

Quarter 1: English IV Challenge Essay

Challenge Essay Directions:

Write an essay that, in your own words, identifies the author's argument and evaluates the effectiveness of that argument. In your essay, analyze how the author uses the features listed in the box above the article.

As you read the passage below, consider how the author uses:

- **evidence, such as facts or examples, to support claims.**
- **reasoning to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence.**
- **stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.**

“How Poetry Can Help Kids Turn a Fear of Literature into Love”

by Jason Reynolds (PBS Newshour - Dec 15, 2017)

If you were to tell me that you were afraid of dogs, I wouldn't then return to you with a pack of pit bulls. I wouldn't invite you out to a quiet evening over dinner and Cujo. However, what I might do is casually walk with you by one of those doggy daycares. The ones with the pups small enough to fit in the palm of your hand. Yippy little furballs that get so excited, their tails wag the entire back halves of their bodies. The dogs that grin and want nothing more than to lap your skin with fervent affection.

That's how I would help break down the distrust of dogs. It just makes sense. So then, why, when it comes to young people who don't like reading, who feel intimidated by literature, do we answer that cry with an onslaught of the very thing they fear? Why do we show up with a pack of pit bulls in the form of pages, and expect them to stop running away?

Perhaps they haven't found the right style of book because, sometimes it isn't about subject matter, or voice, or point of view. Sometimes it's about the most obvious thing—the words on the page.

For some kids, those words — the amount of words — is equivalent to a snarling dog. So, why not start with the less threatening, palm-sized pup in the window? In this case, poetry.

Poetry has the ability to create entire moments with just a few choice words. The spacing and line breaks create rhythm, a helpful musicality, a natural flow. The separate stanzas aid in perpetuating a kind of incremental reading, one small chunk at a time. And the white space, for an intimidated reader, adds breathability to a seemingly suffocating task. I wrote this to explore the in-depth, though momentary, inner monologue of a young person dealing with a complex emotion — one we all can relate to — in just 50 words:

I felt like crying,
which felt like another person trapped
behind my face,
tiny fists punching the backs of my eyes,
feet kicking my throat at the spot
where the swallow starts.
Stay put,
I whispered to him.
Stay strong,
I whispered to me
because crying
is against the rules.

With the incredible selection of poetry and novels and verse from past to present, this is an opportune time to use them to chip away at bibliophobia. Less words on the page, more white space, without necessarily sacrificing the narrative elements.

And once young people experience turning those pages, once the rush of comprehension and completion laps at their psyches for the first time, perhaps they will know they need not fear a thing created to love them, and for them to love.