

Writing Bravely

by Eva Sierra

Education level: High School

Genre: Poetry

Time frame: 1-1.5 hrs (or self-paced)

Objective: Create a poem about bravery inspired by the narratives of Palestinian writers.

Prior knowledge and skills: None.

Required materials: Pen and paper. Video projection. Handouts of the literary models.

Literary model: “Mimesis” by Fady Joudah, “Insight” by Maya Abu Al-Hayyat, “We Love What We Have” by Mosab Abu-Toha

Sequence of activities:

Introduction (20-25 minutes):

Share with students the importance of honesty in writing. Make sure they are aware of the bravery it takes to write truthfully. Remind them why it is important that they write their story.

Let students know that today’s lesson will feature Palestinian writers, and that their work requires a bit of background to fairly view and assess.

Allow for grace in the class’s knowledge. Some students may be more informed about the events happening in Palestine than others. Remind them it is okay to approach as they come, but to be mindful and respectful as they listen and read.

This lesson plan was put together to give students a way to understand the current state of the situation in Palestine. We process these topics through poetry about bravery and healing. Art is one of the ways we have historically understood the narratives of the people. We give these stories life by reading them and understanding them.

Prior to reading and discussing the poems below, take some time to provide students with an understanding of the recent events and longer history of Palestine. Find videos and other resources suitable for high schoolers that offer a comprehensive, historical understanding.

Poetry Reading and Discussion (20-25 minutes):

Make sure students have printed copies or their own digital copies of the poems.

Before reading, ask the class: “What makes you feel brave?” Call upon students to share their answers.

Give time for students to silently read through the poems (about 5-7 minutes). After, allow students a couple of minutes to circle or highlight what parts stand out to them.

When all students appear to be finished, read each poem out loud for the students. It may be easier to follow along if you show poems on the board.

After reading, pose the following questions to the class and call on students to answer:

- What are some lines from the poems that stood out to you?
- Which poem did you find the most interesting? Why?
- Before reading we thought of ways to be brave. Now, can you think of any other ways to feel brave?

Brainstorming (10 minutes):

At the bottom of this lesson plan is a simple worksheet where students can make 4 lists:

- Places Where I Feel Brave
- Places Where I Don't Feel Brave
- People I Feel Brave Around
- People I Do Not Feel Brave around

Let students know they can use fake names for privacy. Allow students to work individually for this portion.

After they have written their lists, ask students to review their answers and circle or underline what stands out to them.

Writing Exercise (15+ minutes):

Before writing, ask students to take a few moments to meditate on the videos we watched, poems we read, and topics we discussed. They may close their eyes or sit silently. Take one or two minutes for this.

Prompt: Imagine a world where you are totally safe and free to be brave—*What would you say? Who would you stand up for? What would you let the world know?*

Share the prompt with students. Leave the prompt in a visible place so they can refer back to it as they write.

Ask students to try to write without stopping. This means to allow their ideas to flow, without leaving out ideas looking for the “best” ones.

Ask students to be creative and imaginative.

Ask students to be honest about their feelings and experiences.

Let them know they will be writing for ten minutes. If at ten minutes students are still writing, silently extend the time by 3-5 minutes.

Sharing (5 minutes):

If there is time, call upon students who volunteer to share their work.

Before sharing, ask performers to be loud and confident and ask the class to be attentive and respectful.

Also, set a **class guideline of confidence** to not repeat any personal or sensitive topics after this lesson or outside of the classroom.

Write a list for every prompt in the squares. Write as many answers you can in each square. Aim for at least 4 of each. (Feel free to use fake names for privacy.)

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|--|--|
| <p><u>Places Where I Feel Brave</u></p> | <p><u>People I Feel Brave Around</u></p> |
| <p><u>Places Where I Don't Feel Brave</u></p> | <p><u>People I Do Not Feel Brave Around</u></p> |

After you have finished writing your lists, review what you wrote and circle or underline what stands out to you the most.

Mimesis¹

Fady Joudah

Fady Joudah is a Palestinian-American poet and physician born in Austin, TX.

My daughter
wouldn't hurt a spider

That had nested
Between her bicycle handles
For two weeks
She waited
Until it left of its own accord

If you tear down the web I said
It will simply know
This isn't a place to call home
And you'd get to go biking

She said that's how others
Become refugees² isn't it?

¹ **Mimesis** is the representation or imitation of the real world in art or literature.

² **Refugee** is a person who has been forced to leave their home country to escape war, prosecution, or natural disaster.

Insight

Maya Abu Al-Hayyat

Maya Abu Al-Hayyat is a Palestinian novelist, poet, storyteller, and translator, born in Beirut.

I am waiting for a brave martyr's³ daughter
To stand up and scream
Take your homeland
And give me back my dad

The almond blossom knows its life is short
But the bud cracks and yawns
And only when it falls on the streets of the school
Does happiness bloom
All the minutes of silence
Cannot return one voice to life

I've lived a life filled with heroes
And complete bastards
Now I can no longer distinguish between them

I have seen children
Who gave their parents to the homeland
But I have never seen a homeland
That gave an orphan a father

I want everyone to live and no one to fall
Not even my demons
Not even your demons
Maybe if not one of us falls
We will all rise
Above this hell

³ **Martyr** is a person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs.

WE LOVE WHAT WE HAVE

Mosab Abu-Toha

Mosab Abu Toha is a Palestinian poet, scholar, and librarian from the Gaza Strip.

We love what we have, no matter how little,
because if we don't, everything will be gone. If we don't,
we will no longer exist, since there will be nothing here for us.
What's here is something that we are still
building. It's something we cannot yet see,
because we are part
of it.

Someday soon, this building will stand on its own, while we,
we will be the trees that protect it from the fierce
wind, the trees that will give shade
to children sleeping inside or playing on swings.