Boundaries, Borders, and Sliding Glass Doors
Where do we come from, and where are we going?

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Abstract: This unit explores the themes of boundaries, borders, and sliding glass doors through a creative writing lens in a high school Creative Writing classroom for students grades 10-12. Drawing from critical literacy scholars like Freire, Rosenblatt, and Bishop, the unit challenges traditional academic confines by emphasizing personal and cultural narratives over standardized curricula. Through children's literature, fiction, and poetry, students engage in varied forms of creative writing dependent on their personal interests and identities. Students will explore and analyze various craft elements to inspire their own writing practices. The unit and related course aim to empower students as critical thinkers and writers, fostering creativity and imagination as essential tools for personal and social transformation.

Keywords: Creative Writing, Storytelling, Place-based Learning, Poetry, Fiction, Children's Literature, Writing Workshop, Cultural Identity, Critical Literacy, Boundaries, Borders

Unit Content

all around, and creeping
self righteous, let's say it, fascism,
how else to say, border
—*Dionne Brand, from "Inventory"*

Introduction

I believe that being aware of and valuing my own story is placed critically at the heart of my teaching–as argued by Nieto (2003) we must first consider our own heritages, experiences, and family histories if we are to focus directly on our students. Nieto perhaps most aptly describes this approach through reference to a quote from another bilingual educator, Laura Gibson– "Teaching is an encounter with the self" (25). Thus, my unit content is informed not only through my students' respective identities and my chosen seminar–Children's Literature and the Immigrant Experience–but also through my own identity, and my abridged teacher autobiography that thus informs the background of my inquiry.

Story of the Question

This is my second year as a learning support teacher at Science Leadership Academy high school, and my fifth year teaching students. I grew up in California, where transient movement is less covert; in 2023, government statistics (Gramlich, 2024) noted a record high of 250,000 "migrant crossings" at the lines legally separating the United States and Mexico. I thus grew up with many friends from Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, and the cultures of the Americas were much more explicitly enmeshed in my everyday life. In 2017, inspired by my interest in Spanish language and multilingualism, I moved to Spain. My time in Córdoba was punctuated by slower

moments of self-reflection and ethereal strolls through mosques disguised as cathedrals, where I could observe where the north and south met to dance–occasionally a Flamenco, but with practiced diligence, I could make out a Shikat. I was thus drawn to the Spain-Morocco relationship, and noted many parities with the California-Mexico one.

Upon my return to UC Berkeley, I took a class on Islam, and my newfound appreciation for ideas around othering and belonging in connection with this class coupled with the current political landscape would go on to influence my teaching pedagogy and practices. The venn diagram, it seemed, extended across cultures and bodies of water; the linguistic and cultural pluralism of Morocco was echoed in my native California, where the majority of my students spoke Spanish at home, translanguaging and code-switching as soon as they stepped through one doorway, returning through another. I would go on to be the point person for these families, realizing what a privilege it was to have pursued my education in my first language, and reworking my own definition of education. Education, I decided, was deeply intertwined with community. I began to ensure that I was uplifting students' interests and centering their respective identities, by surveying my students and families on their interests and passions, and would embed said responses within the curriculum.

These students–meaning, culturally and linguistically diverse students–are oft viewed as deficient when they do not fit neatly into the standards that make up the American educational system–that is, white people and their beliefs, experiences, outcomes, histories, and epistemologies are viewed as the norm to which all others are compared. This grew my curiosity of these transient spaces of being, in tandem with what it would look like to center my multilingual and multicultural students within the US schooling context such that their identities and cultures are given equal precedence. When I came to Penn's Urban Teaching Apprenticeship Program, I was able to build my pedagogy around the latter. My students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds differed heavily from my students in California, and I thus began to rework my practice around these new identities. For my thesis, I focused on centering students at the intersection of culturally responsive pedagogy, socioemotional learning, and student-centered learning by conducting research within my classroom, the implications of which built the foundation of my student-centered praxis. My next goal is to explore the former: that is, how can my multicultural and multilingual students' ways of being be explicitly uplifted as cultural capital to upset typical power dynamics such that they are the teachers?

In 2022, I began my current teaching position at Science Leadership Academy, learning the ropes alongside what is our current sophomore class. According to my colleagues, this year saw a large shift in our freshman class: we were encountering behaviors left and right, students cared much more about their social well-being than they did what teachers named as learning, and they most certainly did not bother with school work that they were not interested in. I saw this as a major turning point in a post-COVID world, with students noting discrepancies in academia and school more generally as compared to their goals, interests, and future job prospects. Thus, many students turned (and are turning) to social over academic capital, spending time outside of class, not attending school, and exiting the learning environment to spend time with novel found friends.

