



Informational Text

Author/Title: Mary Oliver, “The Buddha’s Last Instruction”

Mary Oliver (1935-) was born in Maple Heights, near Cleveland, Ohio. She attended college at The Ohio State University, and later at Vassar College. She did not receive a degree from either institution. Oliver’s poetry has won numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award and a Lannan Literary Award. Mary Oliver’s poetry is deeply aware of the natural world, particularly the birds and trees and ponds of her adopted state of Massachusetts.

Definitions: **Buddha**— Also known as Siddhārtha Gautama, Shakyamuni Buddha, or simply the Buddha, after the title of *Buddha*, was an ascetic and sage, on whose teachings Buddhism was founded. He is believed to have lived and taught mostly in the eastern part of Ancient India sometime between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE.

Sala tree— In Buddhism, the brief flowering of the sala tree is used as a symbol of impermanence and the rapid passing of glory. Buddhist tradition says that sage’s mother gave birth to him holding onto the branch of a sala tree. According to legend, the Buddha is said to have died between two sala trees.



Informational Text

Author/Title: Tracey Kidder, Excerpt from *Mountains Beyond Mountains*

Tracy Kidder (born November 12, 1945) is an American writer of nonfiction books. He received the Pulitzer Prize for his *The Soul of a New Machine* (1981), about the creation of a new computer at Data General Corporation. He has received praise and awards for other works, including his biography of Paul Farmer, a doctor and anthropologist, titled *Mountains Beyond Mountains* (2003).

Definitions: **Tap-taps**— Gaily painted buses or pick-up trucks that serve as share taxis in Haiti.

Creole— The predominant Haitian tongue, which is based on a combination of antiquated French and West African, Spanish, Portuguese, and Taino speech. While the official language of Haiti was French and all state business was conducted in the European language, Creole was spoken by the majority of the population.

Junta (pron. 'hōōn(t)ə)— A military or political group that rules a country after taking power by force.

Purgatory (in Roman Catholic doctrine)— A place or state of suffering inhabited by the souls of sinners who are expiating their sins before going to heaven.

Coup (pron. kōō)— A sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government.

US Army School of the Americas (SOA)— A United States Department of Defense Institute located at Fort Benning near Columbus, Georgia, that has provided military training to government personnel in US-allied Latin American nations.



Informational Text

Author/Title: John F. Kennedy, “Inaugural Address, 1961”

John F. Kennedy Jr. (1917–1963) was the 35th president of the United States, from 1961 until his assassination in 1963. The background for JFK’s inaugural speech was the threat of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and in particular serious concern for all out nuclear war (“The dark powers of destruction unleashed by science;” the “deadly spread of the deadly atom”). The inaugural address laid the groundwork for the Peace Corps that sent thousands of young Americans around the globe to complete service activities. AmeriCorps is frequently referred as the “domestic Peace Corps.”

Context: The early 1960s saw the end to much European colonial rule in Africa, Asia, and South America. Many hoped that national self-determination was now possible for these former colonial states. However, Soviet expansion abroad threatened to absorb these newly liberated countries.

The speech triangulates between three groups of nations:

- 1) “The West” comprised of the United State and those countries “whose cultural and spiritual origins we share;” namely the North Atlantic European countries that colonized and later provided the early immigrants to North America. Following World War II these nations formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to oppose the Soviet Union.
- 2) The Communist Block led by the Soviet Union, which uses tactics of “aggression and subversion” to create “an iron tyranny.”
- 3) Countries of the developing world comprised of “sister republics” in Central and South America and peoples “in the huts and villages in half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery.”



Informational Text

Author/Title: Franz Kafka, “The Helmsman”

Franz Kafka (1883 – 1924) was a Jewish Czech writer whose stories use dark humor to explore themes of absurdity and social alienation. Although widely regarded as one of the major figures of 20th-century literature, Kafka’s work went largely unnoticed during his lifetime. After studying law Kafka entered professional life as an insurance company clerk.

Context: In response to the increasingly bureaucratic nature of European society in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Kafka’s most famous works, such as *The Trial* (*Der Prozess*) or *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*), explore what Kafka saw as the surreal and sometimes nightmarish qualities of professional and civic life in Modernity. *The Helmsman* (*Der Steuermann*) can be understood within this same context.



