

YOU DON'T KNOW ME UNTIL NOW



LATINO/A MIDDLE SCHOOL VOICES

March 2010

A service-learning project with the National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
and What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD)

Edited by Abe Louise Young

Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	4
“Caldo” and “Austin” by Valerie Minerva Flores, East Austin	5
“Do You See Me?” by Gaspar Zaragoza, Jr., Los Angeles	7
“You Don’t Know Me Until Now” by Elizabeth Tamayo, Los Angeles	9
“Where I’m From” by Jasmine Noehmi Alcaraz, East Austin	12
“Where I’m From” by Thelma Manzano, East Austin	14
“The America I Want” by Humberto Perez Bello, Los Angeles	15
“What I See” by Digna Castro, Los Angeles	15
“In My World” and “My Life” by Yamile Duran, Oakland	16
“Who I Am” by Jorge Prieto, Oakland	18
“I Am From” by Pedro Villalba, Oakland	20
“My Oakland” by Jorge Prieto, Oakland	21
Acknowledgments	22
“Cultural Conversations through Creative Writing: Supporting Students’ Diverse Identities” by Abe Louise Young	23



FOREWORD

In 2008, the Education component of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) launched a multiyear service-learning initiative in three Affiliate charter middle schools: Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California; Camino Nuevo Charter Academy in Los Angeles, California; and East Austin College Prep Academy in Austin, Texas.

Five principles guide the initiative:

- Reflecting and honoring the values of Latino communities and the traditions in those communities through culturally competent service-learning programs
- Approaching the service element of service-learning through direct ties in the community
- Reinforcing high standards and rigorous learning
- Engaging youth in the service-learning planning process to emphasize their voices
- Addressing community issues through participation in the solution to challenging issues that many Latino students commonly face

Drawing upon the evidence-based success of middle school service-learning programs nationwide, these schools are developing their own programs and becoming models for the broader NCLR School Network. During the pilot phase, NCLR has helped teachers develop a culture of service-learning, cultivate a cadre of youth advocates, and create a space for the Latino voice. It is also strengthening students' skills in leadership and critical thinking and students' understanding of issues affecting their community.

In the fall of 2009, NCLR partnered with What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD) to design and implement a Youth Voice Institute at each school. These workshops gave student leaders the opportunity to use language arts, literacy, and writing activities to imagine a better world. As they found their voices, ideas for projects and concepts of the service-learning process came to life.

The students participating in this program are leaders at their school. In turn, they will serve as youth trainers, teaching other students and instructors how to use language arts and literacy to imagine a healthy community.

I am grateful to the participating schools for the unending support they gave and continue to give their students. These students love their communities and have given voice to their image of the future.

Sarah DeCamps
NCLR Service-Learning Project Coordinator



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *You Don't Know Me Until Now!* We hope this collection of writing by a diverse group of middle-school aged students will inspire and astonish you. The students who share their stories and poems are joining a growing community of writers from America's public charter schools.

These students—Digna, Elizabeth, Gaspar, Humberto, Jasmine, Jorge, Pedro, Thelma, Valerie, and Yamile—and fourteen more volunteered to be part of a three-city project called the Youth Voices Institute, a leadership development/service-learning experience envisioned by National Council of La Raza and designed by What Kids Can Do, Inc.

In these pages, you'll learn how these writers connect to their place, identity, and cultures. They resist stereotyping and define themselves as complex, creative, growing people. They rhapsodize on what makes them who they are, explore the sensory details of communities they come from, and imagine some facets of the world they want to help create.

In three days of writing and workshopping, the students identified the key concerns they want to address as leaders. Safe families in caring communities. Respect and equity for their ethnic groups. High expectations. Healthy food options. A passionate desire to contribute in positive ways.

Using poems and writing prompts as starting places, the young people did powerful work talking, writing, and supporting each other into expression. Writing is a way of claiming truth, sorting out confusion, imagining alternative possibilities, healing wounds, strengthening ourselves, and connecting us to other people. Writing can create peace: within the writer, on the page, and in readers.

While these students wrote, another group of students at each school took photographs of their neighborhoods, classmates, and families. With delight, we include in these pages some of their photographs as well.

We are grateful to these young people for sharing themselves and their sense of place. We're proud to welcome them as leaders, and introduce their work to you. Enjoy!

Abe Louise Young
WKCD Writing Facilitator
Barbara Cervone
WKCD President and Photo Coach

WHAT **Kids** CAN DO

Valerie Minerva Flores

6th Grade, East Austin College Prep Academy, Austin, TX

Caldo

Let me tell you about *caldo*.
Caldo is a stew for both me and you.
It is shared among my family,
and consists of vegetables, meat, and soup.
It's served beautifully arranged
with a beverage of choice
and a side of lemon.
It has a spice and vegetable smell.
It lures the family in.
Once my family gets acquainted
they always go back for more.
Sometimes the *caldo* makes me soar.
I feel high above the trees.
I'm so glad there's not any fees.



