PERSONA POEMS: WRITING THE DRAFT LOTTERY

CRAFTED BY CARRIE GEORGE

ARMED WITH OUR VOICES

LESSON PLANS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
5 minutes

→ Recruitment for the Vietnam War was based on "Selective Service," or a draft lottery. Each birthday was assigned a random number. Numbers that were drawn and all numbers lower would have to report to physical exams immediately. For example, if the number 50 was drawn, all people with a birthday corresponding to the number 50 and below would be drafted.

→ The highest draft number ever drawn was 215 in 1972. Therefore, anyone with a number above 215 was safe from the draft.

→ Men between the ages of 18 and 25 were eligible for the draft

→ Most people drafted were poor or working-class because they were less likely to obtain deferments.

INTRODUCTION
10 minutes

→ Take a look at the chart below. Find your birthday and your corresponding draft number.

→ Discuss who would have been drafted and who would have avoided the draft. How do you feel about your number?

→ What would you do if someone you knew had been drafted and you hadn't?

READ THE EXCERPT OF "THE JOURNALIST" BY AI

10 minutes

→ Ai is a mixed-race woman of color who is known for writing *persona poems*. A persona poem is a poem in which the writer embodies the voice and perspective of a different person. The speaker of that poem becomes that person. Another word for a persona poem is a *dramatic monologu*e.

→ How does Ai create the character of the journalist in this poem? What details develop the character?

→ What do you think is the purpose of writing a poem from a perspective other than your own?

WRITE

20 minutes

→ Using the draft lottery numbers, write a persona poem embodying a person who has been affected by the draft.

→ You might choose to use the number corresponding to your birthday to influence your poem, or you might choose to use a different number.

→ Consider also the lives of women, children, and parents who had to stay home and watch loved ones leave—and sometimes never come back.

→ Use the tools Ai used in her poem to create a character and establish an emotional experience.

SHARE

15 minutes

→ Have students share the poems they wrote.

EXAMPLE POEM

EXCERPT OF "THE JOURNALIST"

BY AI,
FROM *VICE: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS*

In Viet Nam in 1966,
I stood among the gathering crowd,
as the Buddhist nun
doused her robe with gasoline.
As an American, I couldn't understand
and as I stood there,
I imagined myself
moving through the crowd
to stop her, but I didn't.
I held my camera in position.
Then it happened so quickly—
her assistant stepped forward
with a match.
Flames rose up the nun's robe
and covered her face,
then her charred body
slowly fell to the ground.
That year in Viet Nam,
I threw my life in the air
like a silver baton.
I could catch it with my eyes closed.
Til one night,
it sailed into black space like a wish
and disappeared.
Or was it me who vanished,
sucking the hard, rock candy
of the future,
sure that a man's life is art,
that mine had to be?

But tonight, I'm fifty-three.
I've drunk my way to the bottom
of that river of my youth
and I'm lying there
like a fat carp,
belly-down in the muck.
And nothing, not the blonde,
the red car,
or the smell of new money
can get me up again.

Ai. Vice: New and Selected Poems.
W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

1970 LOTTERY NUMBERS

SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM

1970 RANDOM SELECTION SEQUENCE, BY MONTH AND DAY

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1	305	086	108	032	330	249	093	111	225	359	019	129
2	159	144	029	271	298	228	350	045	161	125	034	328
3	251	297	267	083	040	301	115	261	049	244	348	157
4	215	210	275	081	276	020	279	145	232	202	266	165
5	101	214	293	269	364	028	188	054	082	024	310	056
6	224	347	139	253	155	110	327	114	006	087	076	010
7	306	091	122	147	035	085	050	168	008	234	051	012
8	199	181	213	312	321	366	013	048	184	283	097	105
9	194	338	317	219	197	335	277	106	263	342	080	043
10	325	216	323	218	065	206	284	021	071	220	282	041
11	329	150	136	014	037	134	248	324	158	237	046	039
12	221	068	300	346	133	272	015	142	242	072	066	314
13	318	152	259	124	295	069	042	307	175	138	126	163
14	238	004	354	231	178	356	331	198	001	294	127	026
15	017	089	169	273	130	180	322	102	113	171	131	320
16	121	212	166	148	055	274	120	044	207	254	107	096
17	235	189	033	260	112	073	098	154	255	288	143	304
18	140	292	332	090	278	341	190	141	246	005	146	128
19	058	025	200	336	075	104	227	311	177	241	203	240
20	280	302	239	345	183	360	187	344	063	192	185	135
21	186	363	334	062	250	060	027	291	204	243	156	070
22	337	290	265	316	326	247	153	339	160	117	009	053
23	118	057	256	252	319	109	172	116	119	201	182	162
24	059	236	258	002	031	358	023	036	195	196	230	095
25	052	179	343	351	361	137	067	286	149	176	132	084
26	092	365	170	340	357	022	303	245	018	007	309	173
27	355	205	268	074	296	064	289	352	233	264	047	078
28	077	299	223	262	308	222	088	167	257	094	281	123
29	349	285	362	191	226	353	270	061	151	229	099	016
30	164	----	217	208	103	209	287	333	315	038	174	003
31	211	----	030	----	313	----	193	011	----	079	----	100