

A Changing Landscape
Inspired by Hilda Riaz's *Some Questions about the Storm*
By Saraiya Kanning

Grade Level: High School, with art activities made to be inclusive of visual impairment

Time Frame: 60 minutes

Objective: To contemplate the impact of a changing climate or habitat through poetry writing in a question/answer or dialogue format.

Required materials: Hilda Raz's "Some Questions about the Storm" (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49953/some-questions-about-the-storm>), pencil, paper, cardstock, acrylic paint, nature objects (feathers, small stones, seed pods, sticks, feathered grass or fluffy grass, etc)

Sequence of Activities

Introduce the Theme

Invite students to think about a place that is important or special to them. Specifically, a place in nature. It could be a place they visited once and felt a special connection to, or a place they know deeply, such as a natural area near where they grew up. Even in urban environments, students should be able to think of some aspect of nature that is important to them, such as a backyard or a park. The instructor should also share a place to which they feel connected.

As you prepare to read the below poem, prime students to listen for moments that express a special connection to place.

Read and Discuss Poem

Read the poem "Some Questions about the Storm" once or twice and ask students to brainstorm ideas around the following questions:

What caught your attention?

Who do you imagine is asking the questions in this poem?

Who do you imagine is answering in this poem?

What do you learn about the storm in this poem?

How do you think the storm effected the person asking the questions?

In what ways is the landscape important to the speaker(s) in the poem.

How do you think the storm effected the person answering?

Collaborative Title Brainstorm

Explain that soon we'll be writing our own poems inspired by this question-and-answer format. To help us get started, we'll brainstorm a list of possible titles as a class. Later, you'll pick one of these titles around which to write a poem.

Here are some example titles to get us started:

Some Questions about the Monsoon

Some Questions about the Santa Cruz River

Some Questions about the Drought

Continue thinking of titles by filling in the below blank:

Some Questions about _____

Individual Writing

Pick one of the titles from the list we brainstormed (Some Questions about the _____). Using the seven question words of "who, what, where, when, why, which, and how", craft a poem that is a series of questions. Students need not use all seven question words, but if they get stuck, it can help to switch the type of question (for example, from "what" to "how".) Keeping the seven question words in mind also inspires a diversity of question types.

Students need not include "answers" to every question but are invited to sprinkle in an answer here and there as they feel inspired. For some, the entire poem may only be questions. Others may find a flow through writing back and forth dialogue. Still others might write all the questions first and go back and insert answers in only a few places.

Remind students that the questions and answers need not be overly technical, perfectly accurate, logical, or orderly. The questions can be exaggerated, abstracted, simple, humorous, hinting, and so on.

Nature Printmaking

Bring an array of natural objects that students can use to dip in acrylic paint and press on paper to make an impression. Some of the best prints come from seed pods, sticks, feathers, rocks, and leaves. If the object is light enough, students can even use the acrylic to "glue" the object somewhere within their painting.

Share

Invite students to read their poems aloud.