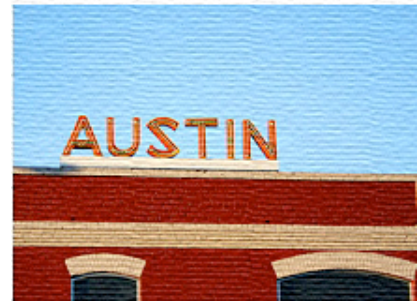
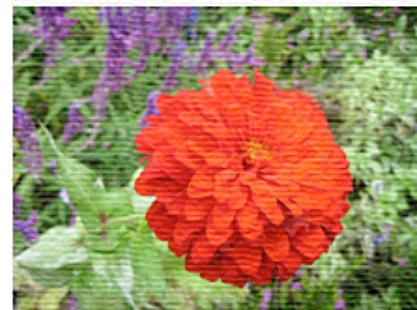
The *caldo* has a feeling.
It makes me feel like I am surrounded
by loved ones. I appreciate
what I have and take a moment
to realize it.

Love, Passion, Sense, Knowledge, Care, Nurture, Health, Life!

When I'm done I look at my family
and realize that they all look so happy and satisfied.
That is what surrounds me.
Caldo...

Austin

I am from a place where people roam
I am from peace and love
I am from food stands on corners
Where animals walk the streets day and night
Where the smell of *comida* comes from kitchens
Where violence lurks
Where the pheasants trudge and beg
Where we argue and fight
Where everything's in sight
Where birds and bees seek war
Where flowers beautify the lawn
And the grass is as green as algae
Where the old *chilé* plant rots in the back
Where neighbors are so grouchy
Where people's lives are taken
And restored souls are free
The neighborhood smells crowded,
earthy, smoky...alive
Where my dirty clothes clutter my room
Where my three cats pack in my bed
And claw at me when I toss and turn
Where sirens drag the town
I am from Janie and John, and a full house
Where my siblings argue and bring back peace
Where my parents give us frights
Where driving around town to see my dad is exhausting
Where cries and sighs begin
Where smiles and laughs dig in
Doors slam and horns honk
Where sticking things under my bed
Is a routine (See that moldy food?)
And hiding stuff seems to bring me glee...
Where eating out is so me
And where my town seems to be.
Texas.



Gaspar Zaragoza, Jr.

8th Grade, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, Los Angeles, CA

Do You See Me?

I am not a wetback but if I was,
I wouldn't be ashamed of myself.
I am from writing that speaks out to people,
that maybe will one day change the world.
I am not a father, and other Latino boys
are also not fathers, though people assume we are.
I am not a gangbanger, a shoplifter, or a trash-picker.
I am an intelligent student
who will go to Harvard or Stanford.

I am not invisible
I am not a whoever person.

I am not a gamer freak / no life
I am from playing video games with my friend's usernames:
kileope, kpackjr, cysticcoast.

I am not fat, but curvy. Yeah!
I am not a nerd,
I am not a four-eyes
I am shy but once you know me,
shy is something that is history.

I am not poor
I am from an okay neighborhood that spells out home.

I am someone who can be playful with others
so they get that laughter you need every day.

I am not a lazy-ass just because I sit around
I am not a weirdo
I am not your slave
I am not from an alcoholic parent.
I am not a mistake.

YOU DON'T KNOW ME UNTIL NOW

I am from a hardworking family that I see only sometimes,
though I know that they'd rather be with me.

I am from Mexico, its people and their delicious food.
I am from a mother that left her home because her father
was going to sell her. I am from a father who wanted
some adventures so he went out to see the world.

I am not trash
I am not stupid.

I am not someone who ignores others in need.
If I see an old lady drop her keys, I will pick them up
and give them to her so she can go back home.

I am from the little light that goes through the dark room,
that will one day be bright—so bright nobody can make the room
dark anymore.



ELIZABETH TAMAYO

8th Grade, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, Los Angeles, CA

You Don't Know Me Until Now

I am not American.
I am from a Sinalueñse mother and a Yucateco father
that came together no matter the critiques of them.

I am not a gangster.
I won't smoke a blunt even if my friends pressure me to do it.

I am not a lunatic.
I am a creative, random girl who doesn't care what other people think.

I am not an alien, although my initials are E.T.
I am not a shoplifter,
my Mom pays for everything I buy.

I am not a quiet person.
I might be loud, but I also have a heart that cares for my family.

