
Poetry in the Classroom

Dialogue



A Publication of the San Diego Area Writing Project

Spring 2018

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“The more students read good poetry, the more they will want to write good poetry. And the more you allow them to mess around in the cupboards and the fridge, spilling orange marmalade on the counter and taking only one bite from the middle of the cake, the more they will feel comfortable with their perfect batches and their mishaps.”

Poetry Inside Out

Susan Minnicks, p. 4

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Get Lit-Words Ignite

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“The aim of the curriculum is to develop the voice of youth poets by using poetry to increase literacy, empower youth, and inspire communities. Get Lit is different from any other course, because students get to choose. They choose the poems they are drawn to, the topics and themes they want to write about, and how to perform their poetry. They choose how to make poetry come alive.”

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Let the Blasphemy Be Spoken: Encouraging Student Voice, Rebellion, and Community in the Classroom Through Spoken Word Poetry

Karla Cordero, p. 11

“In the transition from student to educator, I took an oath to carry spoken word into the classroom to create a space for students whose bodies, too, may have been in a deep sleep under the authoritative systems of power. I found that spoken word not only gave students a tongue of their own to transgress and recognize the various oppressions that had been pressed upon their lives, but it also created a family who valued their stories.”

Holding Space

Darren R. Samakosky, p. 15

“Holding space is what I've come to call this medium I facilitate daily. It is a classroom where students lead, share, and support authentic growth—where being open and vulnerable is seen as a strength, and courage and congregation is genuinely holy.”

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“We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race.”

—Dead Poets Society

Inside this issue, SDAWP Fellows share their experiences with using poetry as a core element of their pedagogy. Educators examine how teaching poetry has improved the atmosphere of their classrooms and has allowed students—who often struggle to find their voice under the weight of curriculum and societal injustices—to develop autonomy in their writing. For inspiration, teaching resources, and local spoken word performances, check out these great organizations:

Poetry Out Loud “helps students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about literary history and contemporary life [through poetry].”

<http://www.poetryoutloud.org/teaching-resources>

So We Say All's “mission is to create opportunities for individuals to tell their stories, and tell them better, through three core priorities: publishing, performance, and education.”

<http://www.sosayweallonline.com/>

National Writing Project's NWP Radio During National Poetry Month in April, NWP Radio hosted a mini-series interviewing “Writers Council members who will talk with us about their poetry, their writing, their process, and more.”
<https://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/events/1077>

In the Kitchen of a Poem

Emily Vizzo, SDAWP 2015

I memorized my first poem in second grade. When I close my eyes, I can still see how the poem (I think it was called, “The Sound of Water”) displayed on the page as a diagonal series of one-word, mostly onomatopoeic lines that culminated in the words “ice, snow.” It began with the word, “rain.” Everything else was an ecstatic scumble of rapid, bouncy sound that—once I’d memorized it—seemed like I was pulling from my own body like a bright, blue, beaded string of rain. I was so proud of myself, and so excited by the language.

But writing a poem doesn’t always feel exciting. It can feel scary, or dull, or perfunctory, or rushed. And I

don’t think there is a solution to that, really, or at least one magic strategy to render the writing of poetry in the classroom predictably fun and easy.

And I think that’s part of it, to think of poetry as something that is not predictably fun and easy. I like to think of it as the kitchen. In the kitchen, sometimes what we want is lazy and leftover—a bite of yesterday’s pizza and what’s left of the milk. Sometimes we want something fresh and brisk, like a just-squeezed glass of juice. Sometimes we want what is comfortable, and we make some casserole our grandmother used to make. And sometimes being in the kitchen is sensual and curious. We crush macadamia nuts, we run a zucchini through a cutting spiral, we pour a scary pile of raw mussels into a big pan and hope for magic.

I think the best way to talk about poems with our students is through this lens. The more students read good poetry, the more they will want to write good poetry. And the more you allow them to mess around in the cupboards and the fridge, spilling orange marmalade on the counter and taking only one bite from the middle of the cake, the more they will feel comfortable with their perfect batches and their mishaps.

Prose Poems: They’re a Thing

I love to tell my students of all ages, “It’s a poem if you say it’s a poem.” For example, see that third paragraph I just wrote? The one that begins, “And I think that’s part of it?” Well, given the imagery and the playful language, and its undertones of indecision and hope, I’ve just decided that it’s a prose poem. Minus the first two sentences. I rec-

ommend Charles Simic’s wonderful collection, *The World Doesn’t End*, for some fantastic prose poems.

Break It Up, Pull It Apart, Add a Dose of Space

The terrific thing about rich, image-laden prose and prose poetry is that they can begin to scratch and beg at the kitchen door for line breaks and enjambment—that interesting thing that happens when we break a line mid-sentence, creating surprise for the reader. I could take my prose poem and begin to slice and dice it, trying out places where the poem wants to break. When the knife hovers over that homemade peach pie, where do you drop it? Well, how big a slice do you want? Do you want to include that juicy dangly bit on the left, or leave it for the next person? And are you going to scrape the dark sugar from the pie piece footmark on the tin? You tell me! Here I am, playing with line breaks in my prose poem:

In the kitchen, sometimes what we want is lazy and leftover—a bite of yesterday’s pizza and what’s left of the milk. Sometimes we want something fresh and brisk, like a just-squeezed glass of juice. Sometimes we want what is comfortable, and we make some casserole our grandmother used to make. And sometimes being in the kitchen is sensual and curious. We crush macadamia nuts, we run a zucchini through a cutting spiral, we pour a scary pile of raw mussels into a big pan and hope for magic.

Truly, I could slice that pie a dozen different ways. Give your classroom a prose poem in paragraph form, and talk about lineation, and let them cut their line breaks. Best of all, ask them to put into words why they made the call they did.

In the Kitchen with Family: The Photos on the Wall

I recently had the pleasure of leading a poetry workshop in a Title I elementary classroom where every student was a native Spanish or Mixtec speaker. We wrote poems using a strategy that provided numerous vocabulary and structural supports

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for poem composition.

Together we created three-word image banks, each related to nature: “Strong,” “Beautiful,” and “Smart.” Working with one word bank at a time, we listed images from nature that fit into each category. Students could provide words in either Spanish or English. For example, “a hunting coyote” might go under the “Smart” word bank while “a rushing river” might go under the “Beautiful” category.

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lovely to have an
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If students provided a one-word image (for example, “tree”) we worked together as a class to develop the image by adding an adjective or two. In this way, “tree” might become “tall oak tree” and be listed under the “Strong” category.

