

Amplifying Cultural Voice and Writing for the Creative Self

Objectives

By the end of this program students will learn to write truthfully, realistically, and free of rigid craft definitions in order to work toward reflection on their world and become a transformer and liberator of their people. This workshop revolves around the need for students of diverse cultural backgrounds to read diverse poets and artists from Southern California to input in their minds that these artists don't exist as myths but rather as actual cultivators of similar images and situations as the students themselves.

Key Vocabulary and Background

This approach comes from the understanding that in the creation of our nation the identity of the individual culture of the student is lost usually at a young age in an attempt to acculturate to the U.S. American image. It is important to frame conversations around identity at a young age when we have the young potential and capability to learn at a higher rate and remember more easily who we are. The importance in including local authors of color is to show students that we are able to create, win awards, and have a voice that is essential and authentic to our family and people. These understandings come from studies of nationalism as it relates to the development of culture and the understanding of our own personal histories.

Materials

Copies of the attached poems "Canada" by Juan Felipe Herrera, "How the Milky Way was Made" by Natalie Diaz, "Girl with Ink and Horseshoes" by Vickie Vertiz, and the Second Verse of "Momma" by Kendrick Lamar. Attached writing prompts, paper, pencil, whiteboard, and markers.

Lesson

1. (5 min) Begin with introductions, start with ice breaker: each student shares their Name, Home, and an Ancestor. Purpose is to have students begin thinking on themselves and their own history.
2. (3 min) Open up discussion of what students think of when they think of poetry. Looking for examples of poets, rhyming, written or unwritten.
3. (7 min) Read Vickie Vertiz bio & poem aloud to class. When reading aloud we have to be expressive. Trying to get students to latch onto rhyming patterns here, focusing on the ways the poem rhymes in different lines or words in the same line. After reading begin discussion and wordbank of things noticed in the poem. If the students aren't responding, ask questions: What does the poem have to do with the painting? What is this poem about? Did this poem grab your attention, why or why not?
4. (7 min) Read Kendrick Lamar bio & poem aloud in class. Really must become familiar with the emphasis in the actual song. Emphasize the 'I know...' and take pauses to allow students to reflect. After reading begin a discussion and wordbank of things noticed in the poem. If the students aren't responding ask questions: What's being repeated throughout the verse? Does Kendrick actually know all these things? Are there any images in this poem?

5. (7 min) Read Juan Felipe Herrera bio & poem aloud in class. Need to emphasize the accents and the intentional use of changing language. After reading begin a discussion and wordbank of things noticed in the poem. If the students aren't responding ask questions: What images do you remember? What colors were mentioned?
6. (7 min) Read Natalie Diaz bio & poem aloud in class. Here really take your time in telling this story, importance is the story rather than any sort of rhyming or poetic devices. After reading begin a discussion and wordbank of things noticed in the poem. If the students aren't responding ask questions: What is being told in this story? What do you remember? Is this poem a dream or real-life?
7. (2 min) Briefly review word banks created and begin passing out the writing prompts. Go over what we will like for the students to write. Use one of the styles or bits of all four to write your own reflection.
8. (10 min) Allow time for free write and sharing each other's work. If there is still time available and no one wants to share then share own work or songs and poems that can be recited from memory. Keeping in mind the purpose of creating and sharing work that reflects personal experiences and histories.

Girl with Ink and Horseshoes

After fallin' by Cruz Ortiz

Palm Frond with its Throat Cut (2017)

BY VICKIE VÉRTIZ

This locket is a rocket start
Ink ears and here I go, coming to get you
Not get through, but only if you want to

I don't like fallin'
I like maulin'

You still live down the alley?
You dig these nostrils? My sharp shoulders?
I have maudlin songs for your mall job

Come with me, prickly pear
Where I always was, when you're bored
The callejones take me right to you

By all means call me, but you might owe me
What I have is luck
Band shirts and concert tickets
For a singer who plays one song, then leaves
The stage in a huff
Blame it on the weenies

I'm your spring, girl
I love you, my first cactus star map
Chicano
Let's jam
Away to other skies

I have vessel mileage
Exploding horseshoes
Squeaky brakes?
Nah
That's just how much I love you



Image taken from the exhibition catalog for
Phantom Sightings: Art After the
Movement, 2008, Los Angeles County
Museum of Art

Momma (2015)

To Pimp a Butterfly

BY KENDRICK LAMAR

[Verse 2]

