

## Using Multiple Kinds of Sources to Analyze an Exhibit Source:

Analysis of “The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till” by Gwendolyn Brooks

**PURPOSE:** *This in-class exercise guides students in the use of background and theory sources to strengthen their close reading skills of an exhibit source and deepen and complicate their analysis.*

### NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS:

- Begin by asking students how many have heard of Emmett Till. Usually more than half have not. Read the poem with students and analyze it together (full-class or small groups) without any contextual information. The conversation may cover imagery, diction, and tone, etc. (5-10 minutes).
- Introduce the following source material (students should use laptops/devices for this class) and allow students to peruse this material while simultaneously re-reading the exhibit (15 minutes).
- After reviewing this material, conclude by re-interpreting this poem (and students’ initial observations) in light of this new information (10 minutes).
- *Possible questions for discussion:*
  - Does Brooks adhere to and/or subvert the traditional ballad form? To what effect(s)?
  - What light do the background sources (contemporary newspaper accounts) shed on the poem, and why?
  - How might the poem and the photo (if students choose to view it) inform each other?

### MATERIALS:

- Exhibit source: [Poem](#) by Brooks
- Theory source: [Definition of a ballad](#) (*The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*)
- Background sources (historical accounts):
  - [“Emmett Till Funeral Saddens City, Nation,”](#) *The Chicago Defender*, September 15, 1955
  - [“Mississippi Jury Acquits 2 Accused in Youth's Killing,”](#) *The New York Times*, September 24, 1955
  - [“Continuing Bonds and Emmett Till's Mother,”](#) *Southern Quarterly*, Spring 2013
  - Background/Exhibit Source: [casket photo of Emmett Till](#)  
**(Warning: Photo is graphic. Warn students ahead of time and allow them to opt out of looking at it.)**