After we generated three full lists of nature-based images, we created a fourth word bank—this one for “Family Members.” Again, students brainstormed words in both English and Spanish, so that “abuela” and “grandmother” could co-exist on the same list.

We wrote a class poem first, creating metaphor lines using our word banks. Examples might be “My grandmother is a rushing river” or “Mi hermana is a tall oak tree.” Because the images are inherently positive, there was not much risk of creating an inadvertently disrespectful line. Still, we talked about making sure that our family members would appreciate the positive comparisons.

Afterward, students composed their own individual poems. Some students added brand-new images or veered from the original poem structure with their own creative departures. Others preferred to work with the class-generated images, assisted with the provided vocabulary and structure. Students selected their own poem title and concluded the poem with a line that began with the sentence starter, “Together, my family is” and then their favorite nature image. We shared them on the document camera, and students who did not care to share their entire poem shared their Golden Line. The classroom teacher divulged that one of the proudest students was one of her struggling students with an extensive IEP.

Recipes: Poetry by the Numbers and “Mise en Page”

Last spring I drove from San Diego to Ontario to attend a two-day weekend conference. I pulled over to talk with the mother of one of my students. She was concerned about an upcoming poetry unit because her son was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and she felt that decoding emotional themes and subtexts of classic poetry would prove extremely difficult for him. Because he loves math and feels comfortable with numbers, we talked about how the relative short length of many poems makes them ideal for analyzing text from an objective perspective, relying on quantifiable data to better understand the poem’s inner workings.

You can try this in your classroom, too. Ask students to tackle a poem from a strictly numerical POV and see what interesting insights you can make as a class. You know, some people cook from scratch and some people cook with recipes!

How many lines are in the poem? How many words? How many 1-syllable words? How many 3-syllable words? How many different (non-repeating) words? How many words that start the same letter (alliteration?) How many words long is the

shortest line? How many words long is the longest line? How many commas? How many verbs? How many adjectives? Does the poet use the word “I?” Challenge students to come up with as many ways as possible to quantify the poem.

This can lead to interesting conversations about the connections between form and content. For example, a poet relying on mainly 1-syllable words is stating things in plain, simple terms. (Why would they do that?) A poet who uses only one comma in the whole poem is relying on simple sentence structures. (Why would they do that?) What if all of the lines are about the same length except for one line? (Why would they do that?) This can allow students to engage deeply with the poem on a linguistic level first, so that they gain confidence with the text, before moving into subtler concepts like metaphor or image.

Mise en page, or layout, is another way to tackle poems from an objective point of view. Kind of like plating something. Eating gingerbread from a paper plate, piping hot from the microwave, is different from eating gingerbread in a china bowl, dripping with toffee hard sauce. Is the poem left-justified or right-justified? Or is it centered in the middle of the page? If it is centered in the middle of the page, does the beginning of the line begin in the same place? Or is it truly centered, so that the line beginnings stagger in-and-out? Is there a lot of white space on the page? (Why would they do that?) Does the layout look like a picture (a concrete poem)? Is the poem mostly square or rectangular, indicating that the lines are of similar length? Or does it move in-and-out, indicating a lot of variation in line length? (Why would they do that?)

The Kitchen is Where Love Happens

When I think about the most loving memories growing up in my house, I remember everyone hanging out in the kitchen. People always seemed to be coming and going, making

Poetry Inside Out

Susan Minnicks, SDAWP 1997

snacks, reheating something, brewing tea, swiping cookies, unpeeling a banana. And more: washing dishes, taking out the trash, hugging goodbye, kissing hello. And more: a real place, where things go bad in the fridge, and disagreements happen, and you come home crying from a bad day and someone hands you a wad of paper towels and some cinnamon toast.

When I hear children and adults say they don't like poetry, I think of living room poetry. Places ruled by good behavior, company manners, and not knocking things over. I think it's perfectly lovely to have an attitude about poetry that involves laughter, and mistakes, and crazy experiments that turn out weird. One of my favorite poets says, "The good poems you write don't belong to you, they belong to the universe." And in your classroom, I think creating a community where the ovens are firing, the stove is snapping, the toaster double loaded, and the blender is going bonkers, flinging strawberry puree at the wall—well, goodness. I want to cook up poems in that test kitchen, and share them with my friends.

Recommended Poetry Books:

- *Fish*, by Aimee Nezhukumatathil (Lots of fun catalogue and narrator poems.)
- *Be Brave*, by JM Farkas (Black-out poetry of the classic *Beowulf*.)
- *Blue Hour*, by Carolyn Forché (Wonderful imagery and experiments with alphabets.)
- *The Man Suit*, by Zachary Schomburg (Some terrific imagery and prose poems.)
- *The Taxidermist's Cut*, by Rajiv Mojabir (Really interesting misen page decisions.)
- *50 American Plays* (Poems), by Matthew and Michael Dickman (These are collaborative, which is cool, and the poems are written as short plays.)



Translating poetry feels like falling in love. Truly. You want to walk away—but can't. Words get their tender hooks into you and just won't let go. But then...something amazing falls from the sky, and—like sudden love—the world seems different. And it gets even better from there.

**Translating poetry
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love. Truly. You want
to walk away—but
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tender hooks into you
and just won't let go.**

When I was asked, back in 2012, if I'd attend a weekend training through San Diego Area Writing Project/UCSD for Poetry Inside Out (PIO), a program through the Bay Area's Center for the Art of Translation, I thought the idea so crazy I almost ignored it. Many people don't simply volunteer to translate, much less translate poetry. My middle school kids, translating poetry from other world languages? Highly unlikely...

But after the first day of immersion (we translated a Bash haiku and a Spanish poem by Benedetti) and doing my homework that night (preparing a poem by Rilke), I was ready to bring this work back to my classroom. And not to the highly gifted kids I had for two double periods a day, but to the 7th graders who straggled in after lunch; kids who'd long lost hope for themselves in school. Bilingual kids, kids with

learning disabilities, and kids who struggled with adolescence and being ordinary in a world that sees right through them.

They thought I was crazy too, but as we talked about our everyday experiences with interpreting and translating for others, the room took on an aura that indicated students were beginning to listen with heart, sharing from a lifetime of experiences in a multi-lingual world. Suddenly their lives made sense, and their "funds of knowledge" held value.

As I sorted the students into quartets, groups that could function as teams of pairs, I saw what a social and linguistic jigsaw the room truly was. The students and I vowed to make it work, and as we began the actual translation process, they saw for themselves how much they did know—about language, yes, about other languages, yes, but even more so about life.

