

Part 3: Appendix: Two Workshop Guides

Guide 1: “Where I’m From” and “Ancestors” – Writing Migration Poems

Overview

This writing workshop has participants write their own migration poems, using the poem “Where I’m From,” by George Ella Lyon, or “Ancestors,” by Moises Villavicencio Barras, as a model.

History

Workshop materials were originally developed by mother-daughter team Jennifer Hirsch and Penny Hirsch as one exercise for a writing class that they taught at Grace House, a transitional home for women released from prison. Similar to the UIC Latino Cultural Center’s program on Migration and Transformation, the class used the theme of migration to help participants think about where they come from, where they’re at, and where they want to go. It used a visual prompt—paintings from renowned painter Jacob Lawrence’s book, *The Great Migration: An American Story*—to help the group relate to the theme of migration. However, many of the participants had never lived outside Illinois so their stories focused on migrations between neighborhoods, between neighborhoods and prisons, and even, in one case, from one side of the street to the other. A number of women also focused on “thought” migrations: evolving from one way of thinking to another. This workshop used the poem “Where I’m From.”

During the Connect project, University of Wisconsin–Madison Arboretum’s Latino Earth Partnership for Schools Program used this activity but substituted the “Ancestors” poem, which was a good cultural fit for their focus on the Latino community. Both poems use the past to think about the present and the future, and either one can be used to help workshop participants explore and write about their own lives.

Needs

Group Age, Size, and Time

5-20 participants, about 2 hours. This workshop will likely work best with participants middle school age and above

Space

A room with desks for writing. A circular or rectangular table is best since people will share their stories with each other.

Materials

- One copy per person of the poem you are going to use, the worksheet, and the “Where I’m From” or “Ancestors” poem template (below)
- Pencils for everyone
- Table-tents for names

- Big post-it pad and markers

Facilitation

The facilitator should have experience encouraging groups of people to express their ideas. Expertise in writing or writing pedagogy is not required, nor is it in climate change or the migration of people or animals. However, the facilitator should become familiar with the poem used. If that is “Where I’m From,” she or he can also visit Lyon’s website (George Ella Lyon – Writer & Teacher) to see other examples of how the poem has been used as a writing tool. The facilitator may also wish to write her or his own poem to share with the group as an example. If the group is big, or if you think people will need lots of individual attention, it’s best to have another person to help with the writing parts of the workshop.

Instructions

Welcome and Introductions (+/- 10 min.)

As participants arrive, give them the handouts (above) and a pencil. Have them write their names on a table tent with the marker. Then ask them to have a seat. When everyone is seated, welcome them, explain the purpose of the activity, and ask them to introduce themselves, sharing their name, where they grew up, and where they live now. If you are not going to focus solely or specifically on geographic migration, revise what you ask them to share accordingly.

Read the Poem Together (+/- 10 min.)

Lead the group together in reading the poem you’ve chosen to read. Ask for a volunteer to read the first few stanzas and then go around the room until the poem is finished. If anyone struggles with a word, gently help them out. At the end of the poem, facilitate a short discussion. Ask people: What stood out to you from this poem? What confused you? And finally: What memories from your life does this poem make you think of? This will get people thinking about the types of details they might want to include in their own poem.

Complete Worksheet and Poem (+/- 30-40 min.)

Now ask everyone to complete their worksheet (below). This is where they will write notes to use for writing their poem. Review the worksheet as a group to see if there are any questions or concerns. If you have written a poem to share as an example, this is a good place to read it to the group and share a bit about your experience writing it. If you haven’t written your own poem, or if you want another example, you can also share the sample poems below written by Connect partners. Once you have shared a poem or two, have people start working on their worksheets.

After a few minutes, go around the room and help people who look like they are confused or not sure what to write. When people are done with their worksheet, ask them to use ideas from the worksheet to complete their poem, using the templates below. Continue walking around the room to offer help.

Share Poems Out Loud (+/- 30 min.)

Ask for volunteers to stand up and read their poems to the group. After each one, ask the group: What did you like most about that poem and why? What parts did you relate to most? What would you like to know more

about (and allow the reader to respond, encouraging her/him to add a detail or two to the poem)? Continue asking people to share until everyone who wants to share has done so. Encourage people who are reluctant to share for the benefit of the group.

In between poems:

- Highlight themes that are emerging, such as common memories, values, and practices. Write these themes down on the big post-it papers.
- Also listen for issues or practices directly related to climate change, such as gardening, conserving water or energy, etc. (see list above on climate change-related prompts for more examples).

