeroy High School and were read before the dear old P.H.S.L.S. (Peace Its ashes!) Some were written while I was ‘teaching the young idea how to shoot,’ and ‘pouring the fresh instruction o’er the mind’ at Rutland, Ohio. Others still have been written since I have been the editor of the West Virginia Enterprise and have been published in that journal.”
He dedicated this work to his mother and it is but necessary to quote from this dedicatory notice to show the real character of the man, viz:

In presenting this little volume to the public, as is customary, I must dedicate it to some one, but whom? Who will consider it an honor to be so remembered? No one? Yes, there is one.

To this one then, I dedicate it.

To one whose every heart beat has been as loyal and as true to me as the pointing of the needle to the pole, who has with loving care and anxious solicitude watched over my every step, as from infancy to boyhood, and from boyhood to the threshold of manhood, I have tottered, then walked the “flinty slopes” and (can’t read a few words here) awards of this life: to one who has thought no sacrifice too great, no denial too severe, for the pleasure, comfort, and advantage of her boy.....whose every thought has been for my welfare, and whose patience I have oftentimes severely tried with my boyish headstrong ways, and whose kind acts I have perhaps too often accepted as “written in hand:” to that dearest, holiest, safest, best blessing ever spared to a boy, I dedicate this book:

“Love droops, friends may fail,
And the leaves of friendship fall.
But the tender love of a mother
Outlives them all.”

The funeral takes place from the Wesleyan Church at Kerr’s Run at 10 a.m. Thursday. The funeral discourse to be delivered by Rev. Lawrence, of Parkersburg, assisted by Rev. Hill of the Baptist Church of this city. The remains will be buried on the hill above Minersville. We know no more fitting close to this article than the epilogue written himself at the close of his first book, viz:

‘Tis done, my songs are sung,
I close the book and finally turn away.
What tho’ no roses at my feet are flung,
Nor plaudits wild greet loud my uncouth lay
I sang not for praise alone.

What tho’ the critiques scornfully sneer
And metre, thought and rhyme with harsh words assail,
And with the wise look of a prophetic sneer,
Predict that such unpolished rhymes will fail
I sang not for their praise.
But from the heart each song arose
Like the spring which bubbled from the mountain side
Then involuntarily a small brooklet downward flows
Then onward until lo! A mighty river sweeps on in pride.
So involuntarily I sang.

I sang because the heary o’er flowed
And songs, to me sweet, unbid would rise,
And the Muse’s face before me ever glowed
Like a bright winged bird, which, alluring ever onward flies.
And so I sang.

“O Mystic Land of Some Day,
Behold our sails spread wide,
As toward the azure mountains
‘Neath softest skies we glide;
‘Land ho!’ the lookout’s calling.
Down oars and sails are falling
Forever, just ahead!”
Acknowledgements

These lesson plans are the result of a group of scholars, public school teachers, and historians desiring to bring James Edwin Campbell back to life in K-12 classrooms during Black History Month. Long overshadowed by African-American poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Campbell predates Dunbar in dialect writing as well as addressing topics pertaining to racial issues of his day.

The following people gave freely of their time, energy and resources to research, write and ultimately provide K-12 students an inspiring introduction to a forgotten poet who has earned his rightful place in African American literature and history.

Jane Ann Fuller, MFA Poetry, Associate Professor of English, Hocking College, and Poet
Miriam Intrator, MSLS, PhD, Special Collections Librarian, Ohio University Libraries
Paula Linscott, MS Reading, Retired Reading Specialist K-12
Jean Mikail, MA Creative Writing, MLS, Former College Instructor of English & Literature, and Poet
Michelle O’Malley, PhD Speech Language Science, CCC-SLP, Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Ohio University
Lisa Roback, MS Education, Intervention Specialist, Meigs High School
Liz Shaw, Meigs County Historical Society Trustee, Folk Musician and Documentary Producer
Christina Veladota, PhD Creative Writing, Poetry, Associate Professor of English Composition & Literature, Washington State Community College, and Poet

Student Masters begin on the following page.
James Edwin Campbell  
Appalachian African-American Poet  

James Edwin Campbell, African-American poet and author, was born in the Ohio River town of Pomeroy, Ohio, in 1867 – just two years after the end of the Civil War. Located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, Pomeroy was known for its coal mining and salt industry that employed thousands of Welsh, Germans, and African Americans at the time.

Campbell’s father worked in the salt works. These operations refined salt water collected from deep wells that tapped an ancient underground body of ocean water. After the salt was collected from boiling of the water, it was shipped to cities along the Ohio River, until competition from salt works in other states drove the Pomeroy industry out of business.

