

Workshop Session 1

Reader Response: Pat Mora and James Welch

Video Program Overview

Part I: In Santa Fe, New Mexico, Alfredo Lujan and his students explore the poetry of Pat Mora. Inspired by Mora, the students create and present their own poetry. Part II: Greg Hirst's students on the Fort Peck Reservation in Wolf Point, Montana, respond to James Welch's literature about contemporary Native American realities through a series of reading and writing activities.

Theory Overview

Reader response stresses the importance of the reader's role in interpreting texts. Rejecting the idea that there is a single, fixed meaning inherent in every literary work, this theory holds that the individual *creates* his or her own meaning through a "transaction" with the text based on personal associations. Because all readers bring their own emotions, concerns, life experiences, and knowledge to their reading, each interpretation is subjective and unique.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready—Part I (15 minutes)

- Read one of the three Pat Mora poems in the Readings following this session of the guide: "Immigrants," "The Desert Is My Mother," or "Teenagers."
- Choose a favorite line from one of the poems.
- Share your line with the group.
- Explain why you chose the line.

Watch Part I: Pat Mora (approximately 30 minutes)

Going Further—Part I (15 minutes)

Discuss as many questions as time permits. You may want to answer more of the questions in your journals at home and share ideas on Channel-Talk.

- What did you think about Part I and the way in which the teacher used a reader-response approach to the literature?
- How might you incorporate or adapt the strategies for use in your classroom?
- How might you work with colleagues in your department/school/district to bring authors to your community?
- How can you provide opportunities for your students to share their work with the community?
- What are some possible next steps to this lesson?

Getting Ready—Part II (15 minutes)

- One member of the group should read aloud "Christmas Comes to Moccasin Flat," from James Welch's *Riding the Earthboy 40*, found in the Readings following this session.
- Then read the poem again silently. At each punctuation point in the poem, jot down in the margin thoughts, ideas, and personal responses.
- Share your thoughts and ideas about the poem with the group.

Watch Part II: James Welch (approximately 30 minutes)

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

Going Further—Part II (15 minutes)

Discuss as many questions as time permits. You may want to answer more of the questions in your journals at home and share ideas on Channel-Talk.

Reader response theory asserts the importance of the reader's personal response. All readers bring knowledge and experience that, in one way or another, relates to the reading. While this approach liberates the students from a right versus a wrong answer while reading, when reading cross-culturally, it's crucial for teachers and students to reflect upon, interrogate and extend understanding beyond personal response through questioning conversation and wider reading. —*Dale Allender, Associate Executive Director, NCTE*

- What do you think about Part II and the way in which the teacher used a reader response approach to the literature?
- What are some of the ways you might extend students' understanding of contemporary Native American issues and James Welch's works beyond personal response?
- What are some possible next steps to this lesson?

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/hslit and:

- Review Workshop Session 1: read the theory overview, teaching strategies, information about the authors and literature, lesson plans, and resources.
- Prepare for Workshop Session 2: preview the theory overview and the information about the authors and literature (biographies, synopses of works, Q&As, key references, and resources).

In the Readings following Workshop Session 2:

- Read: "the hatmaker," "spring ride," and "how is her name april?" from Keith Gilyard's *Poemographies*; and "Coyote Imitates Bear and Kingfisher," "Coyote Juggles His Eyes," and "The Spirit Chief Names the Animal People" from Mourning Dove's *Coyote Stories*. Bring your copies of these works to the next workshop session.

Ongoing Activities

- In your journal, include thoughts, ideas, or questions you might have as you review the online materials and reflect on the workshop session. Make note of whether your participation in the session influenced any experiences in your classroom.
- Online, click on Reflection/Interactive Forum, an activity that you can use to interpret poems using the pedagogical approaches covered in this workshop. Read one of the two poems featured and respond to the *reader response* questions. Share your answers on the discussion board.
- Share ideas on Channel-Talkhslit@learner.org. Subscribe to this email discussion list and communicate with other workshop participants online. To subscribe to Channel-Talkhslit, visit <http://www.learner.org/mailman/listinfo/channel-talkhslit>.

Workshop Session 1 Readings

Immigrants

wrap their babies in the American flag,
feed them mashed hotdogs and apple pie,
name them Bill and Daisy,
buy them blonde dolls that blink blue
eyes or a football and tiny cleats
before the baby can even walk,
speak to them in thick English,
hallo, babee, hallo,
whisper in Spanish or Polish
when the babies sleep, whisper
in a dark parent bed, that dark
parent fear, “Will they like
our boy, our girl, our fine American
boy, our fine American girl?”

