

Before reading the following poems, I will give you some background information and then ask you to answer some questions **before** reading the poem. This can be done on your own or in a small groups in or outside the classroom.

There is a reference in the poem to The National Endowment of the Arts of Complacency. This is a sarcastic and critical comment. There is indeed a government sponsored agency which supports, through grants, all forms of the arts (music, art exhibits, film, etc.) Over the years, there has been criticism from some artists and citizens that the Endowment has sponsored some art exhibits which are “pornographic” in nature, according the critics. In some incidents, the Endowment has bowed to criticism and has not financially supported controversial exhibits. Hence the term *complacency* in the poem..

Read the following excerpt from the Declaration of Independence this will help you understand one of major themes of the poem:

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while

evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

Now answer these questions:

1. How did the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on 9/11/02 impact your life personally?
2. What does it mean to be a “Third World Country?”

NOW READ THE POEM:

SPEAK OUT

by Lawrence Ferlinghetti

And a vast paranoia sweeps across the land
And America turns the attack on its Twin Towers
Into the beginning of the Third World War
The war with the Third World

And the terrorists in Washington
Are shipping out the young men
To the killing fields again

And no one speaks

And they are rousting out
All the ones with turbans
And they are flushing out

All the strange immigrants

And they are shipping all the young men
To the killing fields again

And no one speaks

And when they come to round up
All the great writers and poets and painters
The National Endowment of the Arts of Complacency
Will not speak

While the young men
Will be killing all the young men
In the killing fields again

So now is the time for you to speak
All you lovers of liberty
All you lovers of the pursuit of happiness
All you lovers and sleepers
Deep in your private dream
Now is the time for you to speak
O silent majority
Before they come for you!

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. Do you believe there was a connection with our country's attack on Iraq with the acts of terrorism committed on 9/11?
2. Did you know of anyone who went to fight in Iraq? Did anyone you know lose their life?
3. What is one of the major themes of the poem? You will find the answer in stanza 3? Did you know of people who were among those described in this stanza?
4. Another theme is in the title and in the text: Please explain what the poet's message is? Do you agree? You may want to go back to the web site to the Declaration of Independence.
5. Can you explain the last two lines and their significance?

6. Can you explain the last two lines? The following quote from a pastor who fought against the Nazis will help:

They came for the Communists, and I didn't object - For I wasn't a Communist;
They came for the Socialists, and I didn't object - For I wasn't a Socialist;
They came for the labor leaders, and I didn't object - For I wasn't a labor leader;
They came for the Jews, and I didn't object - For I wasn't a Jew;
Then they came for me - And there was no one left to object.

- Martin Niemoller, German Protestant Pastor, 1892-1984