Pomeroy’s coal mines and salt works were predominantly established by wealthy businessmen from New England who founded the town in the early 1800’s. Rather than sending their children off to boarding schools, these affluent families established the Pomeroy Academy and hired teachers from the best schools in the country, including Harvard University. The Academy was eventually renamed Pomeroy High School.

Campbell and his siblings attended a school that was segregated from white children called Kerr’s Run Colored School; however, the school only went to the eighth grade. One of Campbell’s classmates is credited with appealing to the school board of Pomeroy High School to allow black children to continue their education. The school officials agreed, and African American students were allowed in the school many years before laws required they even be given a high school education, much less in a desegregated school!

The students of Kerr’s Run Colored School took advantage of this rare opportunity and became some of the best students in the high school. The courses were difficult, and Campbell worked very hard at his studies. A few years after graduation his first book of poetry, Driftings & Gleanings, was published. He also successfully passed the teacher’s exam and began teaching at African American schools in Ohio and West Virginia.

Campbell became well known for his writing and was hired to edit two African American newspapers in West Virginia. At the same time his poetry and essays were published throughout the country in literary magazines and in newspapers. He also gave speeches about equal rights for African Americans and was an activist for improved laws and opportunities for his race. These accomplishments occurred before he was 25 years of age!

In 1891, Campbell was hired as the first president of West Virginia Colored Institute (WVCI), a school of higher education originally established for African Americans near Charleston, West Virginia. The school is now West Virginia State University, and Campbell is credited with establishing a solid foundation for the school’s future growth. In 1894 he received an honorary Ph.B (equivalent to a bachelor’s degree) from the historically black university, Shaw University, in Raleigh, North Carolina.
Campbell left WVCI in 1894 for Chicago to pursue writing full time. In 1895 he published his second book of poetry, *Echoes from the Cabin and Elsewhere*. This book was primarily written in Black English dialect, something that up until that time had only been done by white poets mimicking, and sometimes poking fun, at slaves on Southern plantations. Campbell wrote dialect poems based on the language he grew up hearing in Pomeroy. Some of his poems have traces of the speech still heard in the Appalachian Mountains while others make use of the Black English spoken by African Americans at the time.

In December 1895, Campbell came to visit his family in Pomeroy for the holidays and to give readings throughout the region from his new book of poetry. After a few weeks, he became very ill and died January 27, 1896, at the age of 28 at his parents’ home. It is thought he contracted typhoid from the recurring epidemics of the disease in Chicago where he was living at the time.

Campbell’s untimely death was a tragic loss to his family as well as the literary community. He is credited as a pioneer among black poets for use of dialect and predates the better-known black poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar. Campbell’s works are also of special interest to those who study the language of those from the Appalachian Mountains as well as Black English.

**Two Styles of Writing**

James Edwin Campbell wrote poetry in two language styles. His first book, *Driftings & Gleanings*, is written entirely in Standard English. It is obvious from these poems that Campbell took his high school education very seriously, and achieved an excellent command of the English language! Some of the words and phrases he used might be unfamiliar to you, but they can be found in a dictionary and can often be “decoded” by how they are used within the poem.

*Echoes from the Cabin and Elsewhere* is written several years later and consists mostly of poems written in the Black English dialect of that time period. In a letter written by Campbell to the English poet, Thomas Hutchinson, Campbell asks the poet’s opinion of publishing a book of poems in dialect. White writers wrote the only poetry published in Black English at this time; these writers lacked a true understanding of the language form, and sometimes even mocked African Americans. Campbell’s desire, according to this letter, was to write in a way that honored his ancestors and kept alive a unique part of their culture – their manner of speech. Just as in his Standard English writings, some of the words and phrases in Campbell’s dialect poetry might be unfamiliar to you. Many times they can be “decoded” by reading the poem several times to better understand the context or meaning of the poem as a whole.
"Before the Fire"

Let’s Take a Closer Look

Skim read “Before the Fire.” While reading, circle any unfamiliar words. List them on the lines below, using the back of the sheet if necessary. Discuss among the group all unfamiliar words. How many can the group define through the context of the poem? Write the definitions below. Use a dictionary to find definitions for any words left on the list.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
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First Stanza

1. In Campbell’s time, homes were often heated with fireplaces. How is the word “before” used in the title?

What words in this stanza tell you the narrator is sitting in front of a fireplace?

