Along with various forms of the essay and creative nonfiction, other literary artifacts—including poetry and the drama—offer rich insights into American culture. Here are a few examples.

### Money

*Money is a kind of poetry.*

—Wallace Stevens

Money, the long green,  
cash, stash, rhino, jack  
or just plain dough.

Chock it up, fork it over,  
shell it out. Watch it  
burn holes through pockets.

To be made of it! To have it  
to burn! Greenbacks, double eagles,  
megabucks and Ginnie Maes.

It greases the palm, feathers a nest,  
holds heads above water,  
makes both ends meet.

Money breeds money.  
Gathering interest, compounding daily.  
Always in circulation.

Money. You don’t know where it’s been,  
but you put it where your mouth is.  
And it talks.


### Barbie Doll

This girlchild was born as usual  
and presented dolls that did pee-pee  
and miniature GE stoves and irons  
and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.  
Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said: 5

You have a great big nose and fat legs.

She was healthy, tested intelligent,  
possessed strong arms and back,  
abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.  
She went to and fro apologizing. 10

Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.
She was advised to play coy,
exhorted to come on hearty,
exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.
Her good nature wore out
like a fan belt.
So she cut off her nose and her legs
and offered them up.

In the casket displayed on satin she lay
with the undertaker’s cosmetics painted on,
a turned-up putty nose,
dressed in a pink and white nightie.
Doesn’t she look pretty? everyone said.
Consummation at last.
To every woman a happy ending.

—Marge Piercy, 1971

Wishes for Sons

i wish them cramps.
i wish them a strange town
and the last tampon.
i wish them no 7-11.

i wish them one week early
and wearing a white skirt.
i wish them one week late.

later i wish them hot flashes
and clots like you
wouldn’t believe. let the
flashes come when they
meet someone special.
let the clots come
when they want to.

let them think they have accepted
arrogance in the universe.
then bring them to gynecologists
not unlike themselves.

—Lucille Clifton, 1990
Green Chile

I prefer red chile over my eggs
and potatoes for breakfast.
Red chile *ristras* decorate my door,
dry on my roof, and hang from eaves.
They lend open-air vegetable stands
historical grandeur, and gently swing
with an air of festive welcome.
I can hear them talking in the wind,
haggard, yellowing, crisp, rasping
tongues of old men, licking the breeze.

But grandmother loves green chile.
When I visit her,
she holds the green chile pepper
in her wrinkled hands.
Ah, voluptuous, masculine,
an air of authority and youth simmers
from its swan-neck stem, tapering to a flowery
collar, fermenting resinous spice.
A well-dressed gentleman at the door
my grandmother takes sensuously in her hand,
rubbing its firm glossed sides,
caressing the oily rubbery serpent,
with mouth-watering fulfillment,
fondling its curves with gentle fingers.
Its bearing magnificent and taut
as flanks of a tiger in mid-leap,
she thrusts her blade into
and cuts it open, with lust
on her hot mouth, sweating over the stove,
bendanna round her forehead,
mysterious passion on her face
as she serves me green chile con carne
between soft warm leaves of corn tortillas,
with beans and rice—her sacrifice
to her little prince.
I slurp from my plate
with last bit of tortilla, my mouth burns
and I hiss an drink a tall glass of cold water.

All over New Mexico, sunburned men and women
drive rickety trucks stuffed with gunny-sacks
of green chile, from Belen, Veguita, Willard, Estancia,
San Antonio y Socorro, from fields
to roadside stands, you see them roasting green chile
in screen-sided homemade barrels, and for a dollar a bag,
we relive this old, beautiful ritual again and again.