Curriculum for the Youth Prophecy Poetry Project and Contest

Who is Pauli Murray?

Pauli Murray was born in Baltimore, MD in 1910. She moved to Durham’s West End neighborhood to live with her maternal grandparents after her mother died in 1914, and became the third generation of the Fitzgerald family to live there. She was raised in Durham by her grandparents, Robert and Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald, and by her aunt Pauline Dame who worked for Durham public schools. Pauli Murray became an important activist and champion for civil and human rights. As a historian, attorney, poet, activist, teacher, Episcopal priest, and African American woman she confronted many barriers. This year, the Episcopal Church made her Saint Pauli Murray. She worked throughout her life to address injustice, to give voice to the unheard, to educate, and to promote reconciliation between races and economic classes.

The vision of the Pauli Murray Project (www.paulimurrayproject.org) is to build a better Durham by engaging a diversity of residents to lift up the vision and legacy of activist, scholar, feminist, poet and Episcopal priest Pauli Murray.

If you are a writer, poet, mentor, artist, educator, activist, or all of the above who works with young people in Durham, we hope you will consider Pauli Murray as a way to inspire and teach youth to express themselves creatively and promote justice and equality. This guide is a starting place to think about activities and workshops related to Pauli Murray and Durham’s history.
Poetry Project & Contest

The Pauli Murray Project is back at it again this year. We are continuing the celebration of the life of Pauli Murray with the official annual event, the Youth Prophecy Poetry Contest.

- The contest is open to young people between the ages 12-19 who live in Durham.
- Contact paulimurraypoetry@gmail.com for more information about when the submission window will open.
- Submissions will be judged by local poets, educators, and activists and winners will be awarded cash prizes.
- Young people under the age of 12 are also welcome to submit poems that will be compiled and published on the Pauli Murray Project’s website.

What can you do?

Learn about Pauli Murray and introduce her to the young people you know or work with. Her life, work, and vision can be part of teaching and conversations about African American history, women's history, civil rights, human rights, religion, and education. Visit the Pauli Murray Project's website at www.paulimurrayproject.org to find:

- Details and information about Pauli Murray's life and many accomplishments including a biography, timeline, and online exhibit.
- Details about last year’s first annual Youth Prophecy Poetry Project and Contest.
- Photographs of Pauli Murray, her family, and important locations in Durham related to her life.
- Samples of Pauli Murray’s poetry including audio recordings.
- A list of additional writings and sources about Pauli Murray.
- Stories about Durham including Civil/Human Rights Activism and women on Black Wall Street.
- Information about other past and ongoing events of the Pauli Murray Project.
Pauli Murray Through Murals

**Supplies:**
- Maps of mural locations (www.paulimurrayproject.org/pauli-murray/faceup-mural-project/)
- Pens/Pencils
- Paper or notebooks
- Large paper, paint, or other drawing supplies

Involves transportation and/or travel

**Timeframe:**
- ½ hour to 1 ½ hours to view murals, depending on location and number of murals visited
- ½ hour + for creative activity after viewing murals

**Purpose:**
To participate in a public art project; to think about the role of art and public space in telling history; to respond to visual and textural elements to create poems.

**The murals:**
Between 2007 and 2009 artist Brett Cook collaborated with more than 1,500 members of the Durham community to create a series of murals based on or inspired by images of Pauli Murray. The mural project was called *Face Up: Telling Stories of Community Life Project.*

The murals are on the outside of buildings throughout Southwest Central Durham and feature vibrant portraits of Pauli Murray as well as quotes from and about her. All the murals are publicly accessible. A map and guide to mural location can be found at www.paulimurrayproject.org/pauli-murray/faceup-mural-project/

Walk, drive, or bike to see all or several of the murals. Spend some time exploring one that might be near where you live or work. Encourage young people to check them out too, or organize a trip to one or more of the murals. Touch the walls where the murals are painted. Notice the colors and shapes. Are there any words on the mural? What do they say?

**Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**
Have participants spend 5 minutes observing the mural and making notes or drawings about what they see, hear, and feel. Take turns sharing responses out loud.

What does the wall feel like?
What kind of building is the mural on?
What is nearby or what surrounds the building?
Have they ever seen these murals or another mural before?
What do they see in the painting? Feel? What are they reminded of or have questions about while looking at the mural?
Did they learn anything by visiting the mural? What?
Use the murals and observations about the mural sites as a starting place for a visual art or creative writing project. Discuss the use of *imagery* and *descriptive language* in poetry. How do poets create pictures using words? Prompts for writing could include:

Write a descriptive poem about Pauli Murray based on a mural.

