

# **Writing Directions, Creative Mapping**

## **A Poetry Lesson**

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**Grade Level:** Middle School-High School

**Time Frame:** 45-60 minutes

**Objective:** Students will draw inspiration from Joy Harjo's "Directions To You" to write their own direction poems. Students will think about maps and directions in a creative, symbolic, and metaphorical way.

**Prior Knowledge and Skills:** Grade level reading and comprehension

**Required Materials:** Paper, pencil, and "Directions To You" poem by Joy Harjo (provided below)

### **Sequence of Activities:**

#### *1. Welcome and Introduction (10-15 minutes)*

The teaching artist can use this time to introduce themselves, what inspires them to write poetry, and perhaps even share some writing of their own. Students can also introduce themselves. In addition to sharing their names, students can answer/share their response to the following (or another fun question the teaching artist invents):

*Imagine yourself as an animal, object, or color.  
What do you have in common with that animal, object, or color?*

Following introductions, facilitate a relaxed, informal, low stakes discussion on the following questions, reminding students there is no such thing as a "right/wrong" answer. We're sharing our opinions, in so far as we are comfortable to do so.

*Do you like poetry, why or why not?*

*What makes a poem a poem?*

## *2. Literary Model and Discussion (10 minutes)*

Read the below poem and use the below questions to help students contemplate.

### Directions To You

By Joy Harjo

Follow them, stop, turn around  
Go the other way.  
Left, right,  
Mine, yours.  
We become lost,  
Unsteady.  
Take a deep breath,  
Pray.  
You will not always be lost.  
You are right here,  
In your time,  
In your place.

#### 1. North

Star, guidance as we look up  
To the brightest white  
Hoping it leads you to where you want to go,  
Hoping that it knows where you should be.  
We find out peace here in the white,  
Gather out strength, our breath, and learn how to be.

#### 2. East

The sun rises,  
Red,  
Morning heat on our face even on the coldest morning.  
The sun creates life,  
Energy,  
Nourishment.  
Gather strength, pull it in  
Be right where you are.

#### 3. South

Butterfly flits  
Spreads yellow beauty.  
We have come to this moment in time  
Step by step,  
We don't always listen to directions,  
We let the current carry us,  
Push us,

Force us along the path.  
We stumble,  
Get up and keep moving.

4. West  
Sunsets, brings  
Darkness,  
Brings black.  
We find solitude,  
Time to take in breath and  
Pray.  
Even in darkness you  
Can be found.  
Call out even in a whisper  
Or whimper,  
You will be heard.

To find,  
To be found,  
To be understood,  
To be seen,  
Heard, felt.  
You are,  
Breath.  
You are,  
Memory.  
You are,  
Touch.  
You are,  
Right here.

*Questions for Discussion:*

What kind of directions are there in life?

How do the directions in this poem compare to other types of directions you know about?

What do you like or dislike about this poem? Why?

### *3. Individual Brainstorm (10-15 minutes)*

Ask students to answer the following question on a sheet of paper. There is no expectation of sharing their answers, so they can feel completely free and open in their writing:

*Imagine you could be given directions to go anywhere, even places that don't exist, even places that are inside you or in your wildest dreams. Or perhaps not directions to a place, but to a person.*

*Where, or to whom, would those directions lead you?*

### *4. Writing (15-20 minutes)*

Invite students to use their freewriting/brainstorm from activity 3 to write a poem inspired by “Directions To You.” Below is the full prompt:

Write a poem that is a list of directions. Your directions can lead to a real place, an imagined place, to a person, or even to a state of being (like “Directions to Peace”). You don’t need to use complete sentences. Write one idea and then jump to the next line and write another, in a list or bullet format. Write at least four lines. You can write more if you want!

### *5. Illustration and Extension Activities*

If time allows or the teaching artist would like to extend the lesson over multiple days, invite students to create artwork around their poem or write a second poem using a line lifted from “Directions To You.” Below are the full prompts:

1. Create a drawing or a map of your directions. Think about various maps you encounter in daily life: on a GPS, on a school globe, etc, Your own map may be more symbolic. For example, perhaps the lines aren’t straight, but indicate areas of emotional challenge or distraction. Perhaps there are obstacles along the way. You can use icons and images as well to indicate experiences, encounters, and stops along the way. In other words, this map is not entirely literal.

2. Pick one line from Joy Harjo’s poem and use it as the first line of a new poem. You can take the poem anywhere you want, write about any topic, make it long or short. If you aren’t sure which line to pick, here are some suggestions (pick just one):

“We let the current carry us”

“The sun creates life”

“Even in darkness you...”