Many students, particularly those not on a four-year college track, feel disconnected from traditional curricula, questioning its relevance to their futures. Moreover, recent discussion among my students has highlighted the need for inclusive dialogue spaces and discussions of

current social issues within the curriculum. In my position at Science Leadership Academy, I often have the privilege of working with students one-on-one. I am thus able to interview my students individually, to establish a baseline of students' self-perceptions in school, to gauge student interest and disinterest in curricular practices, to assess students' perceptions of teacher care, and to solicit student input. I thus began planning my unit through interviews of my students that are immigrants, second generation, or otherwise historically minoritized, to assess students' perceptions of their self-representation in the curriculum, and their experiences with social interactions within the context of their schooling history, based on this piece of their identity. It must be noted that these interviews spanned all of their schooling experiences. I asked simple questions that prompted students to self-reflect, and the gambit of responses had spectacular range, from experiences of interpersonal microaggressions perpetuated by students–

"Why don't you go back to your country? –"No, I was just joking!"

to overall curricular design–

"No teacher has ever asked me anything like that."

"We never spoke about Latinos…"

"It's not spoken about because of biased opinions."

"If I could go back and know more about it in school, I would definitely like that."

"Alot of people won't put in the effort to learn about each other's cultures."

Many students felt there was no space for the enmeshing of cultures within school at all–

"But I did that at my old school." [in reference to experiences at bilingual middle school that forefronted cultural exchange].

Overwhelmingly, my multilingual and multicultural students did not feel validated in their experiences, did not feel that they had space to share their stories and cultures, and thus did not feel in community such that they could be fully themselves. In response, my unit aims to center my students that feel unseen, occupying the transient spaces between cultures.

Foundations

This unit is grounded in the belief that I am as much a teacher as I am a student of students. Teachers cannot teach what they do not know. I have spent a great deal of my life studying in various schools–nineteen years in eight schools, to be exact–and I have studied a great deal of theory. Yet, there is a clear discrepancy in what I have learned inside the classroom, and what I have witnessed outside of it, in what students have needed, and what I have been told to teach. Lytle (2006) argues that to reconceptualize the literacies of our adolescents, we must involve outside communities and build spaces of discourse about said communities; we must center the local.

My creative writing course thus endeavors to center not only my students' stories, but their overall communities, and their sense of place. Students must be able to situate themselves within the world around them to be strong writers–*what really matters to you, and who do you want to be in this world? Writer, know thyself.* Thus, it is important that this unit is placed critically within the school year. This unit will take place in the second quarter of my creative writing

course. The first unit, which provides necessary set-up, is centered around the theme of "Finding Voice"; students will build their confidence through daily check-ins and freewriting exercises; they will write daily in response to various cultural artifacts and prompts and read their work aloud; they will check their positionality while engaging with others; they will engage in place-based education. The latter is particularly important to detail; the others are expanded within teaching strategies.

Place-based education, in this sense, centers the local community as a rich site for inquiry, centering students and community members as resources and experts in their own right (Case, 2017). A critical place-based pedagogy, in addition to teaching the local, must listen through attention to students' interests, and, "by examining texts, artifacts, and performances of local cultural production", empower the local "by legitimating local cultural production as literature and art" (Ball & Lai, 2006, p. 262). Teachers must thus work to redefine the notion of what counts as art and literature; not only must they utilize the local community and environment as capital, but they must also work within the community to redefine the meaning of what is considered of value in the arts to begin with. Teachers might craft categories in conversation with students–as offered by Ball and Lai, designating conventional categories such as "national literature" and "national art" allow for distinctions amongst the local, regional, and national, "without implying that only one of them is the real thing" (2006, p. 280-281).

Critical place-based educators embrace nonconventional artifacts; place-based art educators embrace the work of "people who make things", including "outsider, folk, naïve, and vernacular artists", "artifacts of visual culture", and "yard art" (Ball & Lai, 2006, p. 274). Critical place-based writing educators support students in exploring local histories, and participating in local opportunities including "ongoing community events, institutions, and issues through 'neighbors' stories,' T-shirts, museum exhibitions, homeless shelters, garage sales, yard art, local parades, war memorials, and bulletin boards" (Ball & Lai, 2006, p. 274). These teachers, in addition to including written literature, include localized stories that stem from a sense of everyday life, such as in "local coffee shops, at family gatherings, and after church", or in more traditional performance settings, pulling from "songs people sing at local coffee shops, hip-hop performances at local nightclubs, stories and poems that circulate in regionally published books, public performances of local church groups and other community organizations, yard art, traditional stories told by community elders, and other local, everyday creative practices" (Ball & Lai, 2006, p. 274-279). In this primary unit a variety of cultural artifacts are included, with no singular type privileged over another.

Conclusively, the goal of this unit is to help my students discover their own voices, but it is through a personal rendering of what constitutes high culture–is it the elite and strange that we must attempt to equate ourselves with, or might we recognize a broader definition of aesthetics and creativity that is far more inclusive and diverse? By centering the local not only are students more predisposed to form meaningful and authoritative connections with the various forms of art around them, but a greater conversation is initiated between the local [our students] and the larger politics of culture. Which cultural artifacts have warranted preservation, and which have been lost or forgotten? Which are exhibited, and at what cost, and to whom? Who decides, and who tells their stories?

Our students, our writers, must "feel 'located' in a particular community and must feel that their writing contributes" in order to write well and to strive for improvement, and should "look

closely at the role writing plays in how we perceive places, at how places affect our writing, and at how our writing affects those places" (Ball & Lai, 2006, p. 283)–it is through a dialogic approach that we move forward towards change in any form. Ultimately, the goal of this creative writing course is to invest in one another as complex individuals, to cultivate a community where we all function as teachers and learners, recognizing the value of collaborative learning and cultural knowledge bases. June Jordan perhaps puts it best, "At last, I had become a part of an academic community where you could love school because school did not have to be something apart from, or in denial of, your own life and the multifarious new lives of your heterogeneous students! School could become, in fact, a place where students learned about the world and then resolved, collectively and creatively, to change it!" (Leon, 2016, para. 3).