I am not a *TAMALERA* or a *tamalera* junior.
I am not the daughter of *El Lechero*.
I might not have the looks of my parents, but I have their charisma.

I am not going to be a high school dropout,
Sometimes white people think that if your parents aren't educated,
you won't have the support to get educated. You hear that in the news
a lot, that it's Latinos who drop out. But it's not only Latinos,
it's worldwide.

My sister is not pregnant or psycho, she has overcome
all those very hurtful rumors.

I am not stupid, I am full of potential
that sometimes I don't show for everybody to see.

I am not a text freak,
I take advantage of the new technology.

YOU DON'T KNOW ME UNTIL NOW

I am not a bully, even though I've been suspended.
I am not a regret to my family
I am not a troublemaker.
I am proud of being who I am.

I might be a Mexican girl but I have a capacity that you will never know.
I am from a hardworking family
that never gives up till they succeed.

My dad is from a different religion and culture than my Mom.
He is Mayan and they were raised in *el rancho*.
He has *historias and creayancas*, rituals that my Mom doesn't believe in.
I don't know my Mom's culture but I know
that they are different. My Mom was raised in the house.
My Grandmother accused my father of being *poryosero*,
with no life, and nothing to offer my mom.
But they got together anyway and they are still together.

My mom has had fifteen surgeries in her right leg,
and she suffers all that pain while she's working.
She has to be eight hours standing at Ralph's Grocery.
She has suffered all those cuts in her hands from work.
She likes things to be very clean and organized.
She has gone through a lot, yet she is happy and keeps her spirits up.

My dad is a *hornalero*, sometimes he waits for work
at Home Depot as a painter. He's working right now.
It doesn't matter for him if he has to stay overtime
or miss one of my events.

If he has to miss an event of mine, he talks to me and he tells me
he is sorry he can't go, but he knows I can do it.
My dad's father left him, and he was rejected by his family.
He came here when he was thirteen and he had to work for his food and his roof.

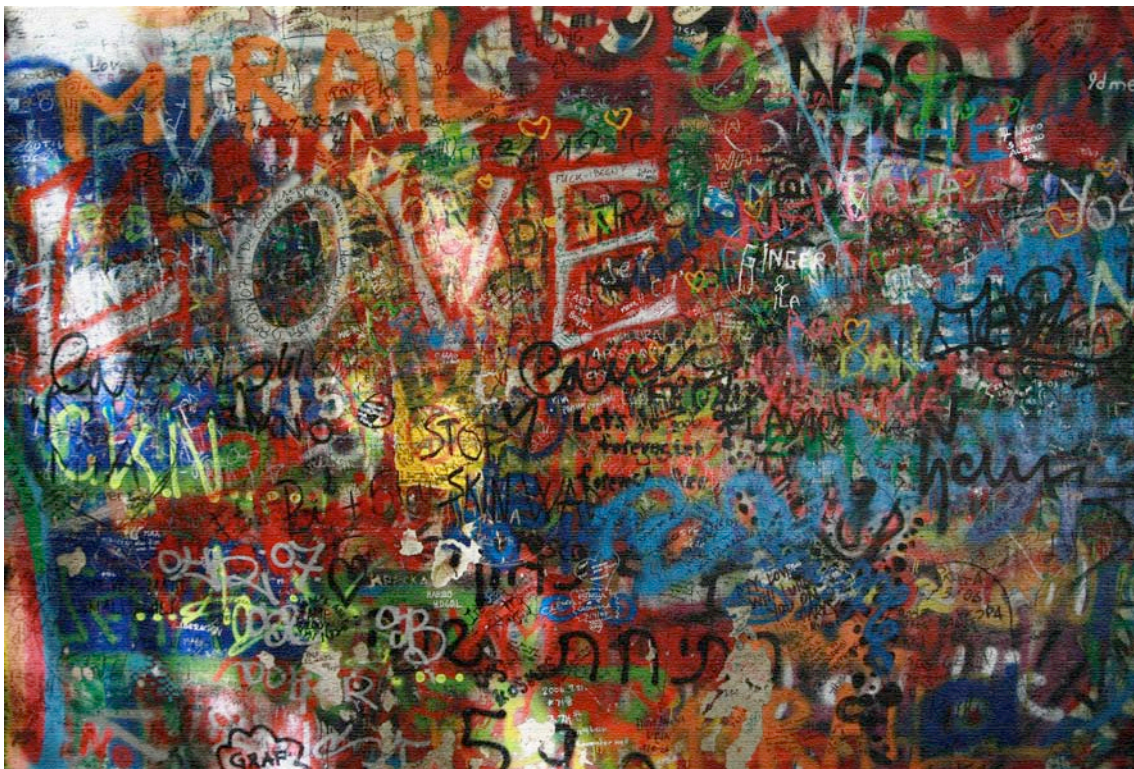
He wasn't with his family. The amazing thing is that
he does not have hatred or bitterness toward them
and he is really funny.

