I still would say that Kerouac was one of the most beautiful composers of vowels and consonants, one of the most mindfully conscious writers dealing with sounds. He was an athletic prose writer and he was tremendously honest. He gave himself to his art and I think he was one of the great prose writers in America. Perhaps in America, itself, the single greatest in the twentieth century.

-Allen Ginsberg, 1978

Read the selections from *On the Road*. As you read, consider the following guiding questions:

1. It can be argued that Ginsberg knew Kerouac better than any other person. Read chapters one and two of *On the Road* and identify areas you feel best exemplify the above description.
2. Find a passage that you feel has a strong jazz influence and read it out loud. How does sound influence his writing?
3. Look for sections where the energy or the pace of the writing seems to suddenly speed up or slow down.
4. Find what you consider to be one or two of his most vivid descriptions of a person or a place or an idea in the book. Why does it seem so vivid to you?

Now reflect on the reading, and answer the questions that follow:

1. What does Kerouac’s writing tell you about his life? Give specific examples.

2. On page 1, Kerouac mentions, “Always dreamed of going West, but never took off.” After actually heading off to Denver, do you think Sal’s experiences have been positive or negative so far? How might the reader of his time have interpreted the story differently? What images stand out to you from the travels?
Now, evaluate the writing of Jack Kerouac, and the life he presented to 1950s Americans. Choose one of the following prompts for a written response:

1. Truman Capote famously said of Kerouac’s prodigious output: “That’s not writing, it’s typing.” Contrast that statement with the glowing New York Times review. What do they say about the cultural landscape of 1950s America? How did On the Road predict the counterculture that it portrayed?

2. In what ways did both the style and content of On the Road differ from works of other 20th Century authors like Capote, Orwell, Bradbury, and Steinbeck? In what ways were they similar?

3. Imagine a cultural faction similar to the Beats emerging in 2014 America. What would they stand for? What would they be fighting against? Write a short story or poem in the style of the Beats – using modern events for context and content – to answer those two questions.