Latin American Poets

Juan Felipe Herrera, Pablo Neruda and Sandra Cisneros

**Grade**

7th-10th

**Time**

One 45 minute class period per activity

**Introduction**

The Academy of American Poets is pleased to present a series of activities for the classroom that allow students to explore and interact with poetry by writing letters to poets.

Aligned with the Common Core Standards, the following activities address the three literacy areas of *Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening.* You can use the series of activities one right after the other, or separate them as you integrate poetry with other areas of your curriculum. The activities are designed to reach diverse learners, but if you need to adapt them further, feel free to do so.

**Activity 1: Selecting Favorite Poems from Historical Poets**

**Objectives**
Students will:

* Identify poets whose poetic voices speak to them
* Select one of these poets and his or her poem to consider more deeply
* Provide verbal explanation or evidence about why they have chosen this poem and poet to their peers

***Pre-Activities***
**Whole class warm-up: The Idea of Voice**

* In their journals (or on a sheet of paper) ask your students to write some quick associations they have with the word “voice.”
* Ask students to turn and talk to a neighbor about their associations.
* Then ask them, sitting alone in their seats, to make a sound, using their own voice, without words, to express how they are feeling at the moment.
* Have them turn to their neighbors and repeat the noises/sounds they just practiced. While listening, their neighbor should describe the sound in writing in their journals and then tell the “voicer” what they heard. Make sure the students start first with the characteristics of the sounds, and then go into their interpretations of what they think the sounds meant, based on what they heard.
* Repeat the process with the second person being the “voicer” and the first one being the “listener.”
* Conduct a whole group discussion about what a person’s voice can tell us without words and how it tells us this.
* Write the characteristics on the board in the front of the room for all to see.
* Now ask for volunteers from the whole group to be “voicers,” this time using words as well as the characteristics noted earlier to express how they are feeling.
* Ask other students to describe what they hear this time. How is it different from what they heard without words?
* Write these comments on the board at the front of the room.

*If you will be submitting your students’ letters to the Academy of American Poets for the Dear Poet project, at this point it is important to tell your students that, as part of National Poetry Month, they will have an opportunity to write letters to poets who are Chancellors of the Academy of American Poets. Leading up to those letters, they will choose poems they enjoy from both living and historical poets, pick ones to whose voices they respond, and practice their own voice and letter writing skills by writing to the poets. You will choose some letters to send to the Academy, and there is a chance that the Chancellor may reply to the student. Selected letters and the poets’ responses will be featured on*[***Poets.org***](http://www.poets.org/)*, the Academy’s website.*

**Individual and Small Group Reading: The Poet’s Voice**

* Divide your class into heterogeneous groups of three.
* Hand out the packet of seven poems to each student (or send your students to Poets.org to view the poems).
* Ask them to refer back to the list of characteristics of voice that is on the board to refresh their memories before they read the poems.
* As the students read the poems, have them complete a T-chart for each one, one side with what “jumps out at them” in the poem, the other side, why they think this is important to the poet’s voice/poem and if/how it is important to them, as a reader.
* If they are having difficulties, they can quietly ask the advice of someone in their group.
* After the students have completed T-charts, ask them to look over the poems and pick the poet’s voice to which they most relate or personally respond.

**Explaining your Choice**

* When your students have completed their reading and T-charts, ask them to share their choices with the rest of their group. Ask students to explain why they relate to this poet’s voice by giving examples from the text of the poems.
* When a student is presenting, those listening should be thinking of constructive comments and questions.
* Listeners should present their comments and questions to presenters, and presenters should incorporate helpful ideas in their explanations.
* Each member of a group should have a chance to present their explanation and receive comments and questions

Make sure your students save notes from this activity, since they will use them when they write letters.

**Vocabulary**

Ask your students to keep a running list on the front board in the room of the words in the poems they do not understand. These may include:

**Activity 2: Writing to a Historical Poet**

**Objectives**
Students will:

* Write a letter to a poet whose voice speaks to them
	+ *stating why the poem spoke to them*
	+ *asking questions about the poem and how it was written*
	+ *with an opening, body and conclusion*
	+ *using proper conventions*

***Pre-Activities***
**Whole class warm-up:**

Get students up on their feet and stand in a circle. Do the following whip-arounds one after the other. Start each cycle with the following prompts:

* Right now I feel… (using only a hand gesture)
* Right now I feel… (using only their voice with no words)
* Right now I feel… (using their gesture, voice and descriptive words)

Repeat the cycles using as many of the following prompts as you can: “I see…,” “I hear…,” “I dream…,” “I imagine….”

