

“Tell Me”: Harnessing Pre-teen Frustration

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Education level: Junior High and/or High School

Genre: Poetry

Time frame: 60 minutes

Objectives: Discuss the pressure BIPOC writers face to write about themselves and their experiences as stereotypes; discuss stereotypes; learn to express anger constructively in writing; understand formal elements of poetry; discuss repetition and use repetition in our own writing.

Required materials: Print-out of poem or project on the board, paper and pencil

Literary model: Ada Limon's "The Contract Says We'd Like the Conversation to Be Bilingual"

Sequence of Activities:

FREEWRITE *5 minutes*

Start the class off with a timed free write. The prompt: write an unfiltered, unapologetic letter to someone or something you *hate* right now. Emphasize that students aren't going to send these and that you aren't going to read them so they can be as "real" as they want. I held a "sacrificial" burning of these free writes at the end of class (a.k.a I shredded their free writes in front of the class while a student gave a desktop drumroll).

Tell the students they have three minutes.

When time is up, tell students to take a deep breath in and out, roll their necks, shoulders, etc.

LIT MODEL *5 minutes*

Ada Limon's ["The Contract Says We'd Like the Conversation to Be Bilingual"](#)

Ask students to read the poem popcorn-style aloud, then read the poem for the class. If you can find a recording of Ada or another poet reading the poem, even better.

DISCUSSION *15 minutes*

As much as possible, I encourage students to lead class discussion, but below are some talking points and potential directions you might want to steer them in.

- In poems there is a "speaker". The speaker is like a character telling the poem, not necessarily the author. Who is the speaker in this poem?
- What is happening in this poem?
- Why is the speaker of the poem asking us (or Ada) to tell particular stories? What stories do they (the speaker) want to hear?
- What is the tone of this poem? Happy? Funny? Sarcastic? Angry?
- What emotion might the speaker be feeling? What about the author?
- What is a line in poetry?
- A couplet? Do you see the couplets in this poem?
- Do you notice the repetition of the phrase "Tell us"?

PROMPT *15 minutes*

Depending on the direction of the conversation, below are possible prompts. You can also give students the option.

- Think about a time when someone misunderstood you. Imagine writing a poem to them (hint: this could be the person you addressed your free write to). Start the poem off with "Tell me ___"
- Write a poem to someone who has hurt you in either a big way or small way.
- Write a sarcastic poem.

SHARE *5 minutes*

Ask students to share!

EXAMPLES

Untitled

no me cais bien tampoco me cais mal

eres envioso pero Tambien estoy yo

cada ves es una cara roja

debil es mi cel

y tu lo quebraste

cada ves que me questoionaste
sigo pensado en cosas que me distraje
ando bien y no importa

I don't like you but I do
you're envious but so am I
a red face every time
fragile is my soul
and you broke it
every time you questioned me
I keep thinking about things that distract me
I'm doing good but that doesn't matter

- Mia Sofia M., Imago Dei Middle School, Spring 2024

Untitled

You broke my heart,
loved you from the very start

Asked you out you said nah
I asked you out you walked away

My heart was in shambles but it
doesn't end

Like my homie said, I'm a lil Romeo,
my love is full of glad

Every time I start talking to someone
I fumble the bag

When you said nah I felt like my heart was
dying, but now I don't even be trying

I loved her so much I dreamt about her

Tell me why I got hurt

Tell me why you left

Tell me why when you said you needed a BF
you didn't go for me

You used to tell me you wanna be
loved but you were loved, by me

when you said bye all I could do was
cry in my sheets

I've been rejected before, one time
I was so bad I got beat

Every time you told me you liked someone
my heart skipped a beat

tell me why I wasn't the one
to take you home

Tell me why you said no
left my heart in the snow

I might not be some curt
but I still got hurt

- Solomon N., Imago Dei Middle School, Spring 2024