

## **To Childhood's Crickets**

by Eva Sierra

Grade level: High School

Time frame: 60 minutes, or self-paced

Objective: Students will explore their identities by reflecting on their childhoods, addressing their goals and aspirations, and thinking critically on their personal growth so far.

Prior knowledge and skills: None

Required materials: Copy of literary model, pencil or pen, paper

Literary model: "Cricket's Lament" by Paola Valenzuela

Sequence of activities:

- **Introduction:** 10 minutes
- **Poem Reading:** 5 minutes
- **Brainstorming Questions:** 15-20 minutes
- **Poetry Writing:** 10-15 minutes, or more if they are still writing!
- **Sharing Out (optional):** 5-10 minutes

### **Introduction: Ice Breaker, Group Guidelines** (15 minutes)

Begin with an ice breaker question that has to do with childhood. Depending on the size of the group, you may ask students to volunteer to share their answers or ask everyone to answer (if they wish to). Some questions you could ask are:

“What is your earliest memory?”

“When you were a young child, what did you want to be when you grew up?”

After, go over the sequence of activities with students.

Next, establish **group safety guidelines**. Explain to students that art and creative writing often bring up personal or sensitive topics. Therefore, there needs to be communal guidelines to ensure

everyone's safety.

After explaining the need and use of group guidelines, ask students to contribute suggestions.

Consolidate or modify existing guidelines if necessary.

Some example guidelines include:

- Be brave, honest, and authentic in your writing.
- Understand the power of your words and be creative in what you say.
- Poetry is prose, is nothing, is everything.
- Do not re-tell any stories you hear today without permission.
- Listen carefully to others.

### **Poem Reading:** (5 minutes)

Make sure every student has a copy of Paola Valenzuela's poem "Cricket's Lament." (The full text can be found at the end of this lesson)\*

Ask students to read the poem individually, then read it outloud for the class.

Spend a few moments asking students to share their impression of the poem.

### **Brainstorming Questions:** (15 - 20 minutes)

Ask students to answer questions on a piece of paper individually. Remind them to be honest, authentic, and detailed in their answers.

- 1. What are some aspects of early childhood that you miss today?*
- 2. What are ways that you can connect with or serve your childhood self? (Think of activities you enjoyed doing as a child, or maybe things you didn't like but are willing to give a second chance now.)*
- 3. In the latter half of this poem, the speaker expresses guilt for growing up. Why might she have felt this way?*
- 4. Is there anything you wish you could say to your childhood self? (maybe advice, a warning, or kind words of encouragement.)*
- 5. What would you be proud to share with your childhood self right now? (a specific skill, becoming your true self, discovering a particular interest, etc.)*

If time permits, invite a handful of volunteers to share their answer to one of the brainstorming questions.

**Poem Writing:** (10 - 15 minutes)

Pose the writing prompt:

*Imagine the cricket's from Paola's poem, who watched you grow up and are now seeing you as you are.*

- *How can the crickets remember you—what were you like as a child?*
- *What new things have you learned and accomplished, and wish to share with the crickets?*
- *Are there any questions you have for the crickets?*

Encourage students to answer as many of the questions from the prompt as they wish, but they do not have to include answers to all. The poem should feel natural, like a conversation.

As students are writing, move around the classroom and offer help to students who appear to be stuck.

Set a timer for 10 minutes, but if students are still intently writing near the end of the countdown, silently extend the timer.

**Sharing (optional):** (5 - 10 minutes)

If time allows, ask for volunteers to share part or all of their poem with the class. You may ask students to stand from their seat, or at the front of the class. Whatever students are more comfortable with. Remind students to speak loud and confidently.

**Literary Model: Cricket's Lament by Paola Valenzuela**

*los grillos cantan* (the crickets sing)

*canciones de duelo* (songs of hurt)

they remember us  
as we were young

before the angst of adolescence  
and the vices of adulthood