Write a poem imagining what happens around, in front of, or nearby the mural every day. How might the mural change what goes on in the space?

Try “translating” the mural into words or a poem. After the poem is written, arrange the words of the poem into a picture on the page making use of negative space, spacing and size of words, or even the direction of the words on the page.

Write a poem imagining what they want a mural about that person or themselves to look like or say in 50 years.

Use large paper, paint, markers, crayons, or another medium to create individual or a group mural. The mural can be a portrait or more abstract. It can include words or not include words. It could depict a person, place, event, or idea that is important to participants. Imagine where they would paint this mural. Who would they like to see it? What would it tell the community? What might someone learn in the future from looking at the mural?
Mapping Pauli Murray’s Life

Supplies:
The “Pauli Murray and her Durham Neighborhood” map (attached) and/or the interactive Google Map of Civil/Human Rights Activism in Durham (www.paulimurrayproject.org/mapping-civil-human-activism-live-now/)
Pens/Pencils
Paper or notebooks
Involves transportation and/or travel

Timeframe:
½ hour + to visit locations depending on distance, mode of transportation, and number of locations visited. Before bringing youth to visit the locations, we recommend that facilitators familiarize themselves with the tour and decide which sites to visit. The Pauli Murray Tour covers 2.5 miles and many of the locations are close to each other.
½ hour + for creative activity after viewing murals

Purpose:
To learn about sites of historical and contemporary importance in Durham related to Pauli Murray and Civil/Human Rights activism; to observe how spaces and locations change over time; to reflect on how places, events, and people are remembered; to think about history as living, present, and all around; to use poetry as a way of remembering or commemorating events and people in history; to use sensory observations to write poetry; to use poetry as a tool for activism and social change.

The Maps:
The “Pauli Murray and her Durham Neighborhood” map is a 2.5 mile tour that is accessible by car, bike, or on foot. It includes locations such as Pauli Murray’s childhood home, the church where her parent were married, and the all-Black West End Graded School that Murray attended and wrote about in her 1956 memoir, Proud Shoes. Some of the buildings on the tour are no longer standing, but the map provides information about their former location and importance. Several of these sites are important not just to the history of Pauli Murray but African-American history in Durham more broadly.

The Google Map of Civil/Human Rights Activism in Durham contains markers, written descriptions, and audio clips about sites that are important to civil and human rights activism in the past and present. This tour can be done virtually on the computer, but you may consider visiting a location or two that are convenient or interesting after reading and listening to the online map. To access the map, visit http://paulimurrayproject.org/connecting-durham-stories/mapping-civil-human-rights-activism-in-durham/

When visiting these locations, encourage participants to make notes or drawings about what they see, hear, feel, smell, notice, or have questions about. Take 3-5 visits at each
sit to record observations. Have participants guess what might have been at a location in the past, then read them the description. Are they surprised? Make observations about traveling from one location to another.

**Questions for discussion or reflection:**
- What is the location? Where are you? Have you been here before?
- What has changed about the location, building, or space? Is it still there? Would you know it was important if you just walked by?
- What do you imagine happened here yesterday? Ten years ago? Fifty years ago? One hundred years ago?
- What can you imagine being here fifty or one hundred years from now?
- Is it important to know about or visit these locations? Why or why not?
- Are there other places that should be on these maps? Which ones? Why?
- How does your view of Durham change after going there or hearing/reading about these places?

Any of these questions or prompts for reflection may be used as the start of a writing activity, or consider the following:

What kind of map would you make? What are the places important to your life, family, or community? Write a poem that leads or directs someone to these locations. Where would they go? Why? How would they get there? Turn the Pauli Murray or the civil and human rights tour into a poem, or create a new poetic tour/map to other locations related to the history, activism, or social change in Durham.
Pauli Murray in her own Words

Supplies:
Copies of Pauli Murray’s poems to share (attached or available as audio recordings at www.paulimurrayproject.org/pauli-murray/poetry-by-pauli-murray/). Pencils/pens and paper

Timeframe:
45 minutes to an hour

Purpose:
To gain exposure and respond to the poetry of Pauli Murray; to use poetry to address contemporary social issues; to identify topics, themes, images, and metaphors in poetry; to practice creative adaptation of a poem.