2. What causes the shadows on the walls and floor? (Hint: the second stanza gives more clues.)

3. A “whirling dervish” is a dance done by some Middle Eastern religious groups requiring the dancers to rapidly spin in a circle. The narrator also says the shadows “flit.” How might flitting shadows compare to shadows doing a “dervish-like dance?” Use the dictionary if necessary.

4. Homonyms are words that are pronounced and spelled alike, but have different meanings. The word “strain” can mean to pull or stretch something in a painful way. Campbell uses a homonym for “strain” in the poem. Can you define its meaning in the poem? (Hint: the adjective “minor” is also a homonym, and in this case has to do with music.)

5. A synonym is a word with the same or similar meaning of another word. Does the word “wail” have any synonyms? Use a thesaurus to find some.
6. Campbell writes about “long imprisoned sunbeams” in the first stanza. Can you guess what this means? (Hint: all three stanzas have references to imprisonment that might offer clues.)

7. After a closer look at the first stanza, do you need to revise any of the definitions you wrote above?

**Second Stanza**

8. Personification is a writing technique that gives human qualities to objects or ideas such as fear, jealously, rocks, or even cars. Campbell uses personification in the second stanza. List words and phrases in the stanza that point to an object or idea taking on human qualities. [Hint: Campbell sometimes indicates personification by turning some common nouns into proper nouns (nouns that name a particular person, place or thing) through capitalizing their first letter.]

9. How does the narrator indicate the passage of a long period of time? (Hint: Campbell uses certain words that denote time and phrases that imply an ancient time period.)

10. What might the “flush of Youth” mean? (Hint: Flush is a homonym with multiple meanings.) Can you come up with a synonym for flush that Campbell might have used instead? (Hint: Use the thesaurus.)

11. The word Ruth in this stanza does not mean a female who is crying. The word is a homonym. Find another definition of the word that might explain why Ruth is “tear-stained.”

12. Why might the sun be called a “tyrant” in the poem?

13. What does the word ash mean in this stanza? Is it a homonym or a synonym?
14. Use a thesaurus to find synonyms for “expiate.”

What might Campbell have meant by an “unknown sin” and who might have committed it?

15. How did the narrator come to know about the Sun’s imprisoned sunbeams?

16. After a closer look at the second stanza, do you need to revise any of the definitions you wrote above?

**Third Stanza**

17. Use a thesaurus to find synonyms for glee

18. Campbell uses personification again in the third stanza. What objects are personified and what human features do they possess?

19. Can you determine what word Campbell means by the reduction of the word ‘sault? What do you think the line, “Or ‘sault the wall in storming bands” means?

20. After a closer look at the third stanza, do you need to revise any of the definitions you wrote above?

21. Circle the words that have homonyms. Be prepared to defend your answers.

    bear car dog foot fork extra sink smell guitar oven television

22. Write synonyms for the following:

    scary = ____________________ angry = __________________________

    pretty = ____________________ sofa = __________________________

    hog = _______________________ treacherous = ____________________
“Song of the Corn” Introduction

Corn was first a wild grass in Central American around 7,000 years ago, but through selective breeding early agricultural peoples created a crop that eventually developed into the plant we now know. Native Americans depended on it for much of their food and called early varieties of corn maize.

Europeans who settled the United States had never seen corn, and they soon began to grow it, too. It became a staple crop of our country and today we often take it for granted because it is grown on very large farms for the entire country. However, when James Edwin Campbell wrote “Song of the Corn,” he painted a picture of how much work it took for families to grow enough corn to feed their families and livestock.

“Song of the Corn” describes each step in growing, tending, harvesting, grinding and preparing corn for corn bread, a very important food in the Appalachian Mountains where he lived. Because of the hilly terrain, it was easier to grow small patches of corn on hillsides than large fields of wheat for bread flour, although small amounts of wheat was grown on farms with flatter land. Corn, however, was much more accessible to mountain people.

James Edwin Campbell wrote “Song of the Corn” in Black English, and interestingly enough, there are also some Appalachian English terms in the poem. In fact, many of his dialect poems have Black and Appalachian English words because this was the language of the people he heard as he was growing up as an African American in Appalachia.

The poem also reminds the reader of “work songs,” although we do not know if the poem was set to music. Work songs have been sung throughout history around the world. They help pass the time during tedious tasks, but often the do more than that. Work songs can keep the workers in a rhythm when it is necessary for them to work together at a certain pace. A sea chantey is an example of a work song that often keeps sailors in time with each other while doing a job together. “Gandyancers” were workers who laid railroad tracks across America and it was very important for them to do their work together in order to move heavy iron rails safely into place; work songs helped them to accomplish this.

