

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. 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.