Facilitate a “Now and Then” or “Here and There” Discussion (+/- 15-20 min.)

Encourage participants to compare their memories with their experiences today. Here are some questions you might ask:

- What is similar and what has changed?
- Who were we before and after we migrated? (Faith in Place’s question)
- What values and meaningful practices have we retained? What values and meaningful practices have we let go that we’d like to bring back?
- What are some of the images, smells, tastes, or experiences that relate to the seasons (temperature, rain, snow), water, wildlife, plants, and other elements of nature? Have any of these changed over time because of climate change?
- Are any climate-friendly practices or technologies described in these poems? How have they changed?

Finally, ask people to think about what they have learned from sharing their own migration stories and hearing others’. Push them to think about the big “so what’s,” such as Faith in Place’s message: that communities of color have been resilient and can draw on their deep knowledge and extend their hospitality to help the natural world, and themselves, survive.

Conclude

Thank people for writing and sharing and tell them about next steps, if there are any. If people will let you, collect their poems so you can review them to think about how to build on key themes and stories in your climate action work moving forward. Ideally, you should make copies of the poems and return the originals since at least some people will likely want to keep them.

If you think you might use participants’ poems in the future, let them know how you might do so—and confirm again that you have everyone’s permission. (Moving forward, also make sure you honor your description of how they might be used; and contact people if you want to use the poems differently from how you originally planned.)

Moving from Stories to Action

For some ideas about how you can use stories as a springboard for action, see [Moving from Stories to Action](#) in Part 2.

Helpful Links

- [Jacob Lawrence, The Great Migration: An American Story:](#)
http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration_series/flash/experience.html
- [George Ella Lyon's website:](#) <http://www.georgeellalyon.com>

“Where I’m From”
by George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the black porch.

(Black, glistening
it tasted like beets.)

I am from the forsythia bush,
the Dutch elm
whose long gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.

I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from perk up and pipe down.

I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.

From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,

a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments-
snapped before I budded-
leaf-fall from the family tree.

"Where I'm From" appears in George Ella Lyon's *Where I'm From, Where Poems Come From*, a poetry workshop-book for teachers and students, illustrated with photographs by Robert Hoskins (Absey & Co: Spring, TX, 1999). It can be found on Lyon's website, [George Ella Lyon—Writer & Teacher](#), along with examples of how people around the world have used it as a writing exercise to prompt thinking about roots and traditions.

“Ancestors”/“Ancestros”
by Moises Villavicencio Barras

In *Luz de Todos los Tiempos* (Light of All Times) (Cowfeather Press: Middleton, WI, 2013)

In my childhood the streams brought
sacred beads
that I hung on my chest
like those calendars on the walls
of my grandmother,
a solitary midwife.
My ancestors sang
in the prairies where infinity lives.
In my childhood my brothers died
in the swollen belly of the night.
In a mud bed
I found the thread of all answers.
Under my hands grew
the glasses and plates
of the constellations.
My ancestors ran
from one city to another
,with seeds and fish
of terrestrial and natural Gods.
They did not have the hours
that the sun spends in the wings of cormorants.
They did not have gold on their side.
The wind planted their bones and flesh
in hillsides of *acahual* and silence.
My ancestors walked from one side
to the other side of the earth quietly
with their mouths in the ruinous waters
that rain leaves
after dying in leaves and stones.
I am the one who did not know the threat
of the wheel and the metallic thirst of the spirit.

En mi infancia los arroyos trajeron
cuentas sagradas
que colgaba en mi pecho,
como esos calendarios
en las paredes de mi abuela,
partera solitaria.
Mis ancestros cantaron
en las praderas donde el infinito.
En mi infancia mis hermanos murieron
en el vientre hinchado de la noche.
En un yacimiento de barro encontré
el hilo de todas las respuestas.
Bajo mis manos crecieron los vasos y los
platos
de las constelaciones.
Mis ancestros también corrieron
de una ciudad a otra
con las semillas y los peces de dioses
terrestres y naturales.
No tuvieron las horas
que el sol pasa en las alas de los
cormoranes.
No tuvieron el oro de su lado.
El viento sembró sus huesos y carne
en barrancas de *acahual* y silencio.
Mis ancestros anduvieron de un lado
a otro de la tierra sin ruido,
y con la boca en las aguas ruinosas
que la lluvia deja
después de morir en las hojas y las
piedras.
Soy el que no conocí la amenaza
de la rueda y la sed metálica del espíritu.

Sample Poem

“Where I’m From” by Velma L. Pate

Covenant United Church of Christ (Faith in Place and Connect partner)

I'm from the dirt road of Lexington, Mississippi.

