

STEPPENWOLF EDUCATION

Virtual Workshop: Teacher Skill-Building Workshop

March 26, 2020

Created by Teaching Artist: Greg Geffrard

(50 minute lesson)

LOI: While exploring the poetical work of Erika L. Sanchez's poem *Forty-Three*, can we utilize stillness to write our next chapter in an ever-shifting landscape and explore how expansive our empathy is during times of consistent uncertainty?

CAPACITIES: Noticing Deeply, Making Connections & Exhibiting Empathy

MODALITY: Written Artmaking

MATERIALS:

- Viewing Device (Computer/Phone)
 - Pens/Pencils
-

LESSON STEPS

STEP ONE (5 minutes) Breath Warm-Up (listening to Eric Satie)

- Invite teachers to be guided through a breathing warm-up.
 - *How might this breathing warm-up connect us during this time of physical distancing?*

STEP TWO (15 minutes) Context/Front Loading for *Forty-Three*

- Listen to [NPR's Lulu Garcia-Navarro talks to journalist Anabel Hernandez about her new book, *A Massacre in Mexico: The True Story Behind the Missing Forty-Three Students*.](#)
- Friday, Sept. 26, 2014, Forty-three students from Raúl Isidro Burgos Teachers' College were trying to secure buses for a trip to Mexico City. They studied at an all-male teacher training college in the town of Ayotzinapa. The college has a history of left-wing activism and the students regularly took part in protests.
- The forty-three were part of a larger group of teacher trainees from Ayotzinapa who travelled to the nearby town of Iguala to protest against what they saw as discriminatory hiring practices for teachers. They also wanted to raise funds for a trip they were planning to take to Mexico City to mark the anniversary of the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre, when a large number of students were killed by the security forces in the capital.
- As they were travelling back from Iguala to Ayotzinapa, they were confronted by municipal police, who opened fire on the buses they were travelling in. The officers maintain they did so because the buses had been hijacked, while the surviving students say the drivers had agreed to give them a lift. Police also mistakenly fired on a bus

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carrying a local football team, killing its driver and one of the players on board. A woman travelling in a nearby taxi was killed by a bullet. Three students were also killed, two of them shot dead, while the body of the third was found mutilated the next morning near the scene of the shooting.

- The 43 students on two of the five buses are now among the more than 40,000 other people in Mexico who are registered as disappeared, many in the country's drug war. It is believed that the two buses had 2 millions dollars worth of heroin underneath them and these forty-six killed/disappeared individuals were simply a casualty of an ongoing drug war
- The forty-three students were reported missing after the clash between the municipal police and the students. An official government report said they were seized by municipal officers and taken to the police station in the nearby town of Cocula. There, they were handed over by corrupt police officers to members of a local drugs gang, Guerreros Unidos (United Warriors), the report said. The gangs then took them to a local rubbish dump, where they killed them and burned their bodies, the official report continued. They dumped their bones and ashes in a nearby stream, it concluded.
- Clarify any questions/ inquiries by the teachers

STEP THREE (5 minutes) Forty-Three read by Erika Sanchez (44:20-49:20)

- [Listen to the poem being read by Erika Sanchez](#) (screen share so everyone can follow along)
- Listen to the tail end of the interview to launch us into the next exercise

STEP FOUR (5 minutes) Connections/Clarity/ Cleansing Breath

- Allow time for teachers to ask clarifying questions about the poem itself and speak on their noticings

STEP FIVE (15 minutes) Digging/Unlayering

"Writing is like archeology. Where most people might see an empty field, a stretch of barren desert, archaeologists see a world of meaning, a world of stories under the surface. Instead of walking past the empty field, the stretch of desert, they stop. They look around and examine the environment. They pay attention. Then they pull out their shovels and start digging. That's what writers do too. They slow down the world. They take a second look and a third. They dig and uncover." - Jeff Kass & Scott Beal

We are going to be writing unlayering poems by digging into the imagery of *Forty-Three*. How unlayering/digging works:

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- Starting from an image/noun from *Forty-Three*, you will begin by stating that underneath that is _____

Example:

*underneath the rain are the answers loverdo and under dew
the answers that have been washed away from
skin peppers the color irrelevant
forgotten by those who never chose to acknowledge in the first place*

*underneath the forgotten are their names
stammering clumsily on their parents lips and heart
fighting against historical erasure*

- We will create a poem that is a dozen layers deep while using the five senses and imagery as much as possible. In other words, only utilizing the phrase “underneath the” 12 times
- Instead of “underneath my heart is anger” expand the imagery to say “under my heart is a house filled with doors that slam so hard they shake the walls”
- Rely on images to do most of the work to communicate the idea
- The goal is not to write a single poem but create a road map for more ideas to guide you to more poems
- If you are having difficulty finding a place to start, you can use my opening line to get you started or think of something physically tangible (the red poppies, bus full of students, the expanding chest, the barbed wires, the black mask, etc.) and then explore as imaginatively as you would love to.

STEP SIX (5 minutes) Sharing and Reflection

- Ask a few folks if they’d like to share 3 lines from their piece
- Final full group reflection. Ask teachers if there are any questions they feel would be easily answered right now as opposed to later
- Take a final cleansing breath together

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Thanks for all your great work!