I could make a book out of all the things I've suffered.
I've suffered domestic violence, foster care, my sister's drug addiction,
suicidal temptations and sexual abuse in my family (but not to me.)

I am still happy, strong, brave, creative, and I am alive.
I am not a fake or weak leader.
Even though all these things have happened, I don't use them as excuses.

I want to become three things: a *fashionista*, an architect, and a lawyer.
I want to be someone important who fights for rights.
I still do what I have to do.
I am a unique girl that will do daring things
but I won't ride a rollercoaster because I don't enjoy the ride.

I am from the mother and father that fought
to make our family a loving family.
I am proud of who I am.



YOU DON'T KNOW ME UNTIL NOW

Jasmine Noehmi Alcaraz

6th Grade, East Austin College Prep Academy, Austin, TX

Where I'm From

I'm from the United States
My favorite food is *tamales*
My mom makes the best *tamale*
with cheese and *jalapenos*
In my house is the sounds
of screaming and fighting,
crying, yelling, laughing,
and the sound of the TV
with *telenovelas*.
My house smells like beans,
soup, and *postoles*.
My kitchen is small and old.
I used to have a room,
but my mom bought me a bed
and she put it in the living room.
At night, I'm sleeping
in the soft, comfy bed to relax
and when I wake up, I feel grumpy
and mad because my dad
wakes me up early
and sometimes I wake up
early early, like 5:45,
to go to the bus to get to school.
I feel as tired like I was sick.
On the way to school
I see cars, stoplights, CVS,
my old school Harris Elementary,
and old houses, some dogs, and
my friends' Dads going to work.
When I get to school
I feel tired and I see my friends, and
they are grumpy too. I see my teachers.
I see the principal. I see my best friend Laura.



YOU DON'T KNOW ME UNTIL NOW

In the afternoon, I am feeling happy.
My Mom makes me happy.
My brothers make me mad.
And sometimes my little brother
makes me sweet.
I play with my little brothers.
Sometimes my brothers fight.
Sometimes I want to go outside
when my little brother's crying.
I used to have a lot of dogs, but now
I have one Chihuahua named Chavo.
Most of all, I want to go to college
to be a doctor or a teacher.



Thelma Manzano

6th Grade, East Austin College Prep Academy, Austin, TX

Where I Am From

I come from my parents,
Juan and Rosalia.
I come from my house
surrounded by trees
on Lyons Road.
I come from playing soccer.
I come from a good friendly family.
I come from where we
get together on weekends,
holidays or birthdays.
We make something to eat
like *tamales*, *posole*,
carne asada, and strawberry pie.
I come from where we go to church
at Santa Julia
and we bring a candle
to *La Virgen de San Juan de los Lagos*
every time She makes us a favor.



I come from where we like to be
all together as a big family
and when we do,
I take care of my little cousin,
Adriana. She will be two
in *enero*, in January.
I come from a blue room
with a big window.
I come from a Spanish-speaking house.
I come from a tradition
that we will have our *quinceanera*
if we can. I want my *quinceanera* dress
to be white and red.
I come from where we are
laughing and being happy.



YOU DON'T KNOW ME UNTIL NOW

HUMBERTO PEREZ BELLO

8th Grade, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, Los Angeles, CA

The America I Want

The America I want is full of people who are different from each other yet know how to treat each other with respect.

The America I want is full of people who have rights, and help others.

No fingers pointing to Latino or black people. The America I want is full of people who think of ways to solve problems and don't just argue.



Digna Castro

8th Grade, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, Los Angeles, CA

What I See

The community I want has no discrimination.

We reduce, reuse, and recycle, and there's no more pollution.

Clean streets, nice people, and everyone has shelter, food, and love.

People see the glass as half-full, not half-empty.

We are full of positivity!

And, we could have a Lady President!

YOU DON'T KNOW ME UNTIL NOW

Yamile Duran

7th Grade, Lighthouse Community Charter School, Oakland, CA

In My World

Like my mother, I like to dance and move every time I'm in a party. I can't help dancing. We both like to party. We are both party animals. Whenever we're at a party, my dad or my uncles take her out to dance. When I go to a party, my cousin or my cousin's cousins take me out to dance. Everyone is impressed with how I'm dancing, and they start clapping! Then I get shy and sit down.

Like my father, I like to get things, but I have to earn them first. Also, I need to work for them to get them.