Rationale

This unit is centered on the topic of boundaries, borders, and sliding glass doors for a multiplicity of reasons. Boundaries function as an important topic in terms of personal boundaries, classroom expectations, and norms. Borders function as real or artificial lines that separate us from spaces, cultures, and community, or segment us therewithin, which many of our students experience on a daily basis. Sliding glass doors, as pioneered by Bishop's (1990) "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors", invite the reader to step through a doorway and into a world that has the capability to change them. I aim to complicate this definition through the scholarship of Freire and Rosenblatt as proposed by Johnson, Koss, and Martinez (2018). Rosenblatt focuses on transaction with text, not only in terms of intellect, but also in terms of emotional investment, and the emotional investment that is thus required for a reader to move through that door (2018). Particularly, she believed that students must be provided opportunity to think critically and thoughtfully to craft their own meaning based on their particular experiences and prior knowledge bases. Freire (1970) defined praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" and stated that when people consider the world critically, they are readily positioned to "intervene actively in reality…[and] are carried along in the wake of the change". Thus, Johnson, Koss, and Martinez (2018) argue that moving through sliding glass doors changes readers, and often empowers them to take action. For the sake of this unit, sliding glass doors should thus be defined as such.

This unit aims to push boundaries not only through included materials and topics, but by design– this unit is centered on creative writing, often a contentious topic for teachers and students alike. It is worth noting that while the detailed lessons forefront children's literature and poetry, all creative writing topics in this course center around students, and thus have the propensity to change in topic dependent on a given class' interests. This seminar–that is, Children's Literature and the Immigrant Experience–has placed great emphasis on curriculum as "metaphor for the lives we want to lead, and the people we want to be". This informed my unit through what I designed, and how I designed it. I have always circumvented forms that I have less confidence in when it has come to creative writing (i.e., poetry). Additionally, in my own classroom I am a detailed planner; while the curricula I design are responsive to students' interests and respective identities, I have not endeavored to design a unit based exclusively around student choice. Additionally, as a beginning career teacher, I have encountered difficulties when it comes to negotiating student-centered curricula with standardization. In many ways this has hampered my students' creativity and my own ambitions, for how can imagination be fully realized when

"current educational discourses seek to standardize the experience of students from diverse geographical and cultural places so that they may compete in the global economy" over social betterment of the local community (Ball & Lai, 2006, p. 273)? How can we push our students to be creative thinkers and boundary breaking writers, if foci is traditional academic writing, and largely external?

Dr Campano opened our first class by providing serial testimony of his experiences as a first grade teacher. He shared that during intensive academic testing meant to track, one of his students wet their pants and began breaking down, a prime example of symbolic violence and of the internalization of the nonconformity to American educational standards as failure, at the mere age of six. Standardized testing does not capture deep or creative thinking, to the detriment of our students, and it enforces a one size fits all approach to education, reinforcing to our students that there is always a singular correct answer and way of being. Nor do standardized tests measure exploration, experimentation, and discovery, and thus, in short form, "Students are rewarded for conformity, and punished for any deviation from it" (Cummings, 2017, p. 211). A re-incorporation of the arts, imagination, and creativity within English Language Arts instruction is necessary to nurture students as critical beings that will be well prepared for shaping their (and our) futures in life beyond school, and it is critical to an understanding of self. For the purposes of my unit, I have defined imagination and creativity as separate entities; that is, imagination is the power of thinking or dreaming up in a place of play; it is the source of our creativity and allows us to step out of the present. Imagination may take place internally, and might have no impact on the world at all. Contrarily, actualized imagination has tangible outcomes, and can be defined as creativity. Ken Robinson, a global authority on education in the arts and creative ways of being, names this as "imaginative processes with outcomes that are original and of value"–that is, "to be creative, you need to be original and do things that are of value in your culture" (Cummings, 2017, p. 211).

My unit aims to establish all of my students as writers and readers that stand in their power, and to crystallize that reading and writing are full of possibility–that there is no one right or correct answer, and that we are all already experts working together to make meaning. This unit is proposed for the second quarter of the school year. It is proposed for a high school English Language Arts or Creative Writing classroom.

Content Objectives

Within this course, by the end of the year every student will feel more established as a confident and creative writer; as a teacher and learner within our classroom; as a member of our classroom community and culture that is supportive, rigorous, and communal; as an attentive and interested listener and speaker with others; as a critical and more worldly reader; and as a thoughtful editor and reflector. Students will gain insight into the historical and cultural contexts of local issues; they will also appreciate the profound impact of culture on identity formation, recognizing the ongoing struggle of biculturalism and the influence of popular culture on individual perspectives. Students will explore the unique languages and storytelling traditions of different cultures, developing an understanding of the complexity and evolution of language and culture over time. Through this unit and course, students will come to understand that anyone can be a writer, regardless of background or experience. They will recognize writing as a powerful medium for storytelling, and will understand that storytelling is a powerful vehicle for resisting injustice.