Many work songs are sung in a call and response pattern. A leader, often the job foreman, sings out part of the song, and the other workers respond with a phrase. The military often uses these types of songs or cadences to keep soldiers training, marching or even running together. In “Song of the Corn” you will hear repeated rhythmic phrases in each stanza that imitate a call and response work song or military cadence. It would be fun to read “Song of the Corn” out loud with a leader doing the “call” parts of the poem and the class reading the response parts!

Because Black and Appalachian English can be confusing for someone who has not heard it very much, reading the poem aloud will help to “decode” what it means. Next to each stanza in “Song of the Corn” you will find a Standard English translation to help you understand the meaning of the poem.
“Song of the Corn”

O, it’s time for the planting of the corn,
The ground is warm, the furrows made-
(“Caw! Caw!” the black crow laughs,)
Put your handle in your old hoe blade –
(“Caw! Caw!” the black crow laughs,)
O, it’s time for the planting of the corn.

O, it’s time for the planting of the corn,
The chipmunk sat on top a clod –
(“Cheat! Cheat!” the rascal says,)
He flirts his tail and winks and nods-
(“Cheat! Cheat!” the rascal says,)
O, it’s time for the planting of the corn.

O, it’s time for the hoeing of the corn,
The corn is up and full of grass –
(Hot, hot, the sun it shines,)
It beats the world how weeds grow fast-
(Hot, hot, the sun it shines,)
O, it’s time for the hoeing of the corn.

O, it’s time for the hoeing of the corn,
It’s standing knee-high in the row-
(Hot, hot, the sun it shines,)
One more time and we’ll let it go-
(Hot, hot, the sun it shines,)
O, it’s time for the hoeing of the corn.

O, it’s time for the cutting of the corn,
The blades are dry, the milk is hard –
(Hack, hack, the corn knives say,)
The hogs are killed and rendered lard –
(Hack, hack, de corn knives say,)
O, it’s time for the cutting of the corn.

O, it’s time for the cutting of the corn,
There’s white frost in the still night air –
(Hack, hack, the corn knives say,)
Come along Sam, let’s grind a pair –
(Hack, hack, the corn knives say,)
O, it’s time for the cutting of the corn.
O, it’s time for the husking of the corn,
The boys and girls have all come out –
(Rip, rip, the brown pegs go,) 
You hear them sing and laugh and shout –
(Rip, rip, the brown pegs go,) 
O, it’s time for the husking of the corn.

O, it’s time for the husking of the corn,
Dar’s Reuben’s side is almost through 
(Rip, rip, the brown pegs go,) 
Hurry up, Sam, they’re leaving you 
(Rip, rip, the brown pegs go,) 
O, it’s time for the husking of the corn.

O, it’s time for the grinding of the corn, 
Run along honey, and get your sack –
(“Clack, clack,” the mill wheel says) 
And put it on old Betsy’s back –
(“Clack, clack,” the mill wheel says,) 
O, it’s time for the grinding of the corn.

O, it’s time for the grinding of the corn, 
Just ride five miles around the hill –
(“Clack, clack,” the mill wheel says,) 
Then dump your load at Thompson’s mill-
(“Clack, clack,” the mill wheel says,) 
O, it’s time for the grinding of the corn.

O, it’s time for the eating of the corn, 
Mammy, bake us a corn pone brown –
(“Good, good,” the children cry) 
Draw up your chair and just sit down –
(“Good, good, the children cry) 
O, it’s time for the eating of the corn.

O, it’s time for the eating of the corn, 
With ham and eggs and coffee strong –
(“Good, good,” the children cry) 
That big cornpone it won’t last long-
(“Good, good,” the children cry,) 
O, it’s time for the eating of the corn.
Corn customs described in the poem:

**Stanzas 1 and 2:** Corn requires very warm ground for proper sprouting. Crows are always waiting for the corn to be planted so they can pick the seeds and sprouts out of the ground to eat. An Appalachian custom is to plant extra seeds to feed the crow and the family. Scarecrows are also used. Hoes are tools for chopping weeds; they have wooden handles that have to be replaced from time to time. The sharp metal piece on the hoe is called the blade. Chipmunks also like corn seeds and will dig in the ground to steal them.

**Stanzas 3 and 4:** Hoeing corn is hard work, and it is necessary when the weather gets warm and causes grass and weeds to grow very fast between the plants and rows. These plants will rob the corn of its water and the soil nutrients necessary for good growth. Hoeing corn is also hot work! When the corn gets knee-high, the hoeing is not usually needed anymore because the tall, leafy plants shade the weeds, depriving them of life-giving sunshine. This task is now done for the season.