I'm a girl who still dreams of the perfect guy, even though I've been through a lot with guys. I started dating guys when I was ten. I've felt before getting my heart broken and it's sad.

When I get outside my house, I'm happy because my house is really boring. My street is sometimes silent, and sometimes loud with music and kids playing outside. When I cross some streets, there's gangbangers and drug dealers.

Everytime they are outside their house and a car goes by, drug dealers go up to the car. Gangbangers hang out in little groups wearing the same colors, and sometimes they carry guns.

Most of the time I go out with my sister, and if they bother us we just keep walking, ignore them, and turn the corner.

But then after that's over I get to a safe place where there are gangbangers but nowhere you can see them in the light. They are like vampires who only come out in the dark, drug dealers hiding from the police.

I like that I get invited to a lot of parties on my street, and my cousin lives close, so I go visit her when I get bored.

When I get to school I daydream what I would do the whole time, and how my day will be after I walk the streets.

My Life

I am from jealousy, to sadness and loneliness
From short skirts to shorts and tight jeans
I am from skate boarding and ice skating
I am from *pozole*, *mole*, and Snicker's bars
From watermelon, mango, and strawberries
I am from strawberry cake, cupcakes, and cookies
I am from crawling, walking, to running
From baby letters to normal letters to graffiti letters
I am from baby toys, to dirty diapers and *chupones*
I am from Nikes, flat shoes, and Vans
From Nikes of purple, white, and black
I am from white, black, and purple loop earrings
I am from skinny jeans, to normal jeans and color jeans
From lip gloss to eye liner and eye shadow
I am from scary movies to suspense movies
I am from hip-hop, Reggaeton, and *duraguenze*
From computers, i-pods, and radios
I am from black, brown, and blue eyeliner
From holding hands to a hug and a kiss
I am from love, and scared
that it might just be a dream!



Jorge Prieto

7th Grade, Lighthouse Community Charter School, Oakland, CA

Who I Am

I am from my Mom Lola and her warm hugs
and my dad Jorge and his big smiles

from Mama Ramona and her cool hands
and Papa Pedro's warm hand shakes

I am from my little brother and his big eyes.
I am from the first time we went to Mexico

from the full week in Blythe in 2009.
I am from the Christmas of 2008.

I am from cherry red roses, nectarines, and tomatoes,
in my backyard, from the messy bed and dark red room.

I am from my Vida Verde wood chip name tag
and black and white size 8.5 Vans.

I am from Mallard Ducks, from the San Lorenzo duck pond
and from Peanut barking every night.

I am from quiet nights with sprinklers on low.
I am from my Mom's delicious cinnamon apple cake,

from my Dad's succulent *carne asada* tacos.
I am from tamales de *queso y rajitas*, and

Munuelos con azucar y piloncillo.
I am from building and unbuilding electronics,

from playing soccer on chilly afternoons
I am from playing video games every weekend.

I am from like father, like son, from, "If you work hard, you can go anywhere."
I am from *mas vale tarde que nunca*,

better late than never.

I am from Nochistlan, Zacatecas

from the hot deserts near Blythe

I am from the quiet streets of San Lorenzo, CA.



YOU DON'T KNOW ME UNTIL NOW

Pedro Villalba

7th Grade, Lighthouse Community Charter School, Oakland, CA

I Am From

I am from Mexico,
San Antonio, Ixtlahuacan,
and also from a good cursive hand.

I am Mexican-raised,
I have light brown skin,
and love to go camping at night in the woods.

I am from video games,
like Xbox 360 "Left 4 Dead Live 1 and 2,"
and also from *Mi Pueblo* meat and fruit store.

I am from a respected family,
so I should be respectful
to get respect back.

I am from soccer balls
and soccer games and my favorite team,
Club America.

I am from hot food
like *posole* and chicken,
meat, *tamales*, also waffles in the morning.

I am from Mexico
but born and raised in California
since little.

I am a fan of good clothes
like my favorites are Gucci, Ecko,
Rockwear, and much more.

I am from hair grease and mousse
that make my hair smell good
and look shiny.

I am from a busy street
with a lot of people, a lot of homeless
asking for money,

and I'm broke, but I have
a heart, a good sense of humor.
I don't fight physically,
but I fight with words, not
bad words, but words that I can say at school,
words that can make a change.



YOU DON'T KNOW ME UNTIL NOW

Jorge Prieto

7th Grade, Lighthouse Community Charter School, Oakland, CA

My Oakland

Oakland would be beautiful if there weren't gangs. Because there are gangs, you can't wear red or blue or black. Not many people want to come here. If you go down the street, it's like that quote from *The House on Mango Street*:

"Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives....But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake, and our car windows get rolled up tight, and our eyes look straight."