It takes experience to make sense of poetry, to speculate about the experiences of another human being, their struggles and heartbreak, their words and what arises between the words...and these kids had heart, and they had more than enough to do the work.

The PIO materials consist of a few pages: Some brief biographical information about the poet, an image or photograph, the poem in its original language, and a glossary of enough of the words student translators use like stepping stones across a river. Bit by bit, they'd start to construct the gist of the poem. We'd read it aloud three times if possible (or play an audio file) so they could hear patterns, rhyme schemes, and cognates so that they were working to make sense on many levels: the concrete "bottom up" as well as the abstract/thematic "top down."

They'd co-construct theories, in partnerships, about what they'd think the poem was most likely about. These hypotheses would be open to revision, depending on the rest of the poem, chunk by chunk, and what the translators' understandings brought to the work. After the pairs shared their preliminary translation with their partner pair, the quartet, or "translation circle" then negotiated a final version. This then became deeply aesthetic work, as they crafted—again on multiple cognitive and linguistic levels, as well as the oral and interpersonal—their version, a translation which they could own and defend.

As my students made headway in this process, I noticed they were coming to class early, not foot-dragging after lunch like they had all year.

As my students made headway in this process, I noticed they were coming to class early, not foot-dragging after lunch like they had all year. They volunteered to pass out the materials themselves, and to get to work quickly, as the support of routine—the "how we do it"—became a comfort and not a chore. The poems themselves, in Spanish, Chinese, French, Italian, German, and Portuguese, became new friends, and the students found their way into metaphor, suggesting nuanced meanings, and reading allegorically. They made sense of making sense and did it for themselves.

Comments like "it's the first time I've ever felt smart" or "before it

was all me, me, me; now it's we, we, we" sweetened the work, but I'd noticed a huge change in the classroom from early on. Suddenly, kids who'd tried to be invisible were the classroom experts: the boy who explained genders of inflected articles or the girl who could explain idioms in Spanish. Another young lady, whose parents spoke Portuguese at home, suddenly had access and social power in her group. A boy who'd been frequently suspended, but was under the wing of the football coach, asked to borrow dictionaries from the coach's Spanish classroom. Another boy, whose mom was from Martinique, brought us a poem from Aimé Césaire, which students unlocked as a condemnation of racism in the Caribbean.

This interwoven synergy of support, camaraderie, and authentic intellectual and aesthetic work only grew stronger as our work progressed. When I needed a native speaker to read a poem aloud, I'd ask the attendance clerk to use the language code data base to find a student who could come read a poem in Vietnamese, or Chinese, or Japanese. They'd come for a few minutes, read the poem three times, take a second look around the classroom and ask if this was a GATE or Seminar class... and ask me why their English teachers weren't doing this kind of work.

What I wasn't prepared for, and hadn't even thought about, were the test scores. Taken in the midst of a blistering heat wave after lunch, both their MAPS (online) and CST scores went up an average of 2.5 years. Students who'd previously scored Below Basic were Proficient, and as I collected data over the summer and the following fall I saw for myself what a deeply profound learning intervention this PIO work had been.

And what of love? Yes, they loved the work and began asking when they could write their own poems (Of course! Any time! Don't let me stop you!). We had a bilingual aide for a student with limited mobility, and he wrote a love poem in Spanish, which

they translated.

There was love (philia) for one another, as this collective constructivist work depended on valuing the skills, knowledge, and experience of one another. There was love (agape) for the WOW of a poem—a poem comparing romantic love to a bird singing from a nest in a tree, or for a Chinese poet who'd been imprisoned in solitary confinement for speaking out against the government. They knew what it could be like to be an unknown waterfall alone in a forest...much like searching for place to sit in the lunch court, or the courage to claim your identity.

And what of love? Yes, they loved the work and began asking when they could write their own poems (Of course! Any time! Don't let me stop you!).

My training was part of a Spencer Foundation research project, but the work continues. We held a one-day PIO training for twenty SDAWP Fellows, as well as four more trainings during spring break. And thus, the partnership continues! Teachers were enthusiastic and couldn't wait to bring the translation work back to their sites.

For further information, or if you're interested in being trained, please contact me: ssminnicks@gmail.com



Get Lit-Words Ignite

Kelly Thomas, SDAWP 2008

Nothing has transformed me and my classroom more than poetry. Throughout my years in education, poetry has become so much more than a mode of writing, it has become a blossom of opportunity, a chance to know myself and my students better, a method that teaches students how to observe, process, and appreciate the world around them. Poetry embodies emotion and emboldens experience. But most of all, poetry connects. It reminds us of our humanity.

Unfortunately, most teachers have heard the groans when introducing a poetry unit. Thanks to standardized testing, poetry has been all but ruined for teachers in love with the words of Whitman, Dickinson, and Hughes. Students are often terrified of poetry, thinking they need to narrow poetry down to one right answer. That they need to prescribe the poet's intention; that—like an equation—they can find the correct theme, solving the steps between the adjectives and abstract.

My students, too, have always groaned at the mere mention of poetry. That was until poetry changed forever. Enter Get Lit.

Get Lit-Words Ignite is a poetry curriculum that pairs classic poetry with spoken word. As a high school teacher, I was introduced to the Get Lit curriculum in 2011, and from that moment my pedagogy changed forever. I taught (and adored) the Get Lit curriculum for five years as a high school teacher before becoming their Manager of Education and Pedagogy in 2016. The impact it has had on me and my students is immeasurable.

Get Lit-Words Ignite has been, and continues to be, the most impactful curriculum I have taught in the classroom. It changed my students, transformed them, ignited them. It

re-inspired the disengaged, it gave voice to the quiet and the courageous, it gave students space to talk about things important to them—the things they needed to talk about. In short, it sparked a revolution within them. Now I have the privilege of teaching Get Lit to students and teachers in over 100 schools—and growing. It is a beautiful thing to watch talented youth poets be inspired by other poets to share their stories—to observe the process of great art in conversation with one another.

The aim of the curriculum is to develop the voice of youth poets by using poetry to increase literacy, empower youth, and inspire communities. Get Lit is different from any other course, because students get to choose. They choose the poems they are drawn to, the topics and themes they want to write about, and how to perform their poetry. They choose how to make poetry come alive.

A poem can unlock a force inside you that you never knew you had. Throughout the curriculum, students claim many poems, but the poems also claim them. These poems act as a mirror and reveal things about themselves and the world they may have not noticed before. These poems reflect their potential. The Get Lit-Words Ignite model uses classic poetry to inspire spoken word responses: each youth poet claims a classic poem that speaks to them. They memorize and perform the classic poem and then write a response poem. They perform both the classic and response poem as a singular piece of cohesive art, a dialogue that starts in the past and proceeds into the future.

