

Let Us Gather in a Flourishing Way For Grades Four Through Twelve

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Former Executive Director CPitS, 1990–1995

(based on the poem of the same name by Juan Felipe Herrera)

In the tradition of Walt Whitman and Pablo Neruda, Juan Felipe Herrera’s “let us gather in a flourishing way” encourages readers to open their minds and hearts to a culturally diverse landscape by gathering images of family, nature, cultural struggle, and a strong and positive vision of the future. This is a fantastic poem to inspire students to gather ways they view the world and to play with the rhythm of language, both in Spanish and English, while expressing images that reside in their memories and five senses.

Herrera’s poem resonates well with fourth and fifth graders, and it can also be inspiring for older kids, including high school students. I would suggest engaging older students in a dialogue about the use of Spanish and English words, and the symbolism expressed by the poet: for example, *turquoise, fields, águila* (eagle), *nopales* (nopal), *maiztlán*, and the juxtaposition of English and Spanish as in *sunluz, hijos rainbows, woven brazos*, and *camino blessing*. Herrera is building a bridge between the two languages and exposing the interior and exterior cultural identities that they represent. This lesson uses repetition, chant, oratory skills, improvisation, and bilingual language practice.

1. Review the students’ writings from earlier lessons. Have them read their poems out loud.
2. Tell the students about Juan Felipe Herrera, a California poet, performer, playwright, teacher, and activist. A former farm worker in the Central Valley, in 2012 he was appointed California Poet Laureate. He is currently a professor at the University of California, Riverside.
3. Read Herrera’s “let us gather in a flourishing way” aloud. Ask your Spanish-speaking students to talk about what the Spanish words mean to them, for the benefit of students who don’t know the language.
4. Discuss the imagery in the poem and the playfulness with language. Discuss rhythm and language. Ask students what are the things that they want to gather, to collect for life. Make a list of words on the board.
5. Write a few sample sentences starting with “Let us gather.”
6. Provide at least thirty minutes of writing time.
7. Give the students these ideas for revision: See what words or sentences you’d like to change, move, remove, or replace. Read your poem in reverse starting from the last stanza. How does it sound to you? How does your choice of words in another language give your poem a rhythm? Ask students to consider gathering feelings and other important things. Rewrite.
8. Have students read their new poems aloud.

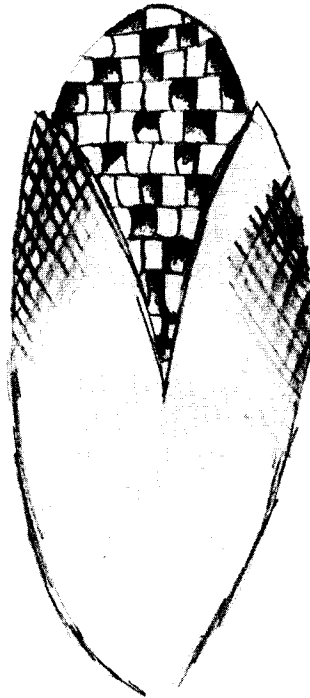
Materials: In your lesson handout include typed student poems from the previous lesson. If the class is not Spanish-speaking, create vocabulary posters with a variety of words from nature, people, culture, and objects.

Worksheet

let us gather in a flourishing way

by Juan Felipe Herrera

let us gather in a flourishing way
with sunluz grains abriendo los cantos
que cargamos cada día
en el young pasto nuestro cuerpo
para regalar y dar feliz perlas pearls
of corn flowing árboles de vida en las cuatro esquinas
let us gather in a flourishing way
contentos llenos de fuerza to vida
giving nacimientos to fragrant ríos
dulces frescos verdes turquoise strong
carne de nuestros hijos rainbows
let us gather in a flourishing way
en la luz y en la carne of our heart to toil
tranquilos in fields of blossoms
juntos to stretch los brazos
tranquilos with the rain en la mañana
temprana estrella on our forehead
cielo de calor and wisdom to meet us
where we toil siempre
in the garden of our struggle and joy
let us offer our hearts a saludar
our águila rising freedom
a celebrar woven brazos branches ramas
piedras nopales plumas piercing bursting
figs and aguacates
ripe mariposa fields and
mares claros of our face
to breathe todos en el camino blessing
the seeds to give to grow maiztlán
en las manos de nuestro amor



Untitled

*by José Silva Huey,
Sonoma County*

Let us
gather
nuestra
tierra
abandonada
Let the
wild rain
grow our
lazy tree
Let the
trees grow
so the sol
can be excited
otra vez
Let our
bold planet
be proud of
us.

Let us gather
the wind of
anger stay low
deja
nuestros
corazones
be happy.
Let our planeta
be peaceful again.

Advice to Writers

Enjoy the sounds of Spanish and English words. Experiment by trying different words next to each other. Make a list of words: ordinary things, places, people. Include the feelings that make you strong, resilient against all odds, that give you a sense of belonging, and make you proud of what you know and have.