Within this unit, by the end of the quarter every student will feel more established a critical reader of both familiar and previously unseen oral, written and visual texts and artifacts; students will contribute to communally create a living archive of multicultural texts that best inform their individual project(s); they will read for craft and then collectively define elements (voice, imagery, characterization, and arrangement).

Teaching Strategies

Ecology of the Creative Classroom

In this context, I reference the ecology of the creative classroom in terms of how students physically relate to one another on a daily basis. Chavez (2021) argues that body language can significantly impact the dynamics of a workshop, often reflecting power imbalances and reinforcing systemic biases. An inclusive writing space begins in how we position ourselves physically. Teachers must thus build communal norms within the classroom community from the beginning of the school year.

Kay (2018) notes that to cultivate a safe space within a given classroom, considerable focus must be given to students who are not speaking: "First, *hands should not be raised while someone is still talking.* When a teacher calls on one student to speak, the rest of the hands in the room have to go down. Any student who does otherwise is communicating to everyone in the room that they don't care about the person who is still talking. That raised (and sometimes waving) arm is saying, "I wish you would shut up! I have my own thing to say!" This behavior sparks an unnecessary rush for respondents…" (Kay, 2018, p. 18). He secondly proffers that the speaker should never be interrupted, for no matter the reason, the effect is drawing focus from the speaker. Beyond these foundational expectations, body language can be negotiated based on a given class and its respective students' opinions. At the beginning of the year, these expectations should be established through discussion that continues throughout the school year: what makes you feel deeply listened to?

Ecology of the Urban Community

Place-based writing is employed within this course and further expanded upon in the Foundations section of this unit plan.

Incorporation of Children's Literature

As discussed by Dr. Campano and visiting scholars of our course, there are many forms of literacy; while we view pictures as a stage to writing and literacy in terms of human development, they are already literacy in of themselves. As discussed by Sipe (1998, p. 68), "In a picturebook, the words of the text and the sequence of illustrations contribute equally to opportunities they provide to make meaning." }|This unit will thus begin with an incorporation of children's literature, through the usage of *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan. As discussed in our seminar course, *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan essentializes the immigrant experience to be more broadly applicable, and calls the reader in to identify with the immigrant protagonist. This text underscores the continual negotiation of life in uncertainty; the protagonist must negotiate

potential opportunities, critical challenges, and the crossing of borders–linguistically, relationally, culturally, and nationally.

Writing Workshop

My course utilizes a decolonial framework of writer's workshop, as proposed by Chavez (2021). Chavez aims to complicate the traditional workshop model to center the sidelined narratives of people of color, women, queer, differently abled, and gender-nonconforming artists. My students will dictate our required course readings based on their personal interests and writing goals; as stated by Chavez, "The living archive does not exist until my students' create it–every workshop participant contributes to our course of study, selecting one art object to share: audio, image, text, or something in between…" (Chavez, 2021, p. 104). Chavez's approach prioritizes attentive engagement with diverse voices and perspectives, fostering an environment where students feel empowered to explore and share their identities and experiences through writing, ultimately producing work that resonates with vitality and authenticity.

Chavez additionally forefronts craft over content–students are invited to define craft concepts collectively. This allows for students to build a deep understanding of craft prior to formal writing workshops later in the year, such that students are well-prepared to understand their peers' input when listening to others speak about their work. This engages students as individuals, exercises skills of criticality, and allows for collaborative construction of communal knowledge. The goal here, then, becomes to center options and not directions when providing workshop feedback. Students' work will not be defined as "good" or "bad", but rather, students will read their peers' work to elucidate their emotional response and to understand what the text is teaching them. This focus on craft will "guide their reading of one another's texts, inform their workshop critique, and direct their self-evaluations–this is, in practice, an unprecedented act of acceptance: they belong, for real" (Chavez, 2021, p. 119).

Finally, Chavez utilized a discovery-based model of assessment in order to reallocate typical power dynamics within the classroom. Writing assessment is individualized and fluid, allowing students to foster "a critical awareness of one's ever-changing self over the course of the term" (Chavez, 2021). To build students' self-assessment skills, frequent opportunities for practice must be provided. At the end of each quarter, students will complete a reflective mini-portfolio of their work and noticings from the respective time frame.

Social Emotional Learning

This unit aims to forefront social emotional learning in order to appropriately respond to adolescent students' needs such that students are able to self-regulate and develop positive relationships with their peers and teachers. It also aims to address the traumas that students bring with them to school on a daily basis.

Boundaries and norms function to support all students, but particularly those impacted by trauma. As discussed in our seminar, trauma plays a substantial role in immigration studies, particularly when it comes to what is passed down to our students physiologically. Simultaneously, many of our non-immigrant students come to school with trauma on a daily basis, due to adverse childhood experiences. Thus, this course begins by asking students to consider their personal boundaries. This will lead to a collaborative design of classroom expectations and norms. This unit in particular is set up to begin to build appropriate assessment

norms for writing workshop which will take place in the following quarter; thus, in many ways this quarter functions as a lower stakes space of practice in writing assessment when analyzing depersonalized work prior to the higher stakes sharing during formal writing workshop.

