

# 1) Read Poem and Annotate For Guiding Question: Why is the poem constructed in one long sentence with the repetition of “perhaps” + “in all likelihood” + “most likely”? What is the poet sorting out here?

## A Small Needful Fact

By Ross Gay (b. 1974)

Is that Eric Garner worked  
for some time for the Parks and Rec.  
Horticultural Department, which means,  
perhaps, that with his very large hands,  
perhaps, in all likelihood, 5  
he put gently into the earth  
some plants which, most likely,  
some of them, in all likelihood,  
continue to grow, continue  
to do what such plants do, like house 10  
and feed small and necessary creatures,  
like being pleasant to touch and smell,  
like converting sunlight  
into food, like making it easier  
for us to breathe. 15

\*On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner died in Staten Island, New York City, after Daniel Pantaleo, a New York City Police officer, put him in a chokehold while arresting him. Garner, who repeated "I can't breathe" eleven times while lying face-down on the sidewalk, lost consciousness and died on the scene. The confrontation was captured on video and seen around the world, stirring public protests and rallies against police brutality.

## **2) In Partners/Free-Write**

- Opportunities to Warm Call: What did you talk about? Write about?
- Opportunities to Warm Up All Voices

**3) Class Wide Discussion with Layered Questions: I usually take notes on board as students talk—7th grade I used a tennis ball, 9th and 11th, they simply jump in...**

Opportunities to Layer in Follow-Up Questions:

- What do you make of the closing line “making it easier for us to breathe”?
- What imagery stands out to us and why?
- Why is this poem titled “A Small Needful Fact”?

#### 4) Take it personal or take it real world:

A) **Personal:** What is “A Small Needful Fact” about you?

Try using the sentence starter: A Small Needful Fact is that....

Share Out: “As the spirit moves you, but the spirit will move all of you.”

B) **Real World:** Journalist Nick Wing explored how the media treats black victims vs. white suspects exposing a concerning media bias. **See if you can notice it as I scroll through the titles of these articles he assembled, and consider why this poem is titled “A Small Needful Fact” and why Ross Gay felt compelled to write it.**

## **Ala. suspect brilliant, but social misfit**

**Montgomery's latest homicide victim had history of narcotics abuse, tangles with the law**

**Son in Staten Island murders was brilliant, athletic -- but his demons were the death of parents**

**Santa Barbara shooting: Suspect was 'soft-spoken, polite, a gentleman', ex-principal says**

**Straight-A student plots to bomb high school**

**Shooting victim had many run-ins with law**

**Trayvon Martin was suspended three times from school**

**Oregon school shooting suspect fascinated with guns but was a devoted Mormon, his friends say**

**Police: Slain Lakeland Teen Had Been Shot Before; Death Possibly Drug-Related**

## **5) “So What?” Closing Reflections:**

If free-write earlier, turn and talk. If turn and talk, then free-write and share out.

What do you make of these headlines and why is Gay compelled to write this poem about Eric Garner?

## Summary:

- Clear Goals and Culture Norms around Discussion
- Low-Lift Opportunity in Check-In
- Chances for Warm-Up and Collective Brainstorming
- Class Discussion
- Personal & Real World Connection: Opportunity to bring immediacy, urgency, and accessibility to lesson
- Follow-Up with students on their performance