



This in-class activity was developed in conjunction with Lightbox interviews with [Carl Phillips](#) and [Kim Addonizio](#). For more information, please see www.lightboxpoetry.com.

Style and Substance

In his Lightbox interview, Carl Phillips writes about the range of strategies he employs in his poem “Capella.” He makes note of how choices in grammar, syntax, mood, image, and narrative come together to create a feeling of restlessness in his piece. Good writers are able to think carefully about their own choices, and have some sense of their own poetic style. In this activity, we’ll think about Carl Phillips’s poetic style, as well as our own styles as writers.

Part I

Read “[As from a Quiver of Arrows](#),” “[Neon](#),” and “[If a Wilderness](#)”. As you read, make note of elements of style that seem consistent to you across all three poems. No observation is too small. How do the sentences work? What about punctuation? Titles? What else?

When you’ve finished reading, discuss these poems in a small group. Compare and contrast the observations you made across these poems. Be sure to point to specific examples in the poems themselves to bolster your claim.

When you’re finished, put together a list of at least six stylistic qualities your group recognizes in the poetry of Carl Phillips.

Part II

As a whole class, share and discuss the stylistic observations you made about these poems. Consider how these qualities might begin to add up to a poetic style. How might you describe that style? Can you think of any other writers or artists who share similar styles?

Part III

Back in your small groups, exchange a set of 2-3 of your own poems. Each writer should get a turn being the focus of attention. What do you see as core elements of style in your partners’ poems? Make a list of agreed upon stylistic qualities for each person just as you did for the poems of Carl Phillips. Try not to lead the discussion of your own poems. Sit back and listen to what readers notice about your work.

Part IV

Reflect on your partners’ thoughts about your poetic style. Were you surprised by any of the observations they made regarding your work? Are there certain habits you have as a writer that you’re aware of? How would you describe your style to others? Which other writers or artists do you share some stylistic relationship with? Are there challenges you might envision giving yourself to stretch your poetic style?