I know everything
I know everything, know myself
I know morality, spirituality, good and bad health
I know fatality might haunt you
I know everything, I know Compton
I know street things, I know things that's conscious
I know everything, I know lawyers, advertisement and sponsors
I know wisdom, I know bad religion, I know good karma
I know everything, I know history
I know the universe works mentally
I know the perks of messing around isn't meant for me
I know everything, I know cars, clothes, those, and money
I know loyalty, I know respect, I know those that's ornery
I know everything, the highs, the lows, the groupies, the junkies
I know if I'm generous at heart, I don't need recognition
The way I'm rewarded, well, that's God's decision
I know you know that line's for Compton School District
Just give it to the kids, don't gossip 'bout how it was distributed
I know how people work
I know the price of life, I'm knowin' how much it's worth
I know what I know and I know it well not to ever forget
Until I realized I didn't know really know it
The day I came home

Canadá in English
Crash Boom Love (2003)
BY JUAN FELIPE HERRERA

Mrs. Tinko says Canada.

She says Ontario. *Canadá* – I whisper in Spanish.

Canadá – to myself in the back row.

Next to Sammy

who inks a skull into his hand. Between

his thumb and his finger. I squint

at the chalkboard English. A greenish sea.

A tidal wave that floods me

with strange curled words. Can't read.

I say *Canadá*. My mouth opens as if

to bite a stolen apple. Then my face hardens again.

I want to raise my hand. My arm is an iron plank.

Fingers are rivets. My blood is electric.

I whisper *Canadá*.

Only to myself. In Spanish.

When no one is watching.

When no one is listening. I write *Canadá*

on the inside of my hand. Look up

to the tidal wave, you gotta look up, César,

I talk to myself like Mama Lucy.

Is Denver by *Canadá*?

When I left México as a kid, alone, Papi used to say,

I jumped off the train in El Norte, in Denver.

Learned English in the snow. Then he'd laugh.

"A penny for each word." He said.

"That's how I learned."

How do you say lapis in English?

Pencil. Ah, pencil.

How do you say leche in English?

Milk. Ah, milk.

How about cielo?

Sky. Ah, sky.

Three words for three pennies.

I look at the watery map

by the limp flag. Wonder

about my father. His other family. Look

without words in English. Squint without

words in Spanish.

Sammy elbows me and laughs

at my right hand. *Canadá* is for sissies, César.

Skulls – are for us.

How the Milky Way Was Made
When My Brother Was an Aztec (2012)
BY NATALIE DIAZ

My river was once unseparated. Was Colorado. Red-
fast flood. Able to take

anything it could wet—in a wild rush—

all the way to Mexico.

Now it is shattered by fifteen dams

over one-thousand four-hundred and fifty miles,

pipes and pumps filling

swimming pools and sprinklers

in Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

To save our fish, we lifted them from our skeletoned
river beds,

loosed them in our heavens, set them aster —

‘Achii ‘ahan, Mojave salmon,

Colorado pikeminnow—

Up there they glide, gilled with stars.

You see them now—

god-large, gold-green sides,

moon-white belly and breast—

making their great speeded way across the darkest
hours,

rippling the sapphired sky-water into a galaxy road.

The blurred wake they drag as they make their path

through the night sky is called

‘Achii ‘ahan nyuunye—

our words for *Milky Way*.

Coyote too is up there, crouched in the moon,

after his failed attempt to leap it, fishing net wet

and empty, slung over his back—

a prisoner blue and dreaming

of unzipping the salmon’s silked skins with his teeth.

O, the weakness of any mouth

as it gives itself away to the universe

of a sweet-milk body.

Just as my own mouth is dreamed to thirst

the long desire-ways, the hundred-thousand light
year roads

of your throat and thighs.

Writing Prompts

You will choose one of the four poems we read and talked about to base a free write on, using the form or poetic devices in the poem as a guide to write poetry or prose about yourself. Keep in mind our introductions, remembering your **name**, **home**, and **ancestors** for inspiration to write.

Canada by Juan Felipe Herrera

- In your piece, use solid imagery and colors
 - Examples from the poem: Green, Canada, apple, electric, skulls, wave

How the Milky Way was Made by Natalie Diaz

- In your piece, tell us a story only you or your people know
 - Example from the poem: “My river was once unseparated. Was Colorado... our words for *Milky Way*”

Momma by Kendrick Lamar

- In your piece, use the repetition of a phrase
 - Example from the lyrics: “I know... I know... I know...”

Girl with Ink and Horseshoes by Vickie Vertiz

- In your piece, stick to a rhyme scheme either in line or from line to line
 - Examples from the poem: “This locket is a rocket start... I don’t like fallin’/I like maulin”