

# Curriculum: The Arpillerista

## Overview: Poem Analysis

The following activity guides students through an analysis of Marjorie Agosín's Poem "The Arpillerista," which is reprinted here from "Stitching Truth: Women's Protest Art in Pinochet's Chile."

Agosín's poem offers an excellent way to bridge literacy with content area studies. Through analyzing the poem, students gain both knowledge of this period of Chilean history, but also experience in practicing literary analysis of poetry. Since students would need at least some understanding of the historical period in order to complete the analysis, this is an activity best done after the unit has already been introduced. It could even be used as an assessment activity at the end of the unit to gauge student knowledge.

1. What is an arpillerista? Agosín defines the arpillerista as "artisan of remains." What does this mean within the Chilean context?
2. How does an arpillerista "burn" with cold? What does the cold represent? (s. 1 v. 3)
3. What is a shroud? (s. 1 v. 6)
4. Why do you think Agosín uses all of the allusions to fabric? (remnants, trousers, ragged scraps)
5. Who is Philomena? (s. 1 v. 13) Why is she relevant to the poem?
6. Who are the "victorious armies"? (s. 2 v. 7)
7. What does it mean to "bring the dead back to life" in the context of the arpilleras? (s. 2 v. 9)

## The Arpillerista

The arpillerista,  
artisan of remains  
burns with rage and cold  
as she tenderly  
picks through the remnants of her dead,  
salvages the shroud of her husband  
the trousers left after the absences  
submerges herself in cloth of foaming, silent blood  
and though she is fragile she grows large,  
sovereign over her adobe hut,  
her ragged scraps  
and determined to tell her story  
truer than the tale woven by her sister Philomena.  
Disruptive and beautiful she  
puts together her flayed remnants  
like a greenish forgotten skin  
and with her disguised thimble  
hidden in the pocket of her modest apron  
and her harmless needle  
she conjures up victorious armies  
embroiders humble people smiling, become triumphant  
brings the dead back to life  
fabricates water, bell towers, schools, dining rooms  
giant suns  
and the Cordillera of the Andes  
peaks opening like portals  
of this splendid city.

—  
Marjorie Agosín  
*Scraps of Life: Chilean Arpilleras*