Informational Text

Author/Title: Charles Baudelaire, “Let’s Beat Up the Poor!”

Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 1867) was French poet and satirist whose works frequently addressed the subject of modern life in Paris. Always provocative, he assailed the boundaries of mid-nineteenth century French society with his revolutionary and often scandalous satire.

Definitions: **Demon**— In Greek mythology, the demon (*dæmon* or *daimon*) is a supernatural being intermediate between gods and men. The Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates described having a personal ‘Demon’ that was an inner voice that gave him direction. Though the modern understanding of this inner voice equates it with the philosopher’s conscience, it can also be understood as a spiritual force mediating between man and the gods. Christian writers have interpreted the word as representing a malevolent spirit, creating the usage of “demon” as it currently exists in English. Baudelaire is aware of the double nature of the ‘Demon’ and qualifies his guiding spirit as a “Good Angel.”

Context: **Lélut and Baillarger**— Louis François Lélut (1804 –1877) and Jules Baillarger (1809–1890) were influential French psychologists and medical professionals who wrote significant works of early psychology rooted in the tradition of Western philosophy. In 1836 Lélut published *On the Demon of Socrates* that examined Socrates’ concept of the Demon from a modern medical perspective, in which he concluded that the Ancient Greek philosopher was insane. This explains Baudelaire’s reference to the certificate of insanity signed by the two learned doctors. This rhetorical device sets up the rest of the prose poem, where Baudelaire explains the shocking manner in which he encountered the beggar.



Informational Text

Author/Title: Gwendolyn Brooks, “The Lovers of the Poor”

Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000) was a highly regarded, much-honored poet, with the distinction of being the first black author to win the Pulitzer Prize. She also was poetry consultant to the Library of Congress—the first black woman to hold that position—and poet laureate of the State of Illinois. Many of Brooks's works display a political consciousness, especially those from the 1960s and later, with several of her poems reflecting the civil rights activism of that period.

Definitions: **Swarthy**— Dark-skinned.

Chitterlings— Chitterlings is an economical dish, usually made from the small intestines of a pig. Cuisine using organ meat is historically associated with poor people who could not afford finer cuts of meat.

Lake Forest, Glenco— Two wealthy suburbs of Chicago.

Rubbed glaze— Luxury decorative objects are coated in glaze and can be polished to a dull shine.

Fistic— Having to do with boxing.

Arms akimbo— A position in which the hands are on the hips and the elbows are bowed outward.

Spode, Lowestoft— Two examples of fine English porcelain ware.

Chippendale— Fine 18th-century English furniture, associated with the famous cabinetmaker Thomas Chippendale (1718 – 1779).

Aubusson— French carpets originally for aristocratic and royal residences.

Hattie Carnegie— American designer of high-end fashion.

Winter in Palm Beach— The women spend winters in the wealthy Florida enclave of Palm Beach to escape the cold of Chicago.

Cross the Water in June— To cross the Atlantic Ocean in June to visit Great Britain and other European countries during the early summer.

Saunter on Michigan, Easter mornings— Michigan Avenue is one of Chicago's most fashionable boulevards, and a prominent place for the well-to-do to make a public appearance after religious services on Easter.

The middle passage— The ocean voyage slaves undertook between East Africa and the Caribbean that brought them to the Americas.

Hie— To go quickly.

Canter— A term used to describe the running gait of horses.



Informational Text

Author/Title: Etheridge Knight, “A Wasp Woman Visits a Black Junkie in Prison”

Etheridge Knight (1931–1991) began writing poetry while an inmate at the Indiana State Prison and published his first collection, *Poems from Prison*, in 1968. Since then, Knight has attained recognition as a major poet, earning both Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award nominations for *Belly Song and Other Poems*. Much of Knight's prison poetry, according to Patricia Liggins Hill in *Black American Literature Forum*, focuses on imprisonment as a form of contemporary enslavement and looks for ways in which one can be psychologically free while yet incarcerated.

Definitions: **Junkie**— A slang term for a drug addict.

Proper-blooded— Similar in meaning to “well-bred,” the term refers to someone with a “good pedigree” or who comes from a “respectable” family.

Wasp— White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) is an informal, sometimes disparaging term for a group of high-status and influential white Americans of English Protestant ancestry. The group has historically controlled significant financial, political and social power in the United States.