Students sit down at their desks to write how they are feeling (or what they see, hear, dream or imagine) at this moment using only descriptive words. They should try to capture—in words only—some of what happened when they moved and verbalized. (This may be difficult, but they should try. It will get them somewhat closer to what poets have to do with the tools they have—the blank page, their internal voice, rhythm, and words.)

**Generating Questions**

Ask your students to take out their notes from the lesson where they responded to poets’ voices and discussed their choices. They will use these notes when they write draft letters to these poets.

* Ask students to look at their notes where they explain why this poet “spoke to them.”
* In a new journal entry (or on a piece of paper) ask them to jot down some questions they would like to ask their poet about how they wrote this poem.
* Ask students to turn and talk to a neighbor with the questions they want to ask, to review questions and make suggestions on how to improve them.
* Ask whole class for examples of great questions to ask in their letters—write some of these on the board, and discuss what makes a good question.

**Whole class writing activity:**

First draft

* Review the format for an informal letter, including date, greeting and closing.
* Review what makes a good letter in their own voice— their opening idea, the body of the letter containing several paragraphs with their ideas and evidence, and their concluding thoughts.
* Using pen/pencil and paper, ask your students to write a draft letter to their chosen poet, telling him/her what in the poem spoke to them, and asking questions relating to how the poet wrote this poem and writes others.
* If they do not finish this draft (or if you prefer) they can continue to write for homework.

**Peer Review: Mirroring Activity**

When your students have finished writing their first drafts:

* Place your students in heterogeneous groups of three (or in their usual writing groups, if you do peer review regularly).
* Ask students in each group to exchange letters so they each have someone else’s.
* If necessary, remind your students how to give constructive criticism, citing positives first and then specifics on what can be improved.
* Ask one student to read aloud the letter she has to the other members of her group.
* After she reads it, ask her to tell the writer what she thought the letter said and what was confusing about the letter. Is the letter writer’s voice strong and clear? The reader should also make helpful comments about voice, format and conventions.
* The writer should take notes and incorporate helpful comments, especially those where the reader’s interpretation differed from the writer’s intent.
* Continue the process in each group until all three people have had their letters read back to them, and recorded helpful comments.

Second Draft: (can be accomplished either in class, combined in-class and homework, or as homework).

* Ask your students to rewrite their first drafts, paying attention to the comments they received from their peers.
* Students hand in their second drafts to you for questions and comments.

**Generating Connections and Questions**

After your students have chosen the poet to whom they would like to write, ask them to read the poem carefully again, jotting down lines, words and images that jump out at them. What questions do they have for the poet about the poem and how it was written? When they have finished writing lines, words, images and questions, ask for volunteers to share some of these with the whole class. Make a record of some of these on the board at the front of the room. Explain why you chose the ones you did.

**Writing a Formal Letter**

First Draft

* Review the format for a formal letter including date, internal address, greeting with punctuation, and appropriate closing.
* Ask for a volunteer (or volunteers) to recall what it means to write “in your own voice.”
* Ask for another volunteer to recall the general form of a letter, i.e. opening idea, several paragraphs containing their ideas and evidence, and their concluding thoughts.
* Using pen/pencil and paper, ask your students to write a draft letter to their chosen poet, telling him/her what in the poem spoke to them, and asking questions relating to how the poet wrote this poem and writes others.
* If they do not finish this draft, they can continue to write for homework. Or you may prefer they do all their writing at home.

**Peer Review: Mirroring Activity**

When your students have finished writing their first drafts:

* Place your students in heterogeneous groups of three (or in their usual writing groups, if you do peer review regularly).
* Ask students in each group to exchange letters so they each have someone else’s.
* If necessary, remind your students how to give constructive criticism, citing positives first and then specifics on what can be improved.
* Ask one student to read aloud the letter she has to the other members of her group.
* After she reads it, ask her to tell the writer what they thought the letter said and what was confusing about the letter. Is the letter writer’s voice strong and clear? The reader should also make helpful comments about voice, format and conventions.
* The writer should take notes and incorporate helpful comments, especially those where the reader’s interpretation differed from the writer’s intent.
* Continue the process in each group until all three people have had their letters read back to them, and recorded helpful comments.

Second Draft: (can be accomplished either in class, combined in-class and homework, or as homework)

* Ask your students to rewrite their first drafts paying attention to the comments they received from their peers.
* Students hand in their second drafts to you for questions and comments.
* Return students’ second drafts so they can polish handwriting a final draft for possible submission to the Academy.