

## CURRICULUM MATERIALS: IV

### ODES TO JUÁREZ: PLACE-BASED POETRY WITH BENJAMIN ALIRE SÁENZ AND ALICE LEORA BRIGGS

#### Introduction and Objective

The following lesson plan was adapted from “[Creating Place-based Poems](#)” by “POV: Documentaries with a point of view.” The original lesson plan is based upon the documentary “El Velador (The Night Watchman)” and poetry by Dolores Dorantes. The lesson can be found at [http://www.pbs.org/pov/elvelador/lesson\\_plan.php](http://www.pbs.org/pov/elvelador/lesson_plan.php). For a more complete description of the original lesson plan, go to the Supplementary Resources section at the end of this guide.

This adapted activity uses three different resources: Alice Leora Briggs’ artwork from “In the Wake of Juárez”; Benjamin Alire Sáenz’s poetry “Odes to Juárez”; and two of Marjorie Agosín’s poems from *Secrets in the Sand: The Young Women of Ciudad Juárez*. Students will use the art and poetry as the basis for creating their own place-based poems. Both Briggs’ images and Sáenz’s poetry are available online. Sáenz’s “Odes to Juárez” are not published yet, but he read some of his poems for a PBS series on poets and poetry, which can be watched online for free. Agosín’s poems are included below.

#### Materials:

- ❖ Computer with speakers
- ❖ Internet connection
- ❖ Projection screen
- ❖ Images from “In the Wake of Juárez” (available online at <http://aliceleorabriggs.com>)
- ❖ Sáenz’s readings of “Odes to Juárez” (available online at: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/poetry/2010/06/benjamin-alire-saenz.html>)
- ❖ Copies of Agosín’s “Only Death / Tan solo la muerte” and “I Have Wandered the Countryside / He ido con tu nombre” (see below)
- ❖ Paper
- ❖ Pen

#### Procedure:

1. If students are not yet familiar with the history and current state of Juárez, provide some background material, either through readings (some suggested references are included in the Supplementary Resources section at the end of

this guide) or a brief explanation of the background material included throughout this guide.

2. Display images from Briggs' exhibit "In the Wake of Juárez". Some of the images contain violent and/or explicit content, so spend time in advance selecting the images you plan to share. You may also provide copies of the two images included in this guide which can be reproduced for educational purposes. Allow students time to take in the images and process what they see. Then, guide students through a discussion that focuses on the sensory details suggested by the images. Ask students to imagine that they are part of the image. What do they see? What do they smell? What do they feel? How do they feel? What do they hear? What do they taste?
3. Next, play the recording of Sáenz reading "Ode to Juárez, No. 5" and "Juárez: The Last Ode". Briefly discuss with students what they thought. Then, play the recording a second time and ask students to take notes on the words or images which speak to them or which provide sensory descriptions.
4. Then, provide copies of Agosín's two poems. Read through the poems with students, asking them to note the same types of things they did with Sáenz's work.
5. Once students have discussed all three resources, ask them to look for images or themes that the three share. Are there common images? While all three resources are about Juárez, do they speak to different things? Do they focus on different subjects? Topics?
6. Explain to students that they are going to write a place-based poem using the information they've learned from Briggs, Sáenz, and Agosín (and any other resources relevant to Juárez). A place-based poem is essentially a five senses poem written about a particular place. In their poem students will describe what they see, smell, taste, hear, and feel in Juárez. They can choose to write about a specific place in Juárez or Juárez in general. They could imagine that they are in one of the images or poems they've analyzed. The poem can follow as simple a format as "I see. . . I feel. . . I smell. . . I taste. . . I hear". Or, the sensory descriptions can be included in more complex sentences like "It was as if I was inhaling smoke, the smell of death choking and burning my insides".
7. Provide time for students to brainstorm and write their rough drafts. Once their draft is finished, follow your classroom procedure for editing and revising.

**Tan sólo la muerte**  
by Marjorie Agosín

Tan sólo la muerte  
Como una caricia  
Beinvenida entre la mudez  
Y el letargo  
Tan sólo la muerte  
Guardiana,  
Angel de reposo  
Tan sólo la muerte:  
Mensajera del alivio  
Repositora de ese cuerpo que no calma  
Que no gime  
Que no es  
Tan sólo la muerte  
Reconoce el espanto  
Se la envuleve toda  
Apacigua su cuerpo desbandado  
Se la lleva al jardín  
Nocturno  
Lejos del desierto

**Only Death**  
by Marjorie Agosín

Only death  
Like a caress  
Welcome among muteness  
And lethargy  
Only death  
Guardian  
Angel of repose  
Only death:  
Messenger of relief  
Repository of that body that  
doesn't cry out  
That doesn't moan  
That no longer is  
Only death  
Recognizes terror  
And surrounds everything  
Soothing her scattered  
remains,  
It brings her to a  
Nocturnal garden  
Far from the desert.

## He ido con tu nombre

by Marjorie Agosín

He ido con tu nombre  
Por los campos  
He entrado a ciudades deshabitadas  
Donde los pájaros mueren en la noche  
Te he buscado  
Entre los mudos  
Las mujeres que solo miran perdidas  
Hacia el horizonte  
He viajado contigo y tu nombre  
En busca de tu luz  
He repetido tu nombre hasta  
Ser un sueño perdido en las planicies  
Y nadie responde nadie reconoce  
Nadie indaga  
Tan sólo tu nombre  
En mis labios secos  
Tan sólo tu nombre que te recuerda  
Palpear esencias, despertarse sola  
Con tu nombre como una ceniza que  
numbla la luz.

## I have wandered the countryside

by Marjorie Agosín

I have wandered the countryside  
With your name  
I have entered uninhabited cities  
Where birds die at night  
I have looked for you  
Among the silent ones  
Women who gaze toward the horizon  
At their losses.  
I have wandered with you and your  
name  
In search of your light  
And have repeated it until  
It has become a dream on the  
wasteland  
And no one responds, no one  
recognizes  
No one inquires  
Only your name  
On my dry lips  
Only your name that remembers you  
To touch absences, to awaken alone  
With your name like ashes that cloud  
the night.