Water rushing down the pond, birds singing in the window

Shotgun house with no phone to ring

Seating on the porch rocking in the chair.

I'm from the cotton fields, sweat running down my face

to a kitchen of greens, cornbread and peach cobbler.

Garden of flower freshly blooming for the summer,

Smells of hogs, chicken, dogs, horses, cows

waiting to be milked, fed each morning.

I'm from "see you tomorrow if the Lord say the same"

"don't count all your chicken before they hatch"

"Fairly-Miley" If you know what I mean.

Hanging clothes on the line, fishing pole hooking the worms.

I'm from going to town on Saturday and church on Sunday

reading the Bible and memorizing poems for Easter and Children Day's

I'm from a grandmamma who was a tough no-nonsense woman

bring you in this world and will take you out.

Waiting for the Commodity Truck at the end on the road

Candy, cheese, cookies and bologna.

Lamps become my light for night

Chop wood to keep me warm for winter.

I'm from the rib, living a thousand years is like yesterday.

A fragrance from flowers, trees that buds in the spring,
The hills of Mt. Olive, Randall Town Road.
I'm a breath of life, Heaven is my home.

Like George Ella Lyon,
“I am from those moments-
snapped before I budded-
leaf-fall from the family tree.”

Sample Poem

“Antepasados”

Escrito por Maribel Gonzalez

Written in Radames Galarza's 5th Grade class, ALBA School, Milwaukee, WI, 2015

En mi niñez. Viaje a México por mucho tiempo. No viajaba a donde vivía. Viajaba a Guadalajara para luego ir a Zacatecas. Me quedaba con mi abuela y a veces dormíamos afuera en días bonitos. Iba al rancho y en el camino montaba mi caballo. Una vez yo y mi hermana hicimos una carrera a ver quién corría más rápido en un animal. Ella en mi yegua y yo en el burro. Ella gano.

En México vi muchos caballos por las carreteras y en plazas. Se usan caballos o caminos para llegar a un lugar. Algunas personas tienen carros pero no mucha gente. Nuestros jardines son muy grandes. Están cerca de la casa. El parque se llama Plaza y es muy diferente. Yo podía oler las plantas que hay en nuestro jardín, en la plaza y por todas partes que pasaba. Hay muchas plantas en México.

Mis antepasados sembraban caña de azúcar. Ya al estar listas para comer se mandaba a la ciudad a vender. Mi abuelo llevaba burros llenos de naranjas y caña. Viajaba a Yagualica y/o Jalisco a vender lo que llevaba. Tomaba como un día a llegar a donde quería ir, al regresar lo que tenía eran sus ganancias.

Mis antepasados no usaban carros como manera de transporte. Usaban caballos y burros como transporte. Cuando lavaban lo tenían que lavar a mano. No existían las lavadoras en ese tiempo. Tenían clases debajo de un árbol higuera. No había edificio. Ellos aprendían sin tecnología, cuando no sabían que significaba una palabra tenían que usar un diccionario. Todo era diferente en los 1900s.

Hay un área para jugar. Hay escaleras en las que se pueden sentar a ver. Hay una tienda y personas que venden raspados. Hay otra área en lo que hay un quiosco y unas bancos para que la gente se siente.

MEXICO ES INCREIBLE!!!!!!

*Note: “Antepasados” is another word for “ancestors.”

Migration Poem Worksheet (Notes)

Think back to your home or neighborhood and make lists:

What did you see? (What did people/rooms/your street/backyard/neighborhood parks look like?)

What did you smell?

What did you/others eat/drink?

What did people say/talk about? (think: common phrases)

What did people do?

Historias de Migración: Hoja de Trabajo

Acurdate de tu hogar o vecindario y haz listas:

¿Qué veías? (¿Cómo se veía la gente, los cuartos, las calles, el jardín, o el parque de tu hogar o vecindario?)

¿Qué olías?

¿Qué comías o bebías?

¿Qué te decía la gente o de qué hablaban? (piensa en frases comunes u otras expresiones)

¿Qué hacía la gente?

“Where I’m From”

By _____ {Your Full Name}

I’m from _____

I’m from _____

I’m from _____

Like George Ella Lyon,

“I am from those moments-

snapped before I budded-

leaf-fall from the family tree.”

“Ancestors”/“Ancestros”

By _____ (Your Full Name/Su nombre completo)

In my childhood / En mi niñez _____

My ancestors / Mis ancestros _____

My ancestors / Mis ancestros _____
