

## Refrains in Poetry: Power, Healing, and Safety (Look Like)

by Eva Sierra

Grade level: High School, University

Time frame: Self-paced, 30-60 minutes

Objective: Identify and practice the use of refrain in poetry. Think critically of neighborhood problems and create solutions.

Prior knowledge and skills: None

Required materials: Writing tools

Literary model: "Home is a Poem" by Leo Herrera and Eva Sierra

### Sequence of activities:

#### Introduction: Use of Refrains (10-15 minutes)

In poetry, a **refrain** is a line that repeats throughout the piece. It functions similarly to a chorus in a song. You can use this literary device to emphasize or strengthen a point you are making, as well as to help give your poem structure. Here is an example of a poem that uses refrain:

#### *Home is a Poem* by Leo Herrera and Eva Sierra

*home is a poem*

*about a bathroom*

*that smelled faintly of pink Fabuloso.*

*baby scent. abuela's favorite.*

*i will always remember the words.*

*the water that ran cold,*

*the slippery bar soap,*

*and softest towels,*

*that always brought comfort*

*to my cold hands.*

*hierbabuena and quelites*

*lined so many homes during*

*the monsoon. we cleaned them*

*and then ate them.*

*the chiltepinos and the nopales, too.*

*home is a poem.*

*when my bones dance in my body,*

*i burn my thoughts into ashes for the desert.*

*how selfless you are*

*that you gift me your consejos.*

*without asking for anything in return*

*but some respect for the land.*

*home is a poem.*

*i share small talk with my father.*

*over awkward mannerisms and breakfast.*

*we converse about a ranch*

*a couple miles south of nogales*

*with a couple cows and some acres.*

*home. a poem.*

*in these quiet streets there is never silence.*

*listen for the humming.*

*that is home lending comfort  
to the babies with moms in jail,  
to the homies with dads trapping  
while we played Xbox in the next room.  
home is a poem.*

*the stars have echoed you  
time and time again  
even when you were just  
a dream in your abuelas hands,  
recognize that you are not the  
first to occupy your skin.  
that generations before you looked  
for answers in the xochitl.  
home is a poem.*

*walks around the block,  
with my best friends.  
bicis, patinetas, and scooters on deck.  
collecting friends one by one.  
meat market stops for snacks,  
running home to fill our bellies.  
home is the gritos we made.  
home is the way we lit up the block  
with our laughter.  
we didn't know  
that we were writing poems.*

**How did the use of refrain help deliver the theme of this poem?**

### **Topic Brainstorming (10-20 minutes)**

Today we are going to imagine an idealized version of our communities—whatever that means to you. Think of what could be done to make things more fair, less dangerous, happier, etc. Take a moment to picture this with as many details as possible. Make note of all the changes and improvements you would make to your neighborhood.

**Take a moment to write down your ideas:**

### **Writing Prompt (15-20 minutes)**

We'll be writing about this 'perfect' version of our neighborhood while thinking of these three things:

**Healing** - Every neighborhood and its people has its wounds; what are some things that could heal these? Think of comforts, justice, and rehabilitation.

**Power** - Think of instances where people have been powerless, or experienced a disparity of power. Imagine what could be given to them to give them power.

**Safety** - Imagine all of the identities present in your neighborhood, and who is most vulnerable. What are some things they wouldn't have to worry about in a perfect world?

**\*\*Create a three-part poem about healing, power, and safety in your idealized neighborhoods. Use the refrains below to structure your work. Feel free to repeat the refrains as often as you'd like.**

*“Healing looks like...”*

*“Power looks like...”*

*“Safety looks like...”*

Examples:

**“Power looks like free college tuition for every kid on the block”**

**“Safety looks like walks alone, any time of the day or night”**

**“Healing looks like getting enough sleep every night”**