

## THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH

### Afrofuturism: Black Joy and Black Resilience

Teachers, click here for a copy of the activity worksheet that you can save, edit, and share with students:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1D49K3A9a94XtJ6FnDvAS850og07NmwJ-/copy?usp=sharing&oid=108535750462976594822&rtpof=true&sd=true>

A sample, completed worksheet can be found here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cZZLmkGuVluUR5bxEu7WsgtyMkOQ-ZZk/view?usp=sharing>

### WARM UP QUESTIONS

THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH was written by a white man in 1942. Director Lileana Blain-Cruz, a woman of color, made the decision to cast the Antrobus family that is at the center of the play with Black actors.

Blain Cruz has said of THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH:

“It’s about a family of ‘Everymans’ - and it’s exciting to me to imagine that everyman family - in its American iconography - through a Black family - to place them at the center of this massive epic journey that asks us to consider who we are as a people - that asks us, in the middle of impending epic doom, to trust and hope in each other in our collective journey through the chaos of living.”

- What have you been taught about Black history in school?
- What is the importance of decentering racial trauma in teaching Black history? How can we include Black resilience, creativity, and joy without ignoring the real history of racial violence?

### MINI LESSON

Afrofuturism is a term that was coined by writer and cultural critic Mark Dery to encompass the ways in which the cultures and history of the African diaspora can be the source for imagining liberatory Black futures. Based in speculative science-fiction, along with music and art, Afrofuturism uses those art forms to grapple with the problems of today while imagining universes that exist beyond racial and gender oppression, and other forces that diminish the humanity of Black people.

Share this video with your students to introduce them to Afrofuturism:

Video: [Afrofuturism Explained: Not Just Sci-Fi](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=154XnA1xcis)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=154XnA1xcis>

- ❖ 0:00 - 2:02 Set up, explanation of Afrofuturism
- ❖ 2:03 - 5:00 Examples of three artists drawing upon Afrofuturism in visual art, fashion, and theater, and graphic novels/comic art.

Post-viewing questions [Teacher posed, or turn-talk and share]

- a) How does Afrofuturism connect the past and future with the here and now?
- b) How can art or sci-fi inform our reality?
- c) If the Antrobus family could break free of the cycles of history they've been trapped in, what might that look like? Imagine three ways the Antrobus family might break out into a new, more hopeful future.

### MAIN ACTIVITY: Imagined Futures Poem

Think about Thornton Wilder's concept of history in *THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH* as a never-ending cycle of calamities that we, as humans, can survive with the help of the art, literature, and ideas that sustain us. Afrofuturism explodes the notion of historical cycles and invites people to construct an entirely new imagined world based in a series of "what ifs..." and "why nots...?"

Ask students to think about and then discuss as a group, or have them brainstorm directly on the worksheet:

- Tell me some ideas you have about the future.
- What are some things you'd like to see in the future? Try and express this in positive terms - not just what you don't want, but what you do want to see!

For this activity, we will translate our ideas about the future into poems. Depending on who we are - our background, experience, passions - our poems may or may not have to do with a specific imagined future for Black people. [Prompts taken from a lesson plan on the Poetry Foundation's website: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/150541/the-poetics-of-liberation> ]

- Write about leaving Earth to find a better place (i.e. where there is no racism, sexism, etc.).
- Use repetition ("I have left Earth...").
- Use similes and metaphors to make comparisons.

*See the link at the top of this lesson to access a worksheet to help students structure their poems.*

### SHARE OPTIONS

- **Group Share:** Students can post their poems on a Padlet timeline. This can permit students to react to and comment on each other's poems.
- **Pair-Share/Verbal:** Students can share their poems with a partner or with the whole class.

### REFLECTION

To what extent can art, poetry, or music bridge imagination and reality?