Key Discussion Points:

1. Poetry as a Political Platform
2. Diction: African American Vernacular Language
3. The Role of Repetition & Rhythm in Protest Poetry
4. The Blues Aesthetic as a Component of Black Art
5. History of the Body & Historical Trauma
6. Double Minority Viewpoint
7. Language as Social Revolution
8. Zora Neale Hurston’s Influence

Poet Spotlight: June Jordan:

1. Born in Harlem in 1936 to Jamaican immigrants; working class family- her father was a mail man and her mother was a nurse. Came from a strict background- father loved literature; but he was often abusive physically and verbally. She grew up in Brooklyn.
2. She attended Barnard College, but dropped out and married Michael Meyer in 1955. Briefly followed him to the University of Chicago, but ended up returning to New York.
3. In 1958 she gave birth to their son. She raised the boy and the couple formally divorced in 1965. The year before was the start of the Harlem Race Riots.
4. Jordan began to write poetry to dissipate the hatred she had for white people at the time.
5. She taught at many universities throughout the next decade ending up at Berkeley.
6. She identified as bisexual in her writing. She was known as a “Poet of the People.” She is categorized as a feminist African American LGBTQ writer and poet.
7. She passed away from breast cancer in Berkeley in 2002.

Recurrent Techniques in Her Poetry:

1. Blends the personal and the political in a sort of oscillation.
2. Uses the personal body to understand the collective body.
3. Integrates the elements of daily life- news titles, current events, household doings.
4. Writes the female Black experience as one component of the universal experience.
5. Uses repetition like jazz- a call and response platform.
6. Often circles back in her poetry to demonstrate cyclical natures.
7. Utilizes personal experience as a gateway into larger social issues.
8. Through her poetry, she offers an alternative to violence (the epitome of hate) and sex (the epitome of love). She shows that poetic form is also reproductive like violence (historical trauma) and sex (physical unity).

**The Blues Aesthetic:**

1. **The Blues Aesthetic:** “arises as a late nineteenth-century / early twentieth-century secular thrust of the African-American musical culture, whose oldest musical and lyrical heritage was Africa but whose changing contemporary expression summed up their lives and history in the West.” Though it can be viewed as separate from the Black Aesthetic, it is “one aspect of the overall African-American aesthetic” (Baraka, p. 101).

**“Poem about Police Violence”**

1. Does the explicit recognition of racial identity in one category determine the racial identity of the other? What if the cop is Black? What if the cop is a woman? Is this a critique of corrupt racial authority or of corrupt authority in general? Explain your answer.
2. What is the “12th House of the Cosmos?” Why would an astrological association to Pisces (house of the subconscious) be significant in this poem?
3. What role does the repetition of “again” serve in the poem?
4. Why are the repeated terms “baby” and “bestial” symbolic or significant? Remember to use word-specific analysis. (Baby = infant, innocent, lover, inferior | Bestial = animal-like, primal, savage, morally inferior).
5. How is juxtaposition inherent in the pairing of “accident” and “rate?”
6. What does the repetition of the postulations at the beginning and end of the poem suggest about the nature or prospective nature of police violence?
7. Is this poem relevant in society today? In what ways was her 1974 poem the foundation for more contemporary expressions protesting police violence? (For example, Beyoncé’s “Formation”)

**“Sketching in the Transcendental”**

8. How does the use of “long” by “long,” “running” by “road,” and “wind” by “white” (the almost alliteration) set the intonation of the poem?
9. Reference “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” by Langston Hughes (1921). How is this poem in dialogue with the work and expressions in that poem?
10. Why is the spirit impacted differently by a truck versus a river? What does a truck symbolize? What does a river symbolize?
11. How did Zora Neale Hurston inspire a Blues Aesthetic? (Think about when we read “Sweat” or Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937).) In what ways does Jordan continue the Hurston style in her poetry?
12. How is the concept of “plain crazy” juxtaposed with “transcendental” in the title? (Think about the transcendentalist movement and their quest as poets.)
13. Investigate the history behind “hound dog.” Willie Mae Thornton sang the song before Elvis capitalized it. Consider the line, “They said if you treat her like a dog / well that’ll be pretty good
enough.” What do you make of this? What is this alluding to in history? In literary accounts of abuse in the Black community (inner and outer racial)?

14. How does the reference to Sojourner without including her last name leave a collective space for multiple interpretations?

15. How does this poem situate itself with contemporary discourse on the resilient Black woman?

16. What is the theme in this poem?

“Alla Tha’s All Right, but”

17. Map the rhyme scheme in this poem. How does she sample rhyme schemes and subvert the scheme at the end of the poem? Why is this significant?

18. The rhyme scheme somewhat carries the reader through the poem. What will carry the poet? Or rather, what carries the poet through a poem?

“Poem about My Rights”

19. Looking at the following lines, consider how the personal body can transform into a collective body. Explain your answer thoroughly.

“I am the history of rape / I am the history of rejection of who I am / I am the history of the terrorized incarceration of my self / I am the history of battery assault and limitless / armies against whatever I want to do with my mind / and my body and my soul.”

20. How is this line representative of the Blues Aesthetic? “My name is my own my own my own.”

Other Poems:

1. “Free Flight”
2. “En Passant”
3. “Grand Army Plaza”
4. “From Sea to Shining Sea”
5. “Des Moines Iowa Rap”