That's how Sandra Cisneros says it.

If you wanted to live in peace, you'd have to be rich and live in the mountains. It seems like nothing bad or dangerous happens up there.

On the other hand, Oakland is beautiful for how it progresses and is becoming better in some ways. Downtown Oakland is becoming more beautiful. There's a new cathedral made out of glass. There's Lake Merritt and tall buildings. The Bay Bridge is being made new.

If I had a choice in Oakland, the police wouldn't kill people, and if they did they wouldn't lie about it. They would have better training. Oscar Grant is a black person, a father, who was killed by police when he was with his friends on the BART. That happens a lot with people of color and Mexicans. Police brutality happens very often and needs to stop because it's not right, and it's hurtful. I've never seen it with my own eyes, and I don't want to. I wish Oakland would become a better place.

At least Lighthouse Community Charter School is trying to make a change. If I had the power, I would make Oakland a better place by cleaning the streets and not making 'sideshowes' legal. Sideshowes are people in cars who do donuts and burn rubber and crash. If I had the power I would try to make gangs not exist and give dropouts better options and give everyone a second chance.

I would like to see people in Oakland getting a better education. There wouldn't be homelessness but successful businesses, and there wouldn't be police brutality. Gangs would not affect Oakland any more, and we would try to stop drug sales. All Oakland should take on the Lighthouse School goal: "To give every child a bright future."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Camino Nuevo Charter Academy (8th grade, Harvard Campus)

Writing

Mario Alvarado, Humberto Perez Bello, Digna Castro, Albert Isaac Galdamez, Bryan Melendez, Gelsey Bridget Padilla, Elizabeth Tamayo, Gaspar Zaragoza, Jr.

Photography

Krissbeth Granados, Estefany Mendez, Naomi Peña, Kevin Sanchez

Faculty

Heather McManus, Assistant Principal, and Chelsea Griswold, Teacher, Harvard K-8 Campus

East Austin College Prep Academy (6th grade)

Writing

Jasmine Noehmi Alcaraz, Liliana Carmona, Heaven Leigh Cook, Irie Corpus, Valerie Minerva Flores, Christian Gomez, Donjae Kenyon Harden, Thelma Manzano

Photography

Jailene Delacerda, Arlette Flores, Jonathan Henderson, Ezekial Ortiz

Faculty

Dr. Nellie Cantu, Principal and Superintendent of Education Programs; Jason B. Brafford, History Teacher; Sandra Estrada, Language Arts Teacher; Rachel Penticuff, Math Teacher; Erica Perez, Spanish Teacher; Tonya Ross-Miller, Technology Teacher

Lighthouse Community Charter School (7th grade)

Writing

Yamile Duran, Ebony Jones, Kellen Lee, Devonte Morris, Kelsy Nava-Lopez, Jorge Prieto, Pedro Villalba

Photography

Estefania Avila, Adam de los Reyes, Tyler Wallace, Bella Zepeda

Faculty

Jenna Stauffer, Founder and Director of Strategic Development; Tony Cuevas, Associate Director; Adriana Diaz, 7th grade P.E. Teacher; Izabela Kulesza, 7th grade Art teacher; Athena Larios, 7th grade Humanities Teacher; Melanie Swandby, 7th grade Math/Science Teacher

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Barbara Cervone, WKCD

YOU DON'T KNOW ME UNTIL NOW

CULTURAL CONVERSATIONS THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING

Supporting Students' Diverse Identities

by Abe Louise Young, WKCD Writing Facilitator

Copyright © 2010 Abe Louise Young and WKCD

Dear Teachers,

Thank you for reading this guide to creating cultural conversations in the classroom, and supporting students' diverse identities through the simple environment of the Writing Workshop.

First, I lay out a series of Writing Workshop Principles, followed by three consecutive lesson plans, or workshop maps. Though intended for middle and high school students, they can be used with any learners who are reasonably comfortable with a pencil in hand—from fourth grade to adulthood.

WRITING WORKSHOP PRINCIPLES

In successful writing workshop, we do four things:

- Use Prompts
- Write Together
- Read the New Work Aloud
- Respond Appreciatively

A complete writing workshop can take place in one class period, although students might want more time.

Use Prompts

A **prompt** is an **experience** that connects to the material we are studying. (For example: a walk in an outdoor environment, a model poem or piece of literature, a group discussion about an issue, a taste or smell, an artifact, a photo.) The teacher offers students the prompt(s) as a doorway to the writing process.