Get Lit also engages in all modes of literacy: writing, reading, listening, and speaking. It creates community, encourages critical think-

ing, and gives students immediate peer-to-peer feedback. Every year, teachers end their unit with the Classic Slam—the largest classic poetry slam in the world where over 50 schools compete for the championship.

Recently, Get Lit developed a year-long curriculum approved as a “G” college-preparatory elective from the University of California, and we are currently working on offering it as a “B” English course for the 2018-2019 school year. We recognize the need to spread the power of this work across schools everywhere and have recently published a textbook, *Words Ignite: How to Explore, Write, and Perform Classic and Spoken Word Poetry*. And while it's great to hear what I—as an educator—think, I would like to share some thoughts by a former Get Lit Player (our touring poetry troupe) and student. Below is an excerpt from our book, *Get Lit Rising*, a book of essays, poems, and writing prompts that explore how “a band of Los Angeles teens is using poetry to battle stereotypes and take over the world.”

In his own words, Raul's journey of discovering poetry is below. (Michele Serros's classical poem and Raul's response to it are both on page 7.)

Raul's Story

School was tough, but I got through it by writing down how I felt about what I was going through. I then helped create a poetry club at my high school to allow fellow students the opportunity to express and share their own struggles and stories. If I had never let my emotions—let my story—out, I would never have reached out to others to help them do the very same thing. It is such a therapeutic action to write your woes onto paper. By bringing your fears and sadness into the physical world you allow yourself to transform those emotions into reasons to be brave, reasons to be fearless. Once I became comfortable with who I was, I was able to voice my thoughts and identity with

(Continued on page 10)

Classic Poem

Mi Problema

By Michele Serros

My sincerity isn't good enough.
Eyebrows raise
when I request:

“Hable más despacio, por favor.”
My skin is brown
just like theirs,
but now I'm unworthy of the color
'cause I don't speak Spanish
the way I should.
Then they laugh and talk about
mi problema
in the language I stumble over.

A white person gets
encouragement,
praise,
for weak attempts at a second
language.
“Maybe he wants to be brown
like us.”
and that is good.

My earnest attempts
make me look bad,
dumb.

“Perhaps she wanted to be white
like THEM.”
and that is bad.

I keep my flash cards hidden
a practice cassette tape
not labeled 'cause I am ashamed.
I “should know better”
they tell me
Spanish is in your blood.

I search for S.S.L. classes,
(Spanish as a Second Language)
in college catalogs
and practice with my grandma,
who gives me patience,
permission to learn.

And then one day,
I'll be a perfected “r” rolling
tilde using Spanish speaker.
A true Mexican at last!

Response Poem

By Raul Herrera

Can I speak about my culture?
Can I...I...I.
I speak Spanish but I don't have an accent
I am a full-blood Mexicano so cholo is the motto
If anyone is asking
I...I...I have a schizophrenic tongue
Escucha me mientras yo digo más verdad que los libros históricos Americanos
Hear me while I speak more truth than American history books
American history crooks. They are panicking. He is panicking. Hispanic.
Tell'em politicians how you took California
Tell'em politicians how you took Arizona
I...I...I urge you, Arizona, not to bring prejudice to the people who used to call to
that land home
Para la tierra usted robo es la tierra que ellos poseyeron
For the land you stole is the land they owned
I am finally learning to speak Spanish just for this poem
Because how are you supposed to move your people if you don't
speak their language?
Can I speak about my culture?
Can I...I...I say that the culture of all humanity is unity.
So why segregate when we're in this together?
Why alienate when it's a human endeavor?
Society is full of alienations, try to kick them out so back to your shapeships.
Back to being racist and back to the basics.
The truth is right in front of us then why don't we face it?
Beauty, wealth, power and color. It's all overrated.
I...I...Isolated and I...I so Latin and I...I'm so hated
The box that we're trapped in divides us in fractions
Take out your tongue let's speak some actions
Mi lengua es un pulmón que no ha ampliado todavía
My tongue is a lung that hasn't expanded yet
But if I continue to eat my culture, I will never run out of breath
We have brown skin resembling the dirt roads we've been
traveling looking for freedom.
But only found a freeway
At the end of freeways we sell dreams in crates while the
fruits of our labors are ravaged by greedy mouths.
I'm just waiting for the day they bite down on their tongues
and spit out truth.
Can I speak about my culture?
Can I...I...I don't consider Mexicans special but I do
consider us equal
So when you start attacking my people through the definition of legal
Expect a few angry Latinos. Ok.
I...I...I am tired of being discriminated against. But aren't we all?
So tell me I should get over it.
Like the borders, Like the Dream Act, like anti-immigration laws.
That's like telling Asians to get over the exploitation of
opium to build the railroads.
That's like telling African Americans to get over slavery.
Or Native Americans to get over America.
Por lo que no tenga miedo de recordar
So don't be afraid to remember.
Recuerde su cultura
Remember your culture
Before it forgets you
Can I speak about my culture?
Can I...I...I speak?

(Lane)

Poetry from Featured SDAWP Fellows

don't be afraid to speak

By Karla Cordero

if your language fractured its leg/
dislocated a shoulder/ nose bled a river to
lips/ if its teeth don't dance/ if the tongue
mops floors/ if the language vagabonds
spitting cuentos/ watch ten fingers be ten
people finding their place in the world/ or
room/ or palm/ if the language has a palm
made of roads/ travel them all/ if the knee
pop-locks too tired/ if the language
punctured the heart/ did you know a heart
continues to beat after separation from the
body/ as long as oxygen is supplied/ if the
language punctured the heart/ it will beat
for you

why the hand labors an alphabet

By Karla Cordero

i have sacrificed white teeth for kona coffee
& green tea—it is in the company of small
boiling oceans the hand welcomed by pen
labors to trick the tallest ghost to becoming
a blood-filled child learning to walk again.
i see honor in such resurrections—
to language light into every lazarus forgotten
by the world. we too know mothers &
grandmothers who've been deemed with
such curses—for their brown hands for their
absent claim to freedom. this is why the hand
labors— a vocation to whittle an alphabet
to sculpt buried faces that know
tragedy & triumph—turning a phantomed-myth
into a marching-limb legacy.

the scribble and the scripture

Darren R. Samakosky

Being a writer is a joy
Being a writer is a woe
Being a writer is stop and go
Sometimes the lines arrive fast
And other times they're slow