Mindfulness is a key tenant of social emotional learning, and related breathing techniques can be uplifted to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression (Komariah et al., 2022) and to bring attentiveness to one's needs. Mindfulness has also been uplifted to increase prosocial behaviors within the classroom, such as kindness and empathy. Other benefits include increased capacity for self-compassion, improved self-esteem, and alertness (González & Frumkin, 2021). Mindfulness, as defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn, encompasses "paying attention, intentionally, in the present moment, and non-judgment" (González & Frumkin, 2021, p. 63). For the purposes of this unit, mindfulness will be utilized through guided meditations, deep breathing techniques, body scans, brief movement breaks, and use of a tibetan singing bowl.

This unit additionally utilizes children's literature for social emotional learning. Children's literature is discussed in greater detail in the Incorporation of Children's Literature section above. Children's literature can be employed to help children "communicate and begin to explore the effects of trauma in a non-threatening manner" as it provides the means to "inform, comfort, and provide models of coping strategies" (González & Frumkin, 2021, p. 67). Children's literature texts that discuss realistic situations and feelings allow students to relate and build empathy. Children should be introduced to content prior such that hard topics do not elicit a trauma response. Additionally, chosen texts should be responsive to students' respective identities, and activities should be cognizant of any potential stress responses that students might have. As discussed by González & Frumkin (2021), some trauma-responsive activities include reading response discussions and journal writing on feelings.

Freewriting

Freewriting is a writing technique that involves writing continuously for a set period without worrying about grammar, spelling, punctuation, or coherence. The goal is to allow thoughts to flow freely onto the page. Pat Schneider (2003) emphasizes the importance of uninhibited expression in writing. She defines freewriting as writing that involves writing continuously for a set period without worrying about grammar, spelling, or topic coherence. This practice is grounded in the idea that allowing thoughts to flow freely onto the page can help writers access their authentic voice and generate creative ideas. Schneider's approach encourages writers to embrace their unique experiences and identities, such as ability, culture, gender, race, age, and class. By reflecting these aspects in their writing, authors can produce work that is deeply personal and genuine. Schneider also promotes a supportive writing community where sharing freewriting without fear of criticism fosters creativity and mutual respect.

Peter Elbow, also a strong advocate for freewriting, highlights the role of freewriting in overcoming writer's block and building writing fluency. Elbow (1998) suggests that the process of writing without self-censorship allows writers to discover new ideas and insights that might not emerge through more structured writing methods. He believes that regular freewriting can help writers develop a natural and confident writing style.

Combining the approaches of Schneider (2003) and Elbow (1998), freewriting in the classroom not only enhances individual expression and creativity but also builds a supportive community where students feel safe to share their work and receive constructive feedback. This holistic

approach helps students develop both their writing skills and their sense of identity as writers. In my unit, students will freewrite almost daily, reinforcing these benefits and fostering a consistent practice of self-expression and skill development.

Collaborative Student Learning

This unit largely centers project-based learning through collaboration. Thus, it is critical that students are presented with authentic roles, and that they are placed in equitable groups. Simultaneously, students must be presented with group-worthy tasks that warrant groups in the first place. These tasks must forefront multiple abilities, which should be reaffirmed by discussion around everyone having something to contribute. This might be as small as an announcement to disrupt classical classroom expectations, such as "This task provides opportunities for multiple abilities. You will do a much better job if *everyone* contributes!" Group-worthy tasks must thus be structured for equitable participation: every student must have a job of equal value. As discussed by Lotan (2003), group-worth tasks must be open-ended and require complex problem solving, they must provide students with multiple entry points and multiple opportunities to show intellectual competence, deal with discipline-based, intellectually important content, require positive interdependence as well as individual accountability, and include clear criteria for the evaluation of the group's product.

Reader Response

Louise Rosenblatt's reader response theory (Davis, 1992) is grounded in the idea that the reader's (or a given audience's) experience of a literary work should be broken down to create textual meaning. Each reader's response will be different, grounded in their unique life experiences and intersectional identities, such as ability, culture, gender, race, age, class, and so on. Rosenblatt emphasized that the act of reading is a transactional process, wherein meaning is created through the interaction between the reader and the text. This transactional theory posits that neither the text nor the reader exists in isolation; instead, meaning emerges from the relationship between the two.

Rosenblatt introduced "efferent" and "aesthetic" reading stances. Efferent reading focuses on extracting information, while aesthetic reading engages readers on a personal and emotional level. In aesthetic reading, readers immerse themselves in the narrative, experiencing it as an event and connecting it to their own lives and feelings; this is the stance that will be used in large part in this unit. For example, when students read a poem, an efferent approach might involve identifying literary devices or summarizing the content, while an aesthetic approach would encourage them to reflect on how the poem makes them feel and how it resonates with their own lives. In a classroom setting, teachers can facilitate this by prompting discussions that encourage students to share their personal responses to the text and connect it to their own experiences.