Write Together

We **write** in response to the prompt. The teacher announces how long we will write for (5-30 minutes.) Each student is free to write in any manner s/he wishes (with a few exceptions.) There is no "expectation" set for the content; students are encouraged to take risks and follow their own imaginations. Encourage them to write about what they **care** about and are interested in. Say "yes" to all questions that begin, "Is it okay if I write about...?"

Proper grammar and spelling do not matter at all at this stage. The important thing is that the student is guided to write about whatever s/he is actually thinking about, and helped over any bumps or blocks.

Read Aloud

After the writing time, it's time to share aloud. Ask, "Who would like to share their piece? We have time for ___ readers." Sharing aloud is voluntary: no one is required to read his or her work. (From time to time, the teacher should share his or her writing as well.)

A shy student may ask another person to read their writing for them.

Respond Appreciatively

We **appreciate** the writer by snapping or clapping after each reading. If there is time, teacher and other students **respond** by offering short, positive reactions naming what they:

- like
- heard
- notice
- remember
- can relate to

about the writing. We do not critique or make suggestions at this stage. (Peers may need guidance in how to respond to writing positively, but it is not difficult to set a standard of appreciative response once everyone experiences the vulnerability of sharing their fresh work aloud.) It is essential that students understand that the work is not graded.

Voila! You have a writing workshop.

Now, you can use it to support students' various learning styles; remove fear about writing; build community bonds; introduce new curricular material; learn about your student's lives, knowledge, and areas of expertise; honor their indigenous knowledge; make space for emotion; and nurture healthy self-esteem.

After Writing Lots, Choose Work to Revise and Polish for Publication

Students need to associate pleasure, competency, and creativity with writing—not boredom, fear, or 'getting things wrong.' They need ownership over their own words as a special creative part of themselves, just as they need to feel freedom and pleasure when creating visual artwork. Writing is art.

For this reason, we don't revise, correct, or ask them to polish every piece they write. We offer enough opportunities to write creatively that the student can choose their favorite pieces to correct, revise, and polish from amongst their wide portfolio.

Publication of that portfolio or selected pieces from it is the natural finish for a writing curriculum. Publication can take many forms: a reading for family and friends, a blog, a

handmade book, or an actual anthology. The true purpose of writing—the sharing of emotion, ideas, and experience with an audience—will motivate students to put words on paper, and be a cause for celebration.

THREE WRITING WORKSHOPS ABOUT PLACE and CULTURAL IDENTITY

Workshop One: "Where I'm From" Poem

Prompt

Read the classic poem "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon:

Where I'm From

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening,
it tasted like beets.)

I am from the forsythia bush
the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger,
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments--
snapped before I budded--
leaf-fall from the family tree.

Discuss

What about this poem gives you the strongest feelings? Is there anything you can relate to in it? How do you think the author feels about where she is from?

Write

Ask students to write their own "Where I'm From" poem. Rather than using this as a template, or suggesting they "copy" her form and order, encourage students but to follow their own intuition in writing about the smells, sights, sounds, voices, people, and place they are from.

At any point, the teacher can stimulate creativity by asking a question aloud:

"What do you hear at night before you go to sleep?"

"What special foods does your family cook for celebrations?"

"What songs does your family or church/mosque/temple sing?"

"Who do you miss?"

"What smells float through your house or neighborhood?"

Workshop Two: Claiming and Naming Our Communities

Prompt

Read two poems by Langston Hughes: "Theme for English B" and "I've Known Rivers," and two poems by Gwendolyn Brooks: "We Real Cool" and "The Bean Eaters." (These are each easily available online.) Discuss.

Warm Up

Draw a series of at least eight concentric circles on the board. Write "self" in the center circle, and "family" on the next circle. Ask students to draw the same on a blank sheet of paper. Then, ask them,

Who is your "we"?

Name the groups, places, or communities they are a part of, labeling the other circles in order of size and importance. The goal is to map out fully the numerous communities and identities that apply to the lives of the students in the room.

Discussion

Discuss as the process takes place: *What's the largest group we are all a part of? Is anyone here a part of a community that no one else is? Are teenagers a community? Discuss the idea that in our different identities, we are seen differently—and perhaps, act differently.*

Does everyone see these communities as the students see them? If so, why? If not, why not?

Introduce the idea that all communities have challenges (things they struggle with) and strengths (unique resources to draw on.) If students wish, they can discuss **challenges** and **strengths** of their own communities. Copyright 2010 © Abe Louise Young and WKCD

Writing Time

Ask students to write the following statements, and complete them, one by one. Give students three minutes or so to complete each statement. The only rule is that each statement has to be completed in a different way.

On planet Earth, I am...
My mother came from...
My father came from...
In [country of origin], I am...
In [the United States], I am...
In [state], I am...
In [city], I am...
In [neighborhood], I am...
On [name of home street], I am...
At school, I am...
With [], I am...
To [], I am...
In my house, I am...
In my room, I am...
In my heart/mind, I am...