Some days are yes
and some days are no
But we always know
The days not over
no never until
We tag that sentence by the toe
And drag it through the slough
Turn the death of us
into something Beautiful -

love beget the ugly
and forget the fro
with the tone of our flow
I'm waiting for our next show

And I'm all stage fright
I'm in the spotlight
I'm in the dim light
I got words like punches
But I'd prefer not to fight

And I'm all taunt in this dance
I'm just trying to avoid my can't
I want you to hear my assault my rant
I'm afraid y'all keeping tabs
watching my moves
like Halloween candy counts
and these words are all
grab bag snacks
I'm all tricks with stanzas sick
I got tootsie pops for poetry
Got the licks and I'm wise to them
And me well it's taking
all of my composure
To remain aware and centered

I'm all mic drops
I'm three steps away from presenting
I'm all lyrical
I'm all exchange
I'm all pen with my piece
I'm all page rage

And because of this complexity
A writer's reality
daily will always be
Joy and woe
and play and crow

It's the duality that is the torture
But when you get the scribble
down in time
it may one day read like scripture

Philippe Buneau-Varillas had to go most of the way by canoe and wrote afterward of gliding past half-drowned trees the tops of which were black with millions of tarantulas

—David McCullough

By Emily Vizzo
(Originally appeared
in *The Collapsar*)

Plus d'une. The future has already happened, but "it may end later."

Filling all space, then banished. Physics has always been spooked.

A ghostly matter. The stage itself a givenness. A container called space.

Hauntology. There is no conspiracy at "work." The past is not closed.

The past is not present. Every being made killable. And not only human

ghosts. The ethical questions are surely not about innocence.

A play that knows more than its author. Or rather, the world is its memory.

There is no erasure finally. Time can't be fixed. To speak with ghosts, risk oneself.

Note: This is a found poem. The original text: Karen Barad's "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come."

He had an astonishing plan to create an inland sea in the Sahara by breaking through a low-lying ridge on Tunisia's Gulf of Gabès and flooding a depression the size of Spain

—David McCullough

By Emily Vizzo
(Originally appeared
in *The Collapsar*)

The world is becoming. Light is a wave, we know that. But a wave is also a disturbance, a togetherness of place.

Interference & togetherness together.

Light might not only be a wave but particulate: one thing in one place at one time.

The light & waves have momentum, you know that.

Boundaries do not sit still.

Note: This is a found poem. The original texts, both by Karen Barad, include Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and "Post-humanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter."

How the Body is Passed Down
By Kelly Thomas
(originally appeared
in *The Los Angeles Review*)

My mother unzips the body she hid herself in. Passes it down. The dress of diplomacy tailored too tight. A red indentation of buttons pressed hard as childhood. She was still hungry. Her body, royal with fridge glow learned that loneliness eats with its hands. She whispered I'm so sorry and handed me her shame. My body has always been a window: I cannot throw myself from. Quickly named it stranger. Hips first. Breasts. Then mouth. Now: The clothes don't fit. Like my mother. My cabinets are stocked with grief. I try to take the smallest bites. The hurt never ripe enough to pick. I tried to bury my history still nothing blooms. And now I know a body can haunt itself. Be a fear no one else believes in. It is the ghost that only says my name.

Most mornings I write the word forgiveness in the fog of the mirror. I'm not sure whose reflection it's for mine or my mother's I can never stand to look.

Wolves Do Not Cover their Dead

By Kelly Thomas
(originally appeared in *The Los Angeles Review*)

Every time you kill a wolf // three more come back // hungrier // hiding memory // night // a drum I beat // paw stalk for bison and breath // no difference between hunted // haunted // hunger // deep as forest // circles prey // divide place into mouthfuls // I've starved three moons // without grudge // my wolf heart folded // pulped with power // wintered into a wait // so gray they call me landscape // tongue pinked with revenge // the past sharpened these teeth // I have no more reasons to die // I return // and choke the river // laugh at the last hunter's wake // and when I meet the flesh // of your guilt // do not apologize for slaughter // do not beg to evergreens // your eyes will open // hands too slow // your throat necklaced by my jaw // after I'm done // I will not cover you // blood reaching across snow // a slurred hollow // warn the scavengers // she has come home

(Continued from page 6)

pride. Where I came from was suddenly a place I was proud of. My appearance was no longer an apology, but a statement. Writing—more specifically, writing poetry—served as an opportunity for me to realize that our social, cultural, and financial history are all positive contributors to how we identify with the world.

Once poetry had its grip on me, my culture was a subject I wanted to know everything about. Shortly after, I was introduced to Michele Serros's poem. It reminded me that cultural identity is an ongoing process. Cultural background can be a significant tool for helping one become self-aware, but it can also be a label that is used to limit or judge an individual or group. This poem made me think about remembering where we come from. Without fear of prejudice or criticism, I attempted to express not only the struggle of mastering my native tongue, but also the struggle attached to being a Mexican American in present-day America. The connection between the classic poem and my response is the desire to reclaim my culture.

As you can see from Raul's chapter, Get Lit prompts students to use poetry to decipher, decode, and think critically about the world and who they are. Poetry is used to curate a community of courage and creativity, and to encourage everyone to live larger than we dared to live before.

Interested in teaching Get Lit's curriculum which comes with entry to the Classic Slam, Mentor Visits, Professional Development, Teacher's Lounge and more? Visit GetLit.org to see how you can bring the power of poetry to your classroom. Ignite literacy. Empower voices. Change the future.

Work Cited:

Lane, Diane Luby, and Get Lit Players. *Get Lit Rising: Words Ignite. Claim Your Poem. Claim Your Life.* Simon Pulse/Beyond Words, 2016.



Project Notes

Kudos to Emily Vizzo (SDAWP 2015). Emily's chapbook collection of poetry called *GIANTESS* is being published by YesYesBooks and will be available on June 15, 2018. Her novel, *Below the Water*, is represented by Frances Goldin Literary Agency in New York. She joyfully teaches writing to students of all ages.

Way to go, Callie Ryan Brimberry (SDAWP 2008). Callie's short story, "Becoming More," was featured in the ongoing exhibit—Story Exchange—at the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art.

A round of applause to the San Diego Area Writing Project! Educators, librarians, administrators, student teachers, parents, community leaders, and volunteers gathered for the annual Greater San Diego Reading Association (GSDRA) Literacy Awards on Saturday, May 5, at the Handlery Hotel in Mission Valley. The SDAWP received the "Celebrate Literacy Award" for its 41 years of professional development service to educators and students in San Diego and Imperial counties. The GSDRA works to promote literacy, provide activities on literacy issues, and to advance the pursuit of life-long reading.

