

Personal Migrations
Inspired by Wang Ping's *Things We Carry on the Sea*
by Saraiya Kanning

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

Time Frame: 60 minutes

Objective: To contemplate movement and migration of people, including ourselves and our families, through poetry writing and tactile artmaking.

Required materials: Wang Pang's "Things We Carry on the Sea" (<https://poets.org/poem/things-we-carry-sea>), pencil, paper, canvas or cake board, popsicle sticks, puff paint, pipe cleaners, beads

Sequence of Activities

Introduction and Word Game (10 minutes)

Establish the theme: migration and movement of people. Today we'll be reading a poem called "Things We Carry on the Sea," which is about one poet's experiences and observations of migration, including migrations which occurred within her own family. Before we read the poem, let's get our brain's warmed-up with a word association game.

In this game, use words taken from the poem to see what other associations come from mine. The instructor may choose the set of words or use the below recommended list. Ask students to raise their hands when they have an idea for filling in the blank of each sentence/word association below. They should not think too hard on what word to share, but rather call upon their spur-of-the-moment thoughts. The word associations may not always make sense immediately, but upon explanation from the student you will learn more about how their mind made certain connections between words. Again, each sentence need not "make sense", though they often do make sense to the ones sharing the association.

In addition to being simple and fun/enjoyable/playful, this exercise should alert students to listen later for certain words as they appear within the poem, as a way of harnessing attention

Fill in the blank:

I say TEARS, you say _____
I say SOIL, you say _____
I say MEMORIES, you say _____
I say SCAR, you say _____
I say SINKING, you say _____
I say MEDICINE, you say _____

I say TACO TRUCK, you say _____
I say DREAMS, you say _____
I say LOVE, you say _____
I say PEACE, you say _____
I say HOPE, you say _____

Here is an example of student word associations using this exercise:

I say tears, you say joy
I say soil, you say boil
I say memories, you say letters
I say scar, you say car
I say sinking, you say water
I say taco truck, you say pumpkin
I say dream, you say scary
I say love, you say family
I say peace, you say PC
I say hope, you say horse

Read and Discuss Poem (5 minutes)

After reading the poem aloud, lead an open-ended discussion on the poem using any or all of the below questions:

What did you notice about this poem? What is your reaction? Did it leave you with any questions?
What did the poet choose to repeat in this poem?
Why do you think a poet might choose to use repetition in this way?
In this poem, who is “we”?
Are all the things they carry physical objects?

Group Poem (10 minutes)

Using a similar form of repetition, write a collaborative poem. Ask students to contemplate how migration has played out in their own lives, including the lives of their families. What sort of things have been carried across land, sea, or even across time? These things might be physical, but they might also be metaphorical, symbolic, intellectual, spiritual, or emotional (in other words, things that can't be held or felt in the hand).

Take down student ideas to fill in the blanks for this group poem. Add as many lines as needed:

We carry _____
We carry _____
We carry _____
And we're _____

And we're _____
And we're _____

Individual Poems (15 minutes)

Using the above form, students can now write their own personal migration/movement poems. Some of us may move frequently or temporarily, others of us may have one big move in our lives, and still others of us know the history of our family and how they moved from place to place, perhaps they even migrated quite some time ago for reasons they did not want or choose. The stories will vary greatly by student, so they should not feel bound to write any one type of poem. For example, one student may want to write about a move between countries, while another writes about a move within town.

Questions to get students started:

What objects did you carry, and where were they carried?

What was important to you?

What ideas did you carry?

What feelings did you?

What words did you carry?

What music or songs did you carry?

What memories did you carry?

Who is moving/migrating? (here begin the lines "We're _____")

Were animals part of the move?

Why did you move?

Art Making (15-25 minutes)

Invite students to make art as they complete their migration poems. Using pipe cleaners and popsicle sticks, they can create a path across the page/canvas/board. Cake board makes a cheap and sturdy surface and can easily be found. Cake boards have a shiny, mirror-like surface which can add to the beauty of the art.

To make the path, students might choose to twist or bend the pipe cleaners, or simply line up the popsicle sticks end to end. Students can make paths that represent the migrations they wrote about in their poems. Will the path be straightforward or windy? Will it cross over itself or intersect with obstacles? How will the path begin and end? How will the path change?

Instead of glue, students can use the puff paint to adhere the path to their canvas. They can also use the puff paint to add textures along the path. Because the puff paint doubles as glue, they can easily stick beads in as desired. This type of art is meant to be enjoyed through touching, so they should contemplate the type and variety of textures they would like to add.

Tip: This lesson plan can easily be adjusted for time. For a shorter lesson, take out the collaborative poem. For a longer lesson, allow more time for art making and add time for sharing.