Read-Alouds

The interactive read aloud (Roberts, 2018) typically involves a teacher reading a text aloud while students follow along with their own copies of the reading. The teacher will generally choose this text in advance, to prepare appropriate pause points in which they model think alouds or other beneficial teaching strategies. During these pause points, the teacher may also ask questions, solicit input, or prompt student talk or reflection (turn and talk, quick write, stop and jot, and so on). Interactive read-alouds serve not only as a model for effective reading strategies but also

foster teacher-student and student-student interaction, stimulating critical thinking. The interactive read aloud allows for a focus on dialogic discourse as authority is shared with students, fostering reciprocal exchanges which support students in building new perspectives. Reading aloud while following along enables students with auditory and reading challenges to participate equally, reinforcing their skills. A key aspect of successful interactive read-alouds is establishing clear objectives beforehand, guiding students to apply specific strategies discussed prior to reading, thus avoiding reliance on basic comprehension checks. While planning is important for the interactive read aloud, text rendering should not be overplanned, as teachers should respond to students in the moment and relinquish plans as needed in response to students' given interactions with the text and classroom community (Kesler et al., 2020). While the interactive read aloud will be employed at various points throughout the unit depending on students' text choices.

Think-Alouds

In that same vein, think-alouds model thinking while reading a text. Think-alouds are a teaching strategy wherein a teacher verbalizes their thought process as they read a text aloud. This helps students develop their own reading skills by demonstrating strategies such as predicting and reflecting. In my unit focusing on poetry, think-alouds will function to enhance students' ability to analyze and appreciate poetic texts, cultivating their proficiency in interpreting and engaging with poetry independently. Particularly useful where interpretation is subjective, think-alouds can be used to guide students in navigating complex imagery and themes, fostering a deeper understanding of craft techniques and overall meaning.

Instructional Activities

Provided is a daily overview for a quarter long Creative Writing elective unit for a twice weekly 10th, 11th, and 12th grade mixed-level English with 65-minute periods. This unit will span sixteen meeting days. All activities may be modified for extensions or to provide additional supports. Additionally, three daily lesson plans are included. Please note that the lessons are largely not in order: while *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan will function as the text of the primary lesson in this unit, *Los Zapatos* will be staggered in the unit to function as an enjoyable break from a typical day but also as a grounding example for analyzing various elements of craft, with a specific focus depending on students' respective submissions. In quarter one, students will be prompted to complete an addition to the living archive by the end of the quarter such that all artifacts are in order for quarter two. Students are expected to provide a link or hard copy of their artifact, and to add a slide to a collaborative slideshow denoting their chosen artifact, author, and author's background.

After students have submitted their artifacts, I will organize the quarter based on craft categories; Chavez (2021) utilizes the categories of voice, imagery, characterization, and arrangement (what students name "flow"), but categories should be tailored or expanded based on students' submitted works. In the first half of the unit, artifacts will be analyzed based on the most overt craft element, and as the quarter progresses and students build their confidence, skills, and criticality, students will balance their analyses of multiple craft elements at once.

Title	*The Arrival* by Shaun Tan
Materials	One full printed scan of *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan, sticky notes, tape, pens or pencils
Objective	SWBAT reflect on how craft elements (such as characterization, setting, symbolism, etc.) contribute to the depth and impact of a narrative. SWBAT effectively practice and apply craft techniques observed in "The Arrival" by Shaun Tan in their own writing.
Standard	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Agenda	Prepare the room: Arrange tables and chairs in a semi-circle. Tape up scans of *The Arrival* around the room, dividing into sections of the story dependent on number of students in course (no more than 6 students per section) Play music as students enter (periodically throughout the year, students are asked to provide song requests - what song should I play? Why is this a great song to play at the beginning of class?) Greet students by name as they arrive. Lesson: Check-in Remind students that for our second unit, we're going to be thinking about craft. Remind students that listening is the first and most important step for maintaining a storytelling tradition, and as such, we must practice it daily–prompt students to review our listening expectations. Introduce "The Arrival" by Shaun Tan, without providing an overview of the text or topic–students should craft their own reader response independent of

	background knowledge. Tell students that they will break into groups to consider respective sections of the text. Students should consider narrative techniques used by Shaun Tan (e.g., visual storytelling, absence of text, use of symbolism, and so on). Students should consider overall thematic elements and how said elements are portrayed through imagery and storytelling. Students read with sticky notes in hand, noting noticings and wondering, and marking any images that evoke an emotional response by placing their sticky notes across the text pages with reflections written on them. Students then share their observations and reactions with the rest of the group in a full-class discussion. Facilitate a discussion based on students' observations. Encourage students to share their interpretations of the narrative techniques and themes. Discuss how Tan effectively communicates complex ideas through images. If students are stuck, consider prompting further discussion with questions: How does Tan structure the narrative? Why do you think he chose this structure? How do the sections contribute to the overall flow of the story? What patterns or repetition do you notice? What is the impact on the reader? How does Tan use voice to convey the emotions and experiences of the characters? Are there any changes in point of view? How does the author develop the characters throughout the story? What details does Tan provide about the characters' appearances, actions, and thoughts? How? How does the author establish the setting of the story? What details contribute to the atmosphere? How did the story make you feel? Did you connect with any particular characters or themes? Allow students to lead the discussion to the greatest extent possible, reinforcing when they touch on any tangible craft elements.
Evaluation	Freewrite (choose one to assign dependent on where the full-class discussion leads): Choose a character from "The Arrival" and write a scene where their gestures, facial expressions, and body language reveal their emotions and motivations. Consider how Shaun Tan uses subtle details to build empathy and understanding for characters. Visualize yourself in a setting from "The Arrival," such as the bustling port or surreal cityscape. Describe the setting using sensory imagery, exploring its influence on characters' actions and emotions. Reflect on the symbolism and atmosphere created by the setting. Write a scene or story that begins in the middle or towards the end of the plot. Use flashbacks or flash-forwards to reveal key events and insights about characters and their journey. Reflect on how Shaun Tan's non-linear storytelling enhances narrative depth and engagement.