Program Manager Carol Schrammel accepted the award on behalf of the SDAWP. "It is an honor to be recognized for the work we do with educators and students in San Diego. I am privileged to work with such amazing educators and see first-hand how powerful writing can be in the life of a student," Schrammel said.

SDAWP Director Kim Douillard was happy with the award. "We are delighted and honored to receive the Celebrate Literacy Award from the GSDRA. Supporting teachers to provide high quality instruction to each and every student in our region is our ultimate goal. We see education—and particularly writing—as a cornerstone of equity. Effective writers have the opportunity to communicate their views, an essential skill in a democracy. At the SDAWP, we are fortunate to work with so many passionate and talented educators and excited that their work, through our organization, is recognized."

The San Diego Area Writing Project (SDAWP) believes that socially responsible approaches to teaching writing support the education and success of San Diego's culturally and linguistically diverse student population. The SDAWP works directly in schools and with districts to improve the teaching of writing through a teachers-teaching teachers model. They also offer summer open institute programs for TK-16 educators and a variety of young writers programs for students in grades 3 through college freshman.

"Like us" on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SDAWP where links to writing resources and research articles are posted regularly offering a wealth of ideas for curriculum design and implementation.

Stay in Touch If you are an SDAWP Fellow and would like regular updates about upcoming events, please send us your email address. Visit our website at <http://sdawp.ucsd.edu>, and go to the 'Contact Us' link, or email us at: sdawp@ucsd.edu. We would love to add you to our eList!

Let the Blasphemy Be Spoken: Encouraging Student Voice, Rebellion, and Community in the Classroom Through Spoken Word Poetry

Karla Cordero, SDAWP 2017

Blasphemy

By Martín Espada

Let the blasphemy be spoken: poetry can save us,
not the way a fisherman pulls the drowning swimmer
into his boat, not the way Jesus, between screams,
promised life everlasting to the thief crucified beside him
on the hill, but salvation nevertheless.

Somewhere a convict sobs into a book of poems
from the prison library, and I know why
his hands are careful not to break the brittle pages.

Imagine a fictional world where the education system has become a militant entity that controls creativity in the hands of teachers. You are asked to select one tool to equip yourself in the battle against a desperate landscape, void of joy and learning. What tool would you choose?

Pressed upon a non-negotiable scenario, my body immediately answered before my mind could comprehend the word that confidently spilled from my mouth: POETRY! The creative form that carries the devices of metaphor and line break may lead a few fanatics to reference the long lasting work of Shakespeare, Dickenson, Wordsworth, and many more who played a crucial role to the evolution of its craft. Although these are writers of great contribution toward the aesthetic of poetry, I speak of another kind of poetry—the kind that reaches beyond their time: Poetry influenced by our ancestors in the form of oral story telling. I refer to the performers of ritual and blessing around a lit fire shared by the members of their tribe during a time before the staining hands of colonization and mass genocide—the narratives of those before such great oppression.

Now, in the 21st century, the poetic form of oral storytelling in the presence of a live audience is known as spoken word (or performance poetry). I was first introduced to spoken word during my undergraduate work. As a student with an unsure direction, I lacked the livelihood to be an invested citizen of society. I was an obedient student with zero voice bridged by an upbringing as both Latina and border child.

I grew up in the little city of Calexico, California, and was part of an education system where 85% of its students crossed the border from Mexico to the United States only to be submerged with Western culture and the English language. Due to the assimilating demand for “Americanism,” our English teachers drilled our brains to exhaustion with the “must read” classics of literature such as *Beowulf* and *The Odyssey*. These characters and their narrative journeys had no distinct connection to my experience as a young Latina. The stale interaction I encountered with education was layered on top of the constricting expectations of my culture. Eventually, I persuaded my parents for their permission to pursue an education beyond the confines of our little city. It was through

my educational journey that poetry found me when I was most thirsty for visibility and purpose in the world.

During my first year of college, I enrolled in an English course titled: Literature in the Community, in which Professor Sandra Doller required her students to attend a literary event that took place beyond the campus walls. I stumbled upon a flyer—stating in bold, Poetry Slam, and I attended. To my surprise, no one held a dead skull in their hands reciting sonnets, but rather, I was exposed to a community of poets who looked like me reciting their stories. Stories about loss and passion for life. I witnessed an audience chanting in support of the poets who shared their accounts of oppressed histories, reclamation of self, and pride for one’s culture. It was in this moment my body had woken from a long dreadful sleep, as my emotions had gone haywire reacting with a desperate need to explore the art form for my own personal liberation.

After the performance, I began to obsess over language, rebelling through the movement of pen to paper. I watched every spoken word video on YouTube and attended local open-mics to access the rejuvenating practice of speaking my truth. Throughout the years, diving further into the craft, I found a community of writers I called family and became one of five poets to represent my city and compete at the National Poetry Slam Competition. The transforming power of spoken word was key to my desire for education, building interest in writing as process with careful attention to

audience, and the rediscovering of my own identity. Whether I sat in a classroom or stood on stage in front of two hundred people, writing-to-voice empowered me to comprehend and question society without consequence. In the transition from student to educator, I took an oath to carry spoken word into the classroom to create a space for students whose bodies, too, may have been in a deep sleep under the authoritative systems of power. I found that spoken word not only gave students a tongue of their own to transgress and recognize the various oppressions that had been pressed upon their lives, but it also created a family who valued their stories.

Raising the Dead Voice from Their Grave

“Watching young people grow through poetry—grow into poets—is watching them grow into leaders of their peers, is watching them grow into wielders of influence, is watching them grow into people who can unsheathe spears and shatter all the polished slick fortresses of fake that threaten to suffocate them.”

—Jeff Kass

I found that spoken word not only gave students a tongue of their own to transgress and recognize the various oppressions that had been pressed upon their lives, but it also created a family who valued their stories.

Now teaching at the community college, I enter the classroom with the philosophy of bell hooks and the work of Paulo Freire on a quest to create my own transformative ped-

agogy that remains true to my spoken word upbringing. I knew many students would enter the classroom with their own encounters of “cultural genocide” due to the persistent costume bestowed upon them to wear, known as America. It is in the wearing of these costumes students become nervous wrecks, in fear of judgment, when called upon to share their thoughts. Classrooms fall into a silence that educators despise, a quiet where one can hear the echo of crickets, and the students become zombies. Certainly not the kind of zombies hungry to feast on your organs, but the dead that have cemented tombstones at the opening of their mouths.