Los inmigrantes

envuelven a sus bebés en la bandera americana,
les sirven puré de *hot dog* y pastel de manzana,
los nombran Bill y Daisy,
les compran muñecas rubias que pestañean azules
ojos o una pelota de fútbol y tojinitos
antes de que el bebé ni pueda andar,
les hablan en un inglés espeso,
alou, beibi, alou,
susurran en español o polaco
cuando los bebés duermen, susurran
en la oscura cama de los padres, el oscuro
temor de los padres—*¿Querrán*
a nuestro hijo, a nuestra hija, nuestro buen americano,
nuestra buena americana?

Workshop Session 1 Readings, cont'd.

The Desert Is My Mother

I say feed me.
She serves red prickly pear on a spiked cactus.

I say tease me.
She sprinkles raindrops in my face on a sunny day.

I say frighten me.
She shouts thunder, flashes lightning.

I say hold me.
She whispers, "Lie in my arms."

I say heal me.
She gives me chamomile, oregano, peppermint.

I say caress me.
She strokes my skin with her warm breath.

I say make me beautiful.
She offers turquoise for my fingers,
a pink blossom for my hair.

I say sing to me.
She chants her windy songs.

I say teach me.
She blooms in the sun's glare,
the snow's silence,
the driest sand.

The desert is my mother.
El desierto es mi madre.
The desert is my strong mother.

El desierto es mi madre

Le digo, dame de comer.
Me sirve rojas tunas en nopal espinoso.

Le digo, juegatela conmigo.
Me salpica la cara con gotitas de lluvia en día asoleado.

Le digo, asústame.
Me grita con truenos y me tira relámpagos.

Le digo, abrázame.
Me susurra, "Acuéstate aquí."

Le digo, cúrame.
Me da manzanilla, orégano, yerbabuena.

Le digo, acaríciame.
Me roza la cara con su cálido aliento.

Le digo, hazme bella.
Me ofrece turquesa para mis dedos,
una flor rosada para mi cabello.

Le digo, cántame.
Me arrulla con sus canciones de viento.

Le digo, enséñame.
Y florece en el brillo del sol,
en el silencio de la nieve,
en las arenas más secas.

El desierto es mi madre.

El desierto es mi madre poderosa.

"The Desert Is My Mother" by Pat Mora is reprinted with permission from the publisher of *My Own True Name: New and Selected Poems for Young Adults* (Houston: Arte Público Press—University of Houston, 2000)

Workshop Session 1 Readings, cont'd.

Teenagers

One day they disappear
into their rooms.
Doors and lips shut,
and we become strangers
in our own home.

I pace the hall, hear whispers,
a code I knew but can't remember,
mouthing by mouths I taught to speak.

Years later the door opens.
I see faces I once held,
open as sunflowers in my hands. I see
familiar skin now stretched on long bodies
that move past me
glowing
almost like pearls.

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Workshop Session 1 Readings, cont'd.

CHRISTMAS COMES TO MOCCASIN FLAT

Christmas comes like this: Wise men
unhurried, candles bought on credit (poor price
for calves), warriors face down in wine sleep.
Winds cheat to pull heat from smoke.

Friends sit in chinked cabins, stare out
plastic windows and wait for commodities.
Charlie Blackbird, twenty miles from church
and bar, stabs his fire with flint.

When drunks drain radiators for love
or need, chiefs eat snow and talk of change,
an urge to laugh pounding their ribs.
Elk play games in high country.

Medicine Woman, clay pipe and twist tobacco,
calls each blizzard by name and predicts
five o'clock by spitting at her television.
Children lean into her breath to beg a story:

Something about honor and passion,
warriors back with meat and song,
a peculiar evening star, quick vision of birth.
Blackbird feeds his fire. Outside, a quick 30
below.

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Reprinted from *Riding the Earthboy 40*: "Christmas Comes to Moccasin Flat" by permission of Carnegie Mellon University Press. © 1997 by James Welch.

Workshop Session 1 Reading List

Works marked with * are required texts for this workshop that do not appear within the Readings in this guide. Other works are the sources for excerpted materials in the Readings or are recommended for additional study.

Mora, Pat. *My Own True Name: New and Selected Poems for Young Adults 1984-1999*.

Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000. ISBN 1558852921

* Welch, James. *The Death of Jim Loney*. New York: Penguin Books, 1987. ISBN 0140102914

Welch, James. *Riding the Earthboy 40*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University Press, 1997. ISBN 0887482643

Notes