The Poems:
Pauli Murray published a book of poetry, Dark Testament and Other Poems, in 1970. Though the book is now out of print, we have attached some of her poems, both excerpts and full poems.

Choose a poem or poems to read together out loud or silently. Distribute copies of the poems to participants. Mark and discuss any words, images, or references that the group does not understand or has questions about.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:
What story does the poem tell? Who is telling the story? What words, lines, sections, or images stand out or seem important? What does the poem make you feel or think about? What does it sound like to read out loud? Brainstorm or free associate some ideas, images, and thoughts about the poem.

Use the poem or poems as a starting place for participants to write their own poems. For example:

- Re-write or adapt one of her poems to reflect their personal experience or a contemporary social issue (like bullying in schools).
- Use a line, word, image, or title of one of Murray’s poems as the first line, word, or title for your own poem. Or use the structure of a poem to create your own. For instance,

  Give me a song of hope
  And a world where I can sing it.
  Give me a song of faith
  And a people to believe in it.
  Give me a song of kindliness
  And a country where I can live it.
  Give me a song of hope and love
And a brown girl’s heart to hear it.

Participants could adapt the structure of this excerpt from the poem “Dark Testament,” following a pattern of “Give me a -----/And a ----- to ------ it,” the activity could be to write a poem of any style or structure that starts with or contains the line “Give me a song of hope,” etc.

Poems could also respond to a topic, image, and/or message in one of Pauli Murray’s poems.

_Dark Testament and Other Poems_ was published by Silvermine Publishers (Norwalk, Connecticut) in 1970. It is out of print, but you can check out a copy of the book in the Main Branch of the Durham Public Library.
PROPHECY
I sing of a new American
Separate from all others,
Yet enlarged and diminished by all others.
I am the child of kings and serfs, freemen and slaves,
Having neither superiors nor inferiors,
Progeny of all colors, all cultures, all systems, all beliefs.
I have been enslaved, yet my spirit is unbound.
I have been cast aside, but I sparkle in the darkness.
I have been slain but live on in the rivers of history.
I seek no conquest, no wealth, no power, no revenge;
I seek only discovery
Of the illimitable heights and depths of my own being.

COLOR TROUBLE
If you dislike me just because
My face has more of sun than yours,
Then, when you see me, turn and run
But do not try to bar the sun.
Excerpt from DARK TESTAMENT

Hope is a crushed stalk
Between clenched fingers.
Hope is a bird’s wing
Broken by a stone.
Hope is a word in a tuneless ditty—
A word whispered with the wind,
A dream of forty acres and a mule,
A cabin of one’s own and a moment to rest,
A name and place for one’s children
And children’s children at last…
Hope is a song in a weary throat.

Give me a song of hope
And a world where I can sing it.
Give me a song of faith
And a people to believe in it.
Give me a song of kindliness
And a country where I can live it.
Give me a song of hope and love
And a brown girl’s heart to hear it.

RUTH

Brown girl chanting Te Deums on Sunday
Rust-colored peasant with strength of granite,
Bronze girl welding ship hulls on Monday
Let nothing smirch you, let no one crush you.

Queen of ghetto, sturdy hill-climber,
Walk with the lilt of ballet dancer,
Walk like a strong down-East wind blowing,
Walk with the majesty of the First Woman.

Gallant challenger, millioned-hope bearer,
The stars are your beacons, earth your inheritance,
Meet blaze and cannon with your own heart’s passion,
Surrender to none the fire of your soul.
New “Prophecy”

Supplies:
A copy of “Prophecy” (included)
Pencils/pens
Notebooks or paper
Scissors

Timeframe: 10 minutes to read original copy of “Prophecy,” 45 minutes to cut up poem, give lines, discuss lines and rewrite them and reorganize lines to make new poem

Purpose: This type of workshop can help develop speech skills as well as writing skills. It will allow students to explore their feelings towards history and the present.

The poem:

PROPHECY
I sing of a new American
Separate from all others,
Yet enlarged and diminished by all others.
I am the child of kings and serfs, freemen and slaves,
Having neither superiors nor inferiors,
Progeny of all colors, all cultures, all systems, all beliefs.
I have been enslaved, yet my spirit is unbound.
I have been cast aside, but I sparkle in the darkness.
I have been slain but live on in the rivers of history.
I seek no conquest, no wealth, no power, no revenge;
I seek only discovery
Of the illimitable heights and depths of my own being.