Context: “I was in prison and ye visited me not,” is a quote from Matthew 25:43 in the New Testament (King James Version). It is part of a larger parable in which Jesus describes the kind of life his disciples should live to prepare for the final judgement. In the parable, Jesus explains that any act of kindness done for people in need is essentially done for Christ.



Informational Text

Author/Title: Cornel West, “What It Means to Be a Leftist in the 21st Century”

Cornel Ronald West (born 1953) is an American philosopher, academic, social activist, author, public intellectual, and prominent member of the Democratic Socialists of America. In 1980, West became the first African American to graduate from Princeton University with a Ph.D. in philosophy. Professor of Philosophy and Christian Practice at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, West has written numerous books and articles on theology, race, gender, and class in the United States and is a frequent media commentator on political and social issues. West’s outspoken political views as well as his role as an activist have led to considerable controversy throughout his career. West has also been known to criticize other figures on the left, especially those from established political parties.

Definitions: PC— “Politically correct.”

Marx— Karl Marx was a nineteenth-century German economist who theorized that historical change is driven by class conflict. He is known as the founder of Marxism, the political, economic, and social theories including the belief that the struggle between social classes is a major force in history and that there should eventually be a society in which there are no classes.

Brother Stanley— Stanley Aronowitz, a scholar and activist from CUNY.

Gramscian— Refers to **Antonio Gramsci**, the nineteenth-century Italian Marxist who examined the power of cultural institutions in shaping society.

De facto segregation— During racial integration efforts in schools in the 1960s, “de facto segregation” was a term used to describe a situation in which legislation did not overtly segregate students by race, but nevertheless school remained segregated. (*De facto* = “in fact”)

Apartheid— A system of racial segregation implemented in South Africa.

James Baldwin— A twentieth-century African American writer who focused on the class, racial and sexual tensions in mid-century American and European society.

Audre Lordes— An African American activist and poet from the twentieth century who wrote on issues of racism, feminism, and civil rights.

Tavis Smiley— An African American political talk show host and author who has been broadcast on PBS and NPR.

Sidney Poitier— A famous African American actor and diplomat.

Elie Wiesel— A famous Jewish-American writer and activist who has written on many topics, including the Holocaust.

C-SPAN— The Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN) broadcasts proceedings of the U.S. Congress, as well as other public events and programs.

Proletarian— In Marxism, “proletariat” refers to workers or working-class people, regarded collectively.

Lumpenproletarian— In Marxism, “lumpenproletariat” refers to the unorganized and unpolitical lower orders of society who are not interested in revolutionary advancement.

Katrina— i.e., Hurricane Katrina.

Barrios— Spanish-speaking neighborhoods.

Rick Wolff— A twentieth-century American Marxist economist.

Socratic— The Socratic Method is a foundational method in Western philosophy where critical thinking is stimulated by asking directed questions.

Reformist— Reformism refers to the theory of the political Left, that gradual changes within a political system, rather than revolution, will lead to emancipation of the working classes.

Martin King— i.e., Martin Luther King Jr.

Fannie Lou Hamer— African American civil rights leader and activist.

Black Panther Party— A revolutionary black nationalist and socialist organization active in the U.S. from 1966 until 1982.

Huey [P. Newton] and Bobby Seale— African American activists and co-founders of the Black Panther Party.



Informational Text

Author/Title: James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village”

James Baldwin (1924–1987) was a famous African American writer and cultural critic who explored ideas of race and identity in the mid–twentieth century America and Europe. Baldwin grew up in New York City, and left the United States for Paris in his mid-twenties as a result of the tensions he experienced due to his race and sexuality in his native country. After many years in Paris, Baldwin returned to America to participate in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

Definitions: **Lourdes**— A Roman Catholic shrine called Our Lady of Lourdes that is said to offer miraculous healing to those who visit. Our Lady of Lourdes is located in the town of Lourdes, France.

Joyce— James Joyce (1882-1941), was a twentieth-century Irish modernist author.

Lent— A solemn religious observance in the Christian liturgical calendar that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends approximately six weeks later, before Easter Sunday.

II village— The “Infant Jesus” organization (now “Infant Jesus Homes and Children’s Centers,”) is a Catholic charity that serves children.

Saluts and bonsoirs (French)— Friendly greetings in the French language.

