

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Analyzing Poetry

Below is Lawson Fusao Inada's poem "Children of Camp." Read the poem a few times before answering the questions on the next page. This activity is meant to be completed in small groups.



## Children of Camp by Lawson Fusao Inada

There was no poetry in the camp.

Unless you can say  
mud is poetry,  
unless you can say  
dust is poetry,  
unless you can say  
blood is poetry,  
unless you can say  
cruelty is poetry,  
unless you can say  
injustice is poetry,  
unless you can say  
imprisonment is poetry.

Lawson Fusao Inada was born in 1938 in Fresno, California, a third-generation Japanese American. In 1942, he and his family were sent to internment camps.

There was no poetry in the camp.

Unless you can say  
families are poetry,  
unless you can say  
people are poetry.

And the people  
made poetry  
from camp.  
And the people  
made poetry  
from camp.

**Directions:** Discuss the following questions with your group before writing your answers. A couple of the questions also ask you to text mark the poem. *Note:* To make things simple, we refer to the speaker of this poem as "he" because the poet is male. However, the poem does not indicate that the speaker is a particular gender.

**1. Describe the structure of the poem—that is, how it's organized. Be sure to explain the use of repetition.**

**2. How does the poem's structure, including the use of repetition, affect your experience of reading or hearing the poem? (It might be helpful to think about the poem like a song—how the structure makes it sound or feel as you read or listen to it, or how the structure gives emphasis to certain words or ideas.)**

**3. Use a colored pencil to underline the words that start the phrase "\_\_\_\_\_ is poetry" each time it appears in the first stanza. List the words you underlined. (We listed the first two for you.)**

mud, dust

**4. Choose a different colored pencil. Use it to underline the words that start the phrase "\_\_\_\_\_ is poetry" each time it appears in the second stanza. Write the words you underlined.**

**5. Compare the words you underlined in the first stanza with the words you underlined in the second stanza. How are they different? Discuss the emotions and images that each set of words brings up.**

**6. What does the speaker mean by "poetry" when he says "There was no poetry in the camp"? Do you think he is referring to literature—that is, to written verse? What else might he mean by "poetry"?**

**7. What does the speaker mean when he says "And the people/made poetry/from camp" in the last stanza?**