Follow Up or Continuation

Students might write freely, beginning each sentence with the word “we.”

Workshop Three: Taking The Leader’s Voice

Prompt

Hand out colored pencils and blank paper. Ask students to draw one of three options:

- the path they take from school to home
- their block
- their neighborhood
- their city
- their country

This artwork can be abstract or representational. No need to be artistically inclined here.

The goal is to stimulate memory and visual thinking. Suggest that they might include people and other forms of life in the pictures.

Discussion

Discuss the idea that all places have challenges and strengths, ugly and beautiful aspects. All places have things we appreciate and things we wish would change. Only by envisioning how things could be different, can we move toward creating the place we truly want to live in.

Brainstorm/List Writing

Make a list of good and bad, or ugly and beautiful, or challenged and resourceful things about their city/home.

Writing Time

Ask students to describe where they live, in words on paper, for five minutes. Then, ask them to envision the America/city/neighborhood/home they **want** to live in for fifteen minutes.

Title the writing, “The [America/Oakland/community/home] I Want,” depending on the scale they choose.

Challenge them to name concretely what they see and what they’d like to change. Nurture their power of dreaming. Support this writing process as an act of civic leadership.



Copyright © 2010 Abe Louise Young and WKCD

All rights reserved.

No part of this guide, “Cultural Conversations through Creative Writing,” may be reproduced, in any form, without written permission from the author.

National Council of La Raza (NCLR)

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations, NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. In the summer of 2009, with support from State Farm Insurance, NCLR launched a service-learning project for middle schools in its School Network.

Contact:

National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
Raul Yzaguirre Building
1126 16 Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202.785.1670 | www.nclr.org

What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD)

What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD) started in 2001 to make public the voices and views of adolescents. On its website, WKCD documents young people’s lives, learning, and partnerships with adults both in and outside school. WKCD also collaborates with students and educators around the world on books, photography projects, curricula, and research to expand current views on what constitutes challenging learning and achievement.

Contact:

What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD)
PO Box 603252
Providence, RI 02906
Phone: 401.247.7665 | www.wkcd.org

Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

Since opening its doors in 2001, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy (CNCA) has become one of the top performing charter schools in Los Angeles. It is spread across three campuses in the city’s downtown. The Harvard campus (grades K – 8) serves more than 460 students and their families—96 percent of whom are Latino—in the MacArthur Park/Pico-Union Neighborhoods of Los Angeles. All three campuses seek to educate students in a college preparatory environment with a curriculum tied to state standards while incorporating an emphasis on the arts, social justice, and parent and community outreach. In 2008 - 2009, CNCA Harvard had a combined API score of 817, well above both the district and state API averages.

Contact:

CNCA Harvard Campus
635 South Harvard Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90005
Phone: 213.736.5542 | www.caminonuevo.org

East Austin College Prep Academy

East Austin College Prep Academy aims to serve as a model middle school that successfully prepares all students, regardless of economic background, for a rigorous high school curriculum, graduation, and, ultimately, a successful college experience and career. The Academy accepted its first class of 90 sixth graders in 2009, and will open its seventh and eighth grade campuses in 2010 and 2011. It is located in the eastern part of Austin, Texas—an area of the city with a high concentration of minority and low-income families. By providing a balanced, comprehensive program, the school also nurtures visual and performing arts and showcases the tremendous talent of students whose abilities are often overlooked. It is part of Southwest Key Programs.

Contact:

East Austin College Prep Academy
6002 Jain Lane
Austin, TX 78721
Phone: 512.462.2181 | www.swkey.org

Lighthouse Community Charter School

Since its opening in 2002, Lighthouse has developed an innovative program based on five priorities, for students in grades K-12: high expectations, a rigorous curriculum, serving the whole child, family involvement, and teachers as learners. The K- 8 program received a ten out of ten in its similar school ranking from the state of California, and the 9 -12 program received an eight out of ten. The latter is ranked among the top three public high schools in Oakland overall, regardless of income level or students served. All students in the first graduating class were accepted to four-year colleges or universities; 92 percent are first in the family to go to college.

Contact:

Lighthouse Community Charter School
444 Hegenberger Road
Oakland, CA 94612
Phone: 510.271.8801 | www.lighthousecharter.org



“I am from the little light that goes through the dark room, that will one day be bright”

— Pedro Villalba, Oakland, CA

NCLR
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA

WHAT **Kids** CAN DO

This project was made possible by the support of State Farm Foundation, through a generous grant to NCLR and its middle school Education Affiliate network.