Dante, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Aeschylus, Da Vinci, Rembrandt, and Racine— Writers and artists who are considered to be foundational to Western culture.

Chartres— French city famed for its magnificent medieval cathedral.

Herrenvolk (German)— The “master race” as defined by the Nazis.

Métier (French)— A trade, profession, or occupation.

Le sale negre (French)— The “dirty negro,” a derogatory term for a black person.

E. Franklin Fraizier— Edward Franklin Frazier was an American sociologist and author who was the first black president of the American Sociological Association. His work analyzed the historical forces that influenced the development of the African American family from the time of slavery to the mid-1930s.



Informational Text

Author/Title: David Foster Wallace, “Commencement Speech to Kenyon College Class of 2005”

David Foster Wallace (1962–2008) was an American writer and essayist whose work contains elements of irony, metafiction and postmodernism. Throughout his writing, Wallace strived to create an authenticity that he believed was increasingly absent in modern, media-saturated American life. Despite considerable success, Wallace committed suicide in 2008.

Context: Kenyon College is a small liberal arts college located in Gambier, Ohio. In many ways, Wallace’s presentation was crafted in response to the deficiencies he saw in both traditional commencement speeches and, more generally, the guidance and expectations placed upon young adults of the period. “Commencement Speech to Kenyon College Class of 2005,” which is also sometimes titled “*This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life*,” has become one of the most widely read commencement speeches in recent memory.



Informational Text

Author/Title: César Chávez, “The Mexican-American and the Church”

Cesar Chavez (1927–1993) was an American labor leader and civil rights activist who, with Dolores Huerta, co-founded a farm labor union, the National Farm Workers Association (later the United Farm Workers union, UFW), in 1962. Born in Yuma, Arizona, Chavez was originally a Mexican-American farm worker. He became the best known Latino American civil rights activist, and was strongly promoted by the American labor movement, which was eager to enroll Hispanic members. His public-relations approach to unionism and aggressive but nonviolent tactics made the farm workers' struggle a moral cause with nationwide support.

Context: The dominant ethnicity in American Catholicism is Irish. They came to dominate the ranks of bishops, priests, and other religious. As such, ‘English’ or Irish-led leadership of the Church had a long history of not maintaining effective spiritual and social services to new Catholic immigrants (be they Germans, Quebecois, Italians, Poles, or Mexicans). The Mexican community was particularly ill-served due to a mixture of high mobility levels—as migrant labor, they were not easily integrated into the territorial parish system—the lack of priests provided by Mexico due to a century-old history of anti-clerical and anti-Catholic politics, and possible racism on the part of the Irish Catholic elite.

Definitions: **Ecumenical**— Representing a number of different Christian churches. Refers specifically to activity that promotes unity among the world's Christian churches.

Parish— In the Christian Church, a small administrative district typically having its own church and a priest or pastor. In the Catholic Church, the parish is the local community to which a believer belongs, usually associated with a church building. Most Catholic parishes designate a specific geographical area or neighborhood.

Community Service Organization— The Community Service Organization (founded 1947) was an important California Latino civil rights organization, most famous for training Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta.

California Migrant Ministry— A Protestant ecumenical group, begun in 1920 to address the extreme needs of migrant farmers in the Southeast. The organization soon spread throughout the U.S. The California Migrant Ministry was particularly active because most American fruits and vegetables come from California’s “factories in the fields”. Migrant Ministries is now the National Farm Worker Ministry.

Huelga (Spanish)— Strike.

Diocese— The area or territorial jurisdiction that is controlled by a bishop in a Christian church.

Catholic Charities— The name given to the consolidated community and social service activities of the Catholic Church. It is essentially the United Way for the Catholic community.



Informational Text

Author/Title: Bertolt Brecht, “A Bed for the Night”

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was a German poet and playwright. His writing was highly influenced by Marxist thought at a time in European history—after the catastrophic disaster of World War I and during the rise of Fascism and the Nazis—when Left-leaning philosophies were common in intellectual circles on both sides of the Atlantic.

Context: “A Bed for the Night” was written in 1931, just two years after the stock market crash of 1929 had inaugurated the Great Depression. In these years, Americans were hard hit by the collapse of the financial system. In New York, bread lines were common and destitute people built shantytowns of makeshift homes in Central Park.

Definitions: **Age of exploitation**— A phrase Brecht used for capitalism.