



Lesson Plan:

## Repetition, Negation and Imperative in "How Do You Raise a Black Child?"

Poem by Cortney Lamar Charleston / motionpoem by Seyi Peter-Thomas

Lesson plan by Saara Myrene Raappana

**Time: at least 50 minutes**

### OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

1. consider the ways that repetition and negation work to create meaning in a poem and film
2. analyze the ways that film and poem work both together and independently to create intimacy and empathy using imperatives
3. apply the lessons learned to writing a draft of a poem

### MATERIALS

- "How Do You Raise a Black Child?," the poem & the motionpoem: [motionpoems.org/episode/how-do-you-raise-a-black-child/](http://motionpoems.org/episode/how-do-you-raise-a-black-child/)
- Motionpoems interviews with Seyi Peter-Thomas ([vimeo.com/235981136](https://vimeo.com/235981136)) and Cortney Lamar Charleston ([motionpoems.org/episode/how-do-you-raise-a-black-child/bonus](http://motionpoems.org/episode/how-do-you-raise-a-black-child/bonus))
- Pen/paper or other writing implements

A list of imperatives is a common form for a poem to take—these imperatives can create, among other things, a sense of involvement and immediacy for the reader. Coupled with the importance and sense of ritual created by repetition, poems from Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night" to Cortney Lamar Charleston's "How Do You Raise a Black Child?" have used imperatives and repetitions to create an incantatory quality while indicating urgency and vitality.

In "How Do You Raise a Black Child," Charleston adds the complication of negations (e.g., "Without a daddy at all, or with a daddy in prison, or at home . . ."; "With hip hop or / without.") to create a larger, implied imperative.

### ACTIVITIES

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**1. The Poem** (20-25 mins): Have students read "How Do You Raise a Black Child?" (don't show them the motionpoem yet) and answer, either in small groups or in class discussion, the following questions:

- a. List all instances of repetition.
- b. List all instances of negation.
- c. Next to each instance of word repetition, list the dictionary definition of the word. For each repetition, write the added, implied meaning to the page.
- d. Now look at each list of imperatives and their negations. What argument is the poem making by listing instructions and then taking them back?
- e. Try rewriting the poem as a set of clear instructions without negations. What is lost?

**R, N, & I in “How Do You Raise...” cont’d**

**2. The Film** (20-25 mins): Watch the film adaptation of “How Do You Raise a Black Child” without sound. Ask them to make a list of the images that appear.

- a. List all instances of repetition in the following categories: image repetition, color repetition, and setting repetition.

Then show the students the questions below, give them a chance to read them, and have them watch the film again, with sound, with the questions in mind. After they’ve watched the film again, have them answer the questions in small groups or in class discussion.

- b. What sounds are repeated in the film?
- c. Are there any negations in the film?
- d. Taken together, what do all of these repetitions, negations, and imperatives accomplish in telling you how to raise a black child?

**3.** Depending on class time, have students complete this exercise in class or at home:

**WRITING PROMPT**

Choose an activity from the list below and write a list of imperatives for how one should go about accomplishing that activity. Be sure to combine concrete, specific, detailed instructions with more general, universal instructions, but avoid abstractions. When you get stuck on what the next instruction should be, try a homonym, a repetition, or a inversion of the previous instruction.