

## **“Carrying Our Words”**

Carolyn Ferrucci

**Objectives:** To explore the power of playing with language, discover the transformative properties of words and comparisons, and minimize ideas of barriers in language and the world.

**Education Level:** Elementary, Middle School

**Time:** 1 hour

**Materials:** Yarn, pens, paper

### **Sequence of Activities:**

#### **Introduction and Discussion (15 minutes)**

Read the poem “Carrying Our Words” by Ofelia Zepeda.

Ask, “What is a border?” Name all the borders you see in the classroom, from the wall of your classroom to the barrier of you, the teacher, facing the students. Ask, “How can we change or move borders?” Sit down among/with the students, instead of standing facing them, and talk about the change. “Are words borders?” Discuss the words you didn’t know before reading the poem (or ask if anyone has learned any new words recently!) and words you know now.

What words can we carry across borders? For younger students, go over the five senses, and ask, “What sounds cross borders? Does a particular song cross a border? What smells? What weather or climate?” etcetera. Make a big list or web on the board. You can illustrate this by moving around the classroom, they can try listen for sounds outside of the classroom, or name what they can see through the window. Try to get specific, but the point is to show that ultimately most things could cross a border, and that borders might not even exist!

#### **Activity (15 minutes)**

If students have played “broken” telephone, this is a version of that game! Have one student start with a word from the web—it can be any word, let’s say “víbora”—and then ask students to find a new word that is inside “víbora”, or a word that “víbora” sounds like or reminds them of. For example, after the first person says, “Víbora,” someone says, “Yo ví” (for younger students you might want to be the second person). Have the first person throw you the yarn, so you are now holding the ball of string and there is a line between the two of you. You will throw the ball of string to the next student that raises their hand with a connecting word to “yo ví”— let’s say “see”— but still hold onto your piece, so there is now a line between the first person, the second, and the third, then someone says “sea,” and so on, until you wind up with a colorful web between you!

This was done with a dual-language Spanish-English class, but can be done in English or in any language! Encourage many languages to enter the room, even made up words are allowed! Also

welcome students to just say the first word they are reminded of if they can't find a new word inside the word the previous student used. This can be great if you're able to play outside and take up lots of space (and have lots of yarn). If you can keep the web you've just made intact somehow, and there is time later to pin up everyone's words on their points on the web, this could be a fun extension!

### **Writing (30 minutes)**

Now have students pair up with someone who isn't directly connected to them on the string, so maybe "sea" is now paired up with "shoes". These two students can write a poem comparing the two things that seem to be different. They will first make a list describing each thing (so what the sea looks like, how it moves, which part of the sea, etcetera) and then look at each other's lists and come up with ways they are the same (making metaphors): Does the shoe move like the sea? Does the shoe have a mouth like the shore? Bilingual students should be make words both in English and Spanish (or the languages they speak), so they can see a wider and powerful web of vocabulary and play!

### **Extension:\***

Connect with a local organization that writes letters to "Soñadores," or to immigrants who are detained, and see if you can give the poems (and hopefully some drawings!) students made to the organization to send to folks. Mariposas Sin Fronteras is a group in Tucson that has a regular letter writing and visiting program, and there are many across the country! You can have a discussion about the powerful possibilities of carrying words (and all the sounds, colors, smells, and sights that come with words) to people who aren't able to be free in the outside world for a time. For this extension students can title their poems "Querido Soñador" if they choose to.

\*This extension was inspired by a second-grade teacher who was reading the book *Soñadores (Dreamers)* by Yuri Morales for their unit on migration. The class had written letters to "Soñadores" beginning with "Querido Soñador" ("Dear Dreamer") so this extension was made in conjunction and in collaboration with the teacher. Since migration can be a difficult topic and possibly cover traumatic issues, many background discussions should be had with students first, ideally with their classroom teacher or whomever is working with students regularly.