	Choose a symbolic element from "The Arrival," like the mysterious creatures or symbolic objects. Incorporate this symbol into a scene or story, exploring its deeper meanings related to identity, migration, or cultural adaptation. Reflect on how symbolism enriches narrative themes in Shaun Tan's work.

Title	Los Zapatos
Materials	Photocopies of poem, pens or pencils, writing notebook
Objective	SWBAT translate a poem utilizing prior knowledge of context, connotation, tone, and figurative language. SWBAT consider their identity in relationship to belongings, objects, or other things in the world around them. SWBAT effectively practice and apply craft techniques observed in "Los Zapatos" by Francisco X. Alarcón in their own writing.
Standard	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Agenda	Would you rather wear the same outfit for the rest of your life, or never be able to wear shoes again? Where is joy? Where is play? Prepare the room: Arrange tables and chairs in a semi-circle. Post the following on the board: What's in a name? Do names matter? Why do we name the people, places, and *things* around us?

	Play music as students enter (periodically throughout the year, students are asked to provide song requests - what song should I play? Why is this a great song to play at the beginning of class?) Greet students by name as they arrive. Lesson: Check-in Ask students the posted questions, prompting a turn and talk or full class discussion. Then, prompt students to share out. *Answers from students may include: names influence how we are treated by others, names have different meanings, names represent culture and where we're from, names can be mispronounced which is disrespectful, we name the things around us for comfort, and so on.* Briefly describe the science of naming things outside of ourselves. Tell students that they will be translating "Oda a Mis Zapatos" by Francisco X–a poem written to an object of the author's. Prompt a read aloud. Break students into small groups such that there are two students assigned to each stanza, and explain that students will read the author bio and poem, utilizing the glossary to translate. Tell students that they will then pair with another group such that everyone is in groups of four to *make it flow*; after this, we will share out full class to consider our different readings. As students begin, circle around to different groups to support, asking clarifying questions and reminding students to back up their thinking from the text. Once 8 minutes have passed, prompt students to come together and share out through a communal reading, with each group reading their section in order. Ask: What is this poem about? How does the author feel about his shoes? What stuck out to you? (prompt students to consider figurative lang, lit devices, etc.)

Evaluation	An Ode to...as a Six Word Memoir
	Tell students that they will be engaging in an activity to reflect on who they are in relation to things outside of themselves, such that they can get to know each other (and themselves!) more deeply. Explain the concept and provide examples.
	
	Post the following on the board:
	• *Using the sticky note on your desk, write your name.*
	• *Things to consider:*
	    o What is something people I know associate with me? What do I associate with *myself*?
	    o What wouldn't I leave the house without?
	    o What is something outside of myself that is important to my identity?
	
	Explain the posted instructions to students as you pass out the sticky notes. Then, prompt students to begin, and set a timer for 5 minutes.

Title	General Daily Plan for Analysis of Students' Artifacts
Materials	Copies of artifact, pens and pencils, writing notebooks
Objective	Students will analyze craft elements (such as characterization, setting, symbolism, etc.) in their chosen texts and apply these techniques in their own creative writing.
Standard	Standards for the analyses of students chosen work varies greatly dependent on the day. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Agenda	Prepare the room: Arrange tables and chairs in a semi-circle. Set up the board to display a given student's artifact introduction. Play music as students enter (periodically throughout the year, students are asked to provide song requests - what song should I play? Why is this a great song to play at the beginning of class?) Greet students by name as they arrive. Lesson: Check-in Review the importance of reading for craft rather than solely to support personal opinions or preferences. Prompt the given student to introduce their artifact. Hand out photocopies of their artifact (as needed). Utilize various teaching strategies (read aloud, think aloud, etc.) to read the artifact as a class. Lead a discussion where students share their embodied responses to the given artifact. Encourage