--Pauli Murray (1970 from Dark Testament and Other Poems)

Directions: Read the poem (without the numbers) aloud to the entire workshop class. Have a discussion about the poem asking various questions: What do you think she was saying with the poem? How does the poem relate to current events today? What type of visuals does the poem provide, etc.?

Next, cut the poem into numbered lines (provided) and give each person in the group a line or create small groups and have each group take a line. They are to then rewrite the line in their own words to be put back together in the original order. After you have the new poem read it aloud and ask each person why they wrote what they wrote.
Send us your re-written version of “Prophecy.” Tell us about your group and how you came up with the poem. Email the poem to paulimurraypoetry@gmail.com.

PROPHECY

1. I sing of a new American
2. Separate from all others,
3. Yet enlarged and diminished by all others.
4. I am the child of kings and serfs, freemen and slaves,
5. Having neither superiors nor inferiors,
6. Progeny of all colors, all cultures, all systems, all beliefs.
7. I have been enslaved, yet my spirit is unbound.
8. I have been cast aside, but I sparkle in the darkness.
9. I have been slain but live on in the rivers of history.
10. I seek no conquest, no wealth, no power, no revenge;
11. I seek only discovery
12. Of the illimitable heights and depths of my own being.
A Picture is Worth 1,000 Words…Exploring Pauli Murray Through Photographs

**Supplies:**
Photographs of Pauli Murray (attached)
Access to a computer with internet to view or print additional photographs (optional)
Pencils/pens and paper

**Timeframe:**
45 minutes to an hour to view, discuss, and respond to photographs.

**Purpose:**
To creatively respond to or express photographic stories in words; to interpret and ask questions about photographs; to learn about Pauli Murray’s life through photographs and communicate what was learned through poetry.

**The Photographs:**
All the photographs provided can also be viewed on the Pauli Murray Project website ([www.paulimurrayproject.org](http://www.paulimurrayproject.org)). Captions are also provided separately, but you may want to begin discussing the photographs by just responding to what participants see without additional information.

More photographs may be viewed online at the Pauli Murray Project website, and hundreds more are available from the Pauli Murray collection at the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe University. To access the photographs from Radcliffe:

- Scroll down and select “Photographs” under the heading “Genre/Form” in right hand sidebar to view photographs.
- Click on individual photographs to view them larger.

**Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**
Describe the photograph. Is it old or new? Who/what is in it?
Who might have taken the photograph?
What story does the photograph tell?
What does it feel like to look at these photos? Are you reminded of anything?
What are some reasons we take photographs?

Use the photographs to start writing. Participants may craft poems written from the point of view of someone in the photograph, the photographer, or someone looking at a picture many years after it was taken. What do you imagine or learn about Pauli Murray from the photos?
Captions for Photographs

*All photographs Reprinted by permission: The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe, Harvard University.*

1. Pauli Murray as a toddler with her parents and siblings.

2. Pauli Murray, first from right in the first row, with her graduating class at Hillside High. Murray graduated at the top of her class in 1926.


4. At 67, Pauli Murray was the first African American woman to be ordained as an Episcopal priest. She offered the Eucharist for the first time at the Chapel Hill church where her grandmother had been baptized as a slave.
These are just a few ideas for how to use writing as a way to teach and learn about Pauli Murray, and to use her life and work as a starting place for creative expression and discussions about history, human rights, and community.

Adapt, improvise, or change these activities to work best with your group or the time you have. If you have questions, comments or ideas about these materials, please contact us at paulimurraypoetry@gmail.com.

We hope you will share what you learn about Pauli Murray with friends, family, and especially young people in Durham. Have a conversation, design a workshop, read a poem out loud, lead an activity, or visit one of the many historical and artistic locations in Durham related to Pauli Murray.

Encourage youth age 12-19 to send what they write to the Youth Prophecy Poetry Contest! Young people ages 11 and under may also send us creative pieces for inclusion on the Pauli Murray Project website. Check the Pauli Murray Project website for updates and see the attached brochure for details and help us spread the word!

Let us know what you are up to! If you design or want to lead a writing workshop or other activity, let us know and we can add it to the calendar on the website for the Pauli Murray Project. That way, other people in the community can get involved. Feel free to send us photographs or poems that come out of any activities or workshops.

Contact us at paulimurraypoetry@gmail.com.