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 Illustrated by Jade Orlando  
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# This Is Not a Small Voice

## Poems by Black Poets

**Note to educators:** This guide is intended to help guide readers through a thoughtful reading of *This is Not a Small Voice*. The following questions and activities provide ideas and invitations for engaging with poetry and can be used in any order.

### Reading and Understanding Poetry

#### Guiding questions

#### Themes

Traci Todd says she wants this collection to be “a celebration of Blackness.”

- How does Todd’s intention set the tone for the book?
- What does it make you, as the reader, anticipate?
- Blackness, and Black people, are complex in many wonderful ways. As you read, what does each poem help you to understand about being Black and Blackness?
- What are the joys, triumphs, struggles, and celebrations?
- How does understanding these multiple perspectives help you to understand more about Black people?

#### Illustrations

Jade Orlando’s illustrations are vivid and compelling, supporting and extending the poems on each page. They are also an invitation to read poetry from a different perspective: through visuals. As you read, pay careful attention to the illustrations.

- What do you notice?
- How do those illustrations help build an additional layer of understanding of the poem or poems on the page?
- How do the illustrations also celebrate Blackness?

#### Wordplay

Poems are full of wordplay that challenge readers to think twice about what they read, to consider words and their many meanings, and to have fun.

- As you read, think about the specific words in the poems and the feelings and emotions they evoke.

## Rereading

Poems invite multiple readings and rereadings, revealing more to the reader each time. Practice reading poems several times, each time for different experiences: meaning, words, images, connections, and anything else that comes to you.

## Culture and Connection Poems (116-117)

Read Todd's explanatory notes about this collection of poems and consider these questions about each:

- The African diaspora is broad, including those of African descent who live in Africa and beyond. How do these poems help the reader understand Blackness as diasporic?
- What are some similarities and differences across cultures you observe that the poems help you to understand?
- How do these similarities and differences widen your understanding of Black people and Black culture and history? What are the connections between them?
- Where do you notice joy and resistance in the poems? Why are these qualities important?

## Power and Protest Poems (118-119)

Read Todd's explanation of these poems, and then consider these questions about each:

- What is the historical event or person that the poem is about? Why is that event or person important in understanding Blackness?
- What words has the poet chosen to depict the event or person? What impact do those words have? Select words that stand out to you.
- What images do you notice? How does the poet use words to help you understand more about the event or person?
- How do Orlando's illustrations work with the poem? What else do they encourage you to think about beyond the words from the poem?
- What do these poems have in common? Are there ones that stand out for you and help you to understand the importance of understanding Black historical and current events?

## Activities

### Learn more about events that inspired poems

Select one of the events from one of the poems; the ones from Power and Protest are good ones to start with.

- Research more information about the person or event(s) that are the subject of the poem.
- Share what you've learned in a format of your choice: poetry, drawing, digital compilation, or another medium.

## Poetry journal

As you read the poems in this collection, you'll have lots of thoughts, questions, and ideas. A good place to collect your thinking is in a poetry journal, which you can create with a blank notebook, pieces of paper, or digitally.

- When you are moved by a poem, or confused by a poem, or even upset with a poem, record those reactions in your poetry journal.
- These reflections will deepen your understanding of the poems and help you to analyze them on deeper levels.
- This critical thinking puts you into conversation with poetry, and as you read more poems, your understanding of poetry and your understanding of yourself will grow.

## Responding to poetry

After reading these poems, ask yourself the questions Todd poses: "What's missing? Who's missing? Can you fill in the gaps?" (p. 5).

- Consider poets, topics, historical events, etc. that could be the answer to these questions.
- For your response, consider creating a response in the style of one of your favorite poems from this collection and inspired by Orlando's illustrations.
- Where is an appropriate place and audience to share your knowledge?
- Work with a grown-up to create a moment or event that helps others understand what you've learned and why it's important.

## Poetry as a gift

Which of these poems would you give to someone as a gift?

- Using Orlando's illustrations as inspiration, select a poem from the collection, illustrate it, and give it to someone of your choice.

## Performing poetry

Todd says her father made her memorize and recite poems when she was young.

- After reading this collection, select one (or more!) poems to memorize, then perform them for someone of your choice.
- Afterward, think about what was special about this decision and how the person who received your poem felt.
- What does that person's reaction help you to understand about the power of poetry?