	students to articulate what specific elements—such as dialogue, description, pacing—evoked their responses. Some questions for consideration: How is the story structured? Is it linear or non-linear? How does the structure contribute to the pacing and impact of the narrative? Are there any patterns or repetitions in the narrative? What do they reveal about the story's themes or characters? How does the author develop the characters? What techniques are used to reveal their personalities, motivations, and relationships? How is the setting described? What sensory details are used to create a vivid sense of place? How does the setting contribute to the mood or atmosphere of the story? How does it influence the characters' actions and emotions? What language choices does the author make? Are there any notable uses of figurative language, such as similes, metaphors, or symbolism? How does the author's style of writing (e.g., descriptive, sparse, poetic) affect your experience as a reader? Who is telling the story, and from what perspective (first-person, third-person, omniscient)? How does the narrative voice shape your understanding of the characters and events? How does it contribute to the story's themes? How does the author use dialogue? What does dialogue reveal about characters' personalities, relationships, and conflicts? Are there any significant conversations or monologues that drive the plot or reveal key information? Are there any symbols or motifs that recur throughout the story? What do they represent, and how do they enhance the meaning of the text? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story in this particular way? What effect does this choice have on the reader's understanding and emotional response? How do the author's craft choices (e.g., structure, characterization, language) contribute to the overall impact and effectiveness of the narrative? How did the text make you feel as a reader? Did any particular scenes or passages evoke strong emotions or thoughts? Reflecting on the craft elements discussed, what can you learn as a writer from studying this text? How might you apply similar techniques in your own writing?
Evaluation	Based on insights from the discussion, assign a freewrite prompt that challenges students to apply a specific craft technique they discussed.

Resources

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Appendix

Activities Expanded

Check-ins

Rotate between different types of prompts to keep the check-ins engaging and relevant, adapting the questions based on the group's dynamics and the specific goals of the session. On occasion a check-in might be interchanged with a mindfulness activity.

Emotional and Reflective Prompts:
- Share one word that describes how you are feeling today.
- Tell us about a moment from your week that stood out to you.
- What is one thing that brought you joy this week?
- What are you feeling grateful for today?
- Share something that has been on your mind lately.
- Share a practice or routine that helps you feel centered.
- What is something new you learned about yourself recently?
- Describe a moment that shifted your perspective this week.
- What is one question you've been pondering lately?
- Who in your life most makes you feel a sense of home?

Goal Oriented Prompts:
- What is one thing you hope to gain from today's session?
- What is one goal you have for today's session?
- Is there something specific you hope to learn or achieve today?
- What is one thing you want to improve in your writing this week?

Community and Connection:
- Share a moment when you felt really connected to someone else recently.
- What is one way you supported someone else this week?

Creative:
- If you could describe your mood as a weather pattern, what would it be?
- What fictional character do you relate to the most right now and why?
- If your week were a book title, what would it be called?

Humor and Miscellaneous:
- If you could read minds for a day, what would you do and why?
- Would you rather have Jalen Hurts or Joel Embiid on your team?
- Would you rather be invisible or be able to turn into any person you want at will?
- Would you rather get banned from TikTok or Instagram?
- Would you rather live in the past, present, or future?
- Would you rather wear the same outfit for the rest of your life, or never be able to wear shoes again?
- Would you rather stay up all night or stay in bed all day?
- Would you rather have hands for feet or feet for hands?
- Would you rather start a rumor, or have a rumor started about you?
- Would you rather learn at home or at school?

Freewrites

<u>Norms:</u>
1. The room should be silent.
2. Sharing is optional.
3. Keep your hand moving the whole time.
   - If you get stuck, type or write the word you're stuck on over and over until you get UNstuck.
   - Less focus is needed for spelling, punctuation, & grammar.
   - Do not worry about editing.

<u>Prompts:</u>
Please note that prompts should be tailored to students' chosen texts; these prompts function as a starting place for different writing genres.
1. Poetry - To jumpstart our return to the board, you will be asked to write a quick poem draft. Remember: these are drafts and by nature are raw and unpolished. You will have three prompts to choose from, and 8 minutes to craft your poem in a format of your choice. Once time is up, you can raise your hand if you'd like to share your poem with the class. Consider as you write: Why did you pick the format that you chose? How does the form impact the meaning?
2. Poetry - What did you do or where did you go over the long weekend? Include something you did in your poem.
3. Poetry - What is an extracurricular activity that you're passionate about outside of school (sports, volunteering, etc)? Include this activity in your poem.
4. Poetry - Which is better, to love one who has died, or to not see each other when you're alive? Craft a prose poem in response to this prompt.
5. Music and Poetry - What was the last song you listened to? Include part of the lyrics in your poem.
6. Short Fiction - Write about an event that changed your world, or the world of someone close to you, that forced you to re-examine your beliefs. Utilize the form of a short story.
7. Short Fiction - You have a subtle superpower. You can understand any language known to man, written or spoken, even ancient ones, braille, and sign language. Your normal life as an archaelogist suddenly takes a turn, when a girl talking on the phone walks past you, but you cannot understand her at all.
8. Creative Nonfiction - Write about a piece of art that you could read, watch, view, or listen to a billion times–something that makes you glow inside. Work to show instead of tell, and try writing in a point of view that you write in less typically (ex, second person: you).

Standards

This unit fulfills Pennsylvania/National Common Core standards in multiple domains.

<u>Reading Literature:</u>
Craft and Structure
<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4</u> Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of

specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10 By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Writing:
Text Types and Purpose
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.B Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

Production and Distribution of Writing:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 9-10 here.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

Range of Writing:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Speaking and Listening:

Comprehension and Collaboration:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

Language:

Conventions of Standard English:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

Knowledge of Language:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3.A Write and edit work so that it conforms to the guidelines in a style manual (e.g., *MLA Handbook*, Turabian's *Manual for Writers*) appropriate for the discipline and writing type.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grades 9-10 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.A Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.C Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, or its etymology.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.D Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.