**Stanza 5:** When the corn has finished growing, it is cut at the base of the stalk. Blades are the leaves of the plant – this is a good name because they can cut you. When the blades are dry, the plant has stopped producing and is drying up. Corn kernels have a milky liquid that gets hard as the plant dries up. This dried corn is already preserved and will last all winter without anything else being done to it. Many people in Appalachia raised their own hogs during James Edwin Campbell’s day, and in fact farm families still often raise them for homegrown bacon and ham. Lard is made from boiling the fat from the butchered hog and the process is called “rendering lard.”

**Stanza 6:** The corn plant’s stalks are very tough and hard to cut. It requires having a very sharp knife. Knives were often sharpened on a grinding stone in the shape of a wheel that was on a frame. The grinding stone was powered by pedaling. This YouTube gives a demonstration. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ws0db9tAq4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ws0db9tAq4)

**Stanzas 7 and 8:** After cornstalks were cut, they were often bundled into teepee like shapes called corn-shocks. The dried ears of corn were taken off first and stored in something called a corncrib, or sometimes in the barn. The dried cornhusks were hard to get off the ear of corn, and a small hand tool called a husking peg was used to cut through the husk so it could be stripped off the corn. Many times friends would get together and have a corn husking party in the barn. Teams of boys and girls would compete and sometimes there were prizes for the fastest team. Now and then a red ear of corn will turn up from corn pollens cross breeding in the cornfield. Finding a red ear usually resulted in a special prize!
**Stanzas 9 and 10:** Now it is time to grind the husked corn into cornmeal! Most communities had a gristmill that used water-power to turn a mill wheel for grinding corn. The corn kernels would be stripped off the corncob and loaded up in a sack for the trip to the mill. Many times the trip was made on a mule, horse, or in a wagon.

**Stanzas 11 and 12:** Finally all the hard work has paid off! Now it’s time to eat the ground corn made into corn pone, which is another name for cornbread. Notice that the corn bread is served with ham and eggs – which sounds like breakfast food. Cornbread was eaten three meals a day because wheat was not as common, and bread from flour was made less often. Making cornbread, on the other hand, was usually a daily ritual.

**Corn Knife**

**Corn Husking Peg**

**Husking peg held in palm of the hand.**
“Song of the Corn“

Let’s Take a Closer Look

Skim read the Standard English version of “Song of the Corn.” While reading, circle any unfamiliar words. List them on the lines below, using the back of the sheet if necessary. Discuss among the group all unfamiliar words. How many can the group define through the context of the poem? Write the definitions below. Use a dictionary to find definitions for any words left on the list.

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<th>Word</th>
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Questions
1. Where did corn come from?

2. Why was corn used more often than wheat in the Appalachians?

3. What is the purpose of a work song?

4. What two animals steal corn seeds and sprouts from the farmer in the poem?

5. Why does corn only need hoeing for the first part of the summer?

6. What are corn knives used for?

7. What do farmers do with corn stalks after they remove the ears?

8. In the poem, who is husking the corn?

9. What do they use to husk the corn?
10. Who is Betsy in stanza 9? ________________________________

11. Where will the corn be ground into cornmeal? __________________________

12. What is corn pone? __________________________________________

13. Who is eating the corn pone in the poem? ____________________________

14. What else are they eating and drinking? ______________________________

15. Can you think of a children’s story that has a similar plot to the “Song of the Corn?” (Hint: It has to do with an animal that grows food for her babies.)

16. List the Standard English word for the following Black English words found in “Song of the Corn.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black English Word</th>
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Circle any dialect words that you have heard before among family, friends, or that you might use yourself.

**Grinding Stones**
James Edwin Campbell Quiz

1. Where was James Edwin Campbell born?

2. What is the mountain range near his home?

3. What river flows through his hometown?

4. What war had just ended when he was born?

5. What are the two writing styles he used in his poetry?

6. Besides writing, what else did James Edwin Campbell do for a career?

7. What is the name of the university where he was the first president?

8. How did he die?

10. How many books did he write?

11. Circle the homonym? cook  bake  eat

12. Write a synonym for tragic.

13. Which demonstrates personification? Circle the right phrase.  
   The wind howled as it blew through the canyon.  
   The wind was very loud as it blew through the canyon.

Write in Standard English the following phrases in Black English:
14. The chillen larf at de party.

15. I hyuh dat yo’ am sick.

16. Hits time fur ur hawg to eat de co’n.

17. De gyurl am a’mos froo cuttin’ the cloth.

18. What is a work song?

19. Name a type of work song.

20. What is a husking peg?