We must recognize our students as trauma survivors of discrimination, victims to stereotypes, receivers of micro-aggressions, misogyny, poverty, and other situations that create a collection of experiences shaping their understanding of the world. Judith Herman, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School mentions, “the first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. [They] must be the author and arbiter of [their] own recovery... recovery can take place only within the context of relationships it cannot occur in isolation” (135). Therefore, numerous educators employ the personal narrative as a means for students to reach for their own voices through stories that matter. Students become empowered by the act of writing and sharing their work with peer review groups.

One spoken word assignment I use with mentor texts is called “The Spirit Crusher,” which encourages students to write a poem concerning a time their identity had been questioned or judged by an outside force. During the construction of the poem, students are asked to detail a moment that transitions into the celebration of self. Through the collaborative viewing of spoken word, students are exposed to young poets of various backgrounds and experiences who use language, line breaks, and literary devices that capture an audience on an emo-

tional roller coaster, leaving a listener transformed and connected. Students not only have the opportunity to view the poet at their most vulnerable, but they can see and hear the surrounding support of a community. For example, I’ve used the poem, “My Blood is Beautiful,” by Mercedes Holtry, which introduces to listeners her encounter with a white man who asks a series of questions that lead Holtry to identify the micro-aggressions at work. In her poem, Holtry uses this moment of disempowerment to educate an audience on multicultural identities carried by the history of colonization and the beauty she’s inherited by her ancestors.

She recites:

*If you're Chicana how did you
end up with a German last name?
You're not pure the old man tells
me with his face.
America loves pure
and you are messy
different...
I nod my head proudly
As if to say,
Yeah I'm a walking
history lesson.
Proof that we all come
from the same tree
But eventually
out grow our roots...
And I'll be damned if anyone calls
my blood anything
but beautiful.*

Within these are snippets of the poem’s beginning, middle, and end, Holtry’s voice becomes activist in the desire to hold dialogue and educate through the use of spoken word.

bell hooks, in her book, *Teaching to Transgress*, states, “hearing each other’s voices with personal experience makes us more acutely aware of each other...sharing experience and confessional narratives in the classroom helps establish communal commitment to learning” (186). The act of sharing personal experience in a space made for learning is vital to having students feel visible in the classroom through the support of mentor texts. It is in the

exposure of spoken word that students may encounter a series of subconscious thoughts: *Ok, I can try to write a poem. I can try to be vulnerable. If Holtry can write, so can I.* Students have an encyclopedia of memory waiting to be unleashed into the world with hopes to encounter epiphanies of self and understanding of their surrounding peers, “Wow, I had no idea X felt that way” or “I’ve waited a long time to write this story, it feels good to get the story about X off my chest.” And in every poem, there’s room for rebellion, the kind that pushes students to be critical thinkers of the existing realms of domestication they navigate through daily without question.

Rebellion Through Language

“[Poetry] is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into a more tangible action.”

—Audre Lorde

We also welcome spoken word as observational study. We observe as critical thinkers to identify the various devices poets use to confront their oppressor in the form of rebellion. In the poem, “Dear Straight People,” Denice Frohman comes face to face with a heterosexual society and its pressing norms that “other” the presence of queerness.

She recites:

Dear straight people, kissing my girlfriend in public without looking to see who’s around is a luxury I do not fully have yet. But tonight I am drunk in my freedom, I grab her hand on the busiest street corner...until we melt stares into a standing ovation.

As a class, in collaborative discussion, students are able to recognize Frohman’s rhetorical strategy through the use of letter format as an approach to addressing her oppressor. Throughout this piece,

Frohman creates a catalogue list of the inequalities in her own life as a queer Latina. However, in the moments of addressing “straight people” Frohman transgresses using language as “drunk in my freedom,” making herself visible in the “busiest street corner,” a location where dominate society is present. Frohman shows affection to her partner until stares transform into an applause of celebration. As bell hooks claims, it is necessary to “create ruptures in the established order that promote modes of learning which challenge the norm” (185).

In challenging bourgeois values, this becomes a wonderful opportunity for “straight students” to check their own privilege. The poem opens the floor to the experiences of those who identify as members of the LGBTQ-IA+ community. They are made visible as holders of knowledge that can aid in the dialogue in understanding the challenges one may face as a queer identified individual.

**And in every poem,
there’s room for
rebellion, the kind
that pushes students
to be critical
thinkers of the
existing realms of
domestication they
navigate through
daily without
question.**

In closing the unit of domestication and rebellion through spoken word, I have students write their own letters addressing a systematic order of power and using poetic devices to rebel against the norm. Since students take part in peer review workshops, and in reading one’s work, some may feel apprehensive. Knowing that students may be terrified exposing their work in the classroom, how do we create a space for sharing vulnerable writing?

It Takes A Village: Open-Mic Time As A Building Block Toward Community In The Classroom

When creating a syllabus, one of the most exciting decision factors is the selection of life changing texts by authors we hope strike power into the spirits of our students. We work together, reading and discussing in preparation for students to write a thorough analysis of such texts. However, it is important for students to not only recognize the rhetorical strategies used by authors, but to practice the process of such liberating knowledge through writing and sharing their work in front of a live audience. In addition to finding reason for the importance of sharing student writing, one can reflect back to the work of Judith Herman as she speaks of the trauma survivor (or student):

Survivors [or students] renew connections with other people, the survivor [or student] re-creates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These faculties include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy. Just as these capabilities are originally formed in relationships with other people, they must be reformed in such relationships [such classroom environments] (133).

In efforts to facilitate relationships in academic spaces, I’ve established open-mic time in the classroom using the cultural nature of spoken word. Open-mics are readings that take place at coffee shops and other venues that bring novice and experienced performers to share their work on a volunteer basis in the presence of a live audience. To manipulate a similar space, the classroom is arranged in a circle for intimate listening and respect. Students who shy away from the opportunity may at some point feel encouraged by their classmates or inspired to read their work later in the semester.

If the ground breaking moment for the quiet student to speak never happens, don't give up! The course you are teaching can also include a final project in which students are to create an artistic piece of work in reflection to their writing. Take a step further, include student art into a student service learning event where their work is displayed for a larger audience. Art can speak just as loud as words, and maybe that's the kind of performance quiet students need to feel visible.

...teachers also need to be part of the experience. Be a listener and reader of your own work; students will appreciate your participation and vulnerability.

The performer is not the only key to community building in the classroom; the listener is just as vital to the outcome. hooks brings attention to this matter stating, "Just the physical experience of hearing, of listening intently, to each particular voice strengthens our capacity to learn together...hearing each other's voices with personal experience makes us more acutely aware of each other" (186).

The need for honest communication and listening among people is palpable. In making sense of the chaos and complexities of the social globe, teachers also need to be part of the experience. Be a listener and reader of your own work; students will appreciate your participation and vulnerability.

Deciding On The One Non-negotiable Tool For Teaching Zombies

I bring spoken word culture into the classroom because I've experienced the positive transforming affects when I was a student. Spoken word

is not the solution to every communication or writing challenge in the classroom, but it's a starting point, with room for potential student engagement and learning that is liberating.

As Franco Berardi states in his text, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, "Poetry is going to play a new game: the game of reactivating the social body;" in other words, poetry is essential in pulling students out of a disconnected and selfish society and reconnecting them to what it means to be human.

Spoken word carries the ability to give a single voice sincerity from the heart to ear. I encourage all teachers to teach with the very passion that drove you toward the vocation of teacher. Make time to sit down and evaluate your own non-negotiable that brings light into the classroom. What tool will you choose in the battle against the apocalypse surrounded by zombified students?

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Dialogue

**Call for Manuscripts
Fall 2018 Issue**

**Submission Deadline:
August 15, 2018**

Writing to Engage

Manuscripts should consider but not be limited to the following questions:

- What writing strategies do you use that allow students to incorporate their cultural and social experiences into their writing? How have these tactics impacted student performance and classroom dynamics?
- In what ways do you incorporate writing across the curriculum? Which writing practices do you find most effective in science and math? How does writing enhance students' comprehension in physical education? Art? Music?
- How do you enable students to use their writing to engage with the community?

Dialogue values experiential knowledge and would love to receive reflective pieces written by educators and students. We encourage you to submit your stories, experiences, and strategies. We are especially seeking voices from K-6 educators. Please submit!

Email all manuscript submissions, suggestions, letters to the editor and/or Project Notes to

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Holding Space

Darren R. Samakosky, SDAWP 2011

If you were to visit my classroom on any given day, you would see young people at Point Loma High School excited about writing and finding their voice. It is essential to create and foster a community—a meeting ground for creativity and encouragement where fun and literacy can occur in the same place.

Holding space is what I've come to call this medium I facilitate daily. It is a classroom where students lead, share, and support authentic growth—where being open and vulnerable is seen as a strength, and courage and congregation is genuinely holy. I pride myself in holding this space year in and year out.

My students and I traverse through prose and verse. We grind through annotation and we think critically. We read as writers and we behave like artists. It doesn't always go as planned, but we pride ourselves on progress. We get the chance to edit ourselves and we sometimes have to come to terms with ourselves. But all the sometimes are worth that one time. The one time the outcome truly defines the worth and the effort of a brave student declaring their own trials and tribulations through their efforts of spoken word in front of a full-housed campus gathering.

It is a privilege to witness the journey my students take and where they arrive: confident and speaking positively with conviction and keen awareness with a unique sensibility that is able to move, affect, and inspire others. If my students are able to do this, they will continue to critically navigate their worlds and their educations far beyond the walls of 180 days of held space.

My own style in the classroom has

come to be from years of my own soul searching. I struggled as a student, I doubted myself as an effective educator, and I tried to fit my teachings into a space that didn't quite seem shaped for my approach to learning and studying. I sought out programs that would nudge me appropriately as well as conversed constructively with like-minded colleagues who urged me to follow my own path. I slowly became more confident and began taking chances with lesson plans I knew to be more engaging and suited for my students.

Borrowing and implementing, adjusting and emulating, networking and quietly observing—I attempted to take notice of all aspects of holding a space and keeping an audience. I wanted to design a writing workshop and community that was appealing, engaging, and challenging. I figured I would combine these techniques and styles—much like I encourage my writers to now do.

Then slowly over time I began to find my own voice in the classroom. I began to believe that holding space is what I can offer my students—that it is important and that it is right. And once that momentum took hold I began to notice how much the teaching environment changed.

A typical week in writers workshop looks and feels like this: On Mondays we explore a new piece of text. We read like writers—we annotate and seek to understand both the content and the writer's choices. We inspect to seek what we can borrow or implement to make our own. On Tuesdays we write our own piece that specifically takes from the week's mentor text. I encourage students to take risks and personalize the writing process.

On Wednesdays, we bring in our rough drafts to work collaboratively in writing response groups; we loosely follow the Praise, Question, Wish format. Students get to see others write and take note of the variety of approaches to the assignment. Thursdays establish the community aspect of writing; we have

a mentor writer visit our classroom where they engage students with their own poetry, music, stories, and truths. Students see first-hand how their writing and their voice can be valued and heard in the real world. On Fridays, students turn in their “final” piece—we celebrate student voice with our author's chair and class cipher. Author's chair is essentially an open mic event—voices, music, lights—we have fun. Our cipher allows every class member to be heard as they share a “golden line” in a continuous fashion.

Not every week goes smoothly according to plans, and it takes time for it all to fall into place—but when it does work it provides an opportunity each week for a writing goal to be met with plenty of opportunity to work together, edit, improve, and share.

The freedom I have in leading the writer's workshop program has granted me opportunity to work with many students in the most genuine of capacities. From daily classes, our poetry club, and semester symposiums, to guest writers and visitors, our campus and our students are rich with voice and excitement.

My students' stories are honest and true; they confront relatable issues on politics, gender equality, sexual identity, depression, friendship, family, and ancestry. Their writing is structured, it is prose, it is poetic, it is free form, and in the moment of spoken word it is truly captivating—and these kids relish in that moment.

It is through the art of spoken word that our school community produces students who conjure this poetic magic every year. I'm the fortunate one who gets to facilitate the program and work with dedicated kids who want to help lift others up, and—if for just a few moments—create a space that holds humanity and truth as the truest pillars of a public education. It's the proudest of endeavors.



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Calendar of Events

Summer Open Institutes at UCSD for Educators:

Preparing College
Ready Writers Program (6-16)
June 19 - 21, 2018
8:00am - 3:00pm

Building a Writing
Community (K-6)
June 26 - 28, 2018
8:00am - 3:00pm

Writing, Revision
& Mentor Texts (K-8)
July 10 - 12, 2018
8:00am - 3:00pm

All 3-day programs are \$395
per participants or \$375 each
for teams of 3 or more
from the same school site.

Fall Into Writing 2018 Conference

UC San Diego
Saturday, September 29, 2018
8:00am - 12:00pm
Registration begins August 27

Young Writers' Camp 2018 Open Mic Night and Fundraiser

July 26, 2018
6:00pm

YWC at UCSD

Barnes & Noble Mira Mesa

YWC at Cardiff

Barnes & Noble Encinitas

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