



Empowering Latinx Youth Through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: A Call to Action

By Esmeralda Cartagena Collazo
and Aimee Hendrix-Soto

Esmeralda Cartagena Collazo is a doctoral student at Texas Woman's University. Her research interests include the culture, language, and literacies of culturally and linguistically diverse students. She can be reached at ecartagenacollazo@twu.edu.

Aimee Hendrix-Soto is an Assistant Professor at Texas Woman's University in the Department of Literacy and Learning. Her research and teaching focus on critical approaches to literacy instruction and adolescents' critical literacies. She can be reached at ahendrix4@twu.edu.

Abstract: Our Texas schools are becoming more diverse in terms of language, race, and culture, but our curriculum often does not reflect this same diversity. Despite the availability of texts featuring Latinx youth identities, English curriculum still centers on canonical texts that often bolster the privilege of dominant groups over the marginalization of others. The authors assert that the English curriculum must shift to provide the large population of Latinx students in Texas, and beyond, with a curriculum that reflects their cultural identities, experiences, and languages. We make this case by discussing the necessity of incorporating culturally relevant texts and pedagogies, beginning with the engagement of Latinx culture in the curriculum, to affirm youth and empower them as bold readers, writers, and critical thinkers. We then provide practical suggestions for teachers, including a list of culturally relevant books to use with Latinx adolescent students, lesson plans, discussion questions, teaching ideas, and writing prompts for use with Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X*.

Keywords: culturally sustaining pedagogy, critical consciousness, adolescent literature, Latinx youth, diversity

Many schools nationally are no longer predominantly white; the population is changing quickly, and our schools are becoming more diverse in terms of language, race, and culture (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Although

these students have access to canonical texts that are included in the curriculum, these texts often do not reflect the diversity of our students. Canonical texts are an important part of our society, curriculum, and classrooms but oftentimes perpetuate ideologies that privilege some and marginalize others (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). Adolescent students from marginalized backgrounds find it hard to connect with many canonical texts because they are not related to their own lives (Rosenblatt, 1985, 1995).

Over the past three decades, literacy educators and scholars have paid more attention to the role of relevance in reading. Research indicates that youth have more meaningful engagements with texts when the texts are fresh and relevant, reflecting common issues and themes in their lives (Francois, 2013; Ivey & Johnson, 2013). This focus on relevance benefits all youth, but it is especially important that historically marginalized youth have access to texts that reflect their identities, languages, and social experiences (Bishop, 1990; Muhammad, 2020; Rodríguez, 2009).

Culturally relevant texts represent people of color, women, the LGBTQ+ community, and other people who are underrepresented in school curricula. For Latinx youth, in particular, it is important that these texts also attend to the rich diversity of national, cultural, and linguistic experiences in their lives, including their intersectional experiences with gender, sexuality, class, religion, and more. Additionally, these texts should provide opportunities for Latinx youth to explore socio-political issues impacting their lives. These books not only allow students to connect with their lived experiences but also help them understand the world around them, spark their interest in learning more about the world, and help them become more critical thinkers (Christ et al., 2018; Clark & Fleming, 2019; Ivey & Johnston, 2013).

The incorporation of culturally relevant texts and pedagogies, beginning with texts that engage the lives of Latinx youth within

the curriculum, is imperative. Like other scholars addressing the persistence of culturally irrelevant curriculum that does not honor the culture and languages of youth of color, we know that widespread curricular change is overdue (Baker-Bell et al., 2020). Our students need access to instruction that goes beyond the state standards; they need to be prepared to be bold readers and writers who can enact positive change in society by critically examining socio-political issues in texts and in their lives, while drawing upon their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

We have several decades of theory and empirical research demonstrating the effectiveness of culturally relevant approaches to teaching (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2002, 2010, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2014, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2014). In a synthesis of more than 40 empirical studies, Aronson and Laughter (2016) found plentiful evidence of traditional academic success, alongside other benefits such as greater engagement, better student-teacher relationships, and increased cultural competence. Academic success was reflected through reports of increased content knowledge and academic language, in addition to higher test scores for students who experienced culturally relevant teaching.

In some cases, the academic achievement of students receiving culturally relevant instruction was found to be higher than that of students who did not receive this (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). For instance, in Nykiel-Herbert (2010), newcomer emergent bilingual youth receiving culturally relevant instruction outscored similar students receiving traditional instruction. In a study of culturally relevant teaching delivered via ethnic studies courses, Cabrera et al. (2014) found that the primarily Latinx youth who participated were more likely to graduate high school and pass the state standardized test than those who did not. Simply put, there is no ground for teachers and other educational leaders to ignore culturally relevant approaches. There are proven benefits for all students, including the Latinx students we center here.

Accordingly, this requires that teachers of Latinx youth are empowered to teach boldly by applying culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in the literacy classroom. To do this, teachers must use culturally relevant literature that helps students develop critical thinking skills and a sense of social justice. This involves supporting students in having meaningful conversations about different socio-political topics, building deeper connections, and learning how to investigate power in texts. These changes will allow students to think critically, relate to others empathetically, envision a just society, express their opinions and beliefs about socio-political issues, and use their funds of knowledge (Christ et al., 2018; Duenas, 2005; Flint et al., 2019; Pollard, 2019; Walker et al., 2019).

This might require educators to resist the status quo. As former Texas educators and current teacher educators/coaches, we understand that the official pressures of standardization and accountability do not prioritize cultural affirmation, critical consciousness, or justice as outcomes of literacy education. While there are Texas standards that pay lip service to personal connection as a way of making meaning, standardized tests focus on successful reading as summarizing, finding key details, and utilizing text evidence. As long as the stakes for demonstrating those skills are high, teachers will always need to resist the pressure to narrow the focus of literacy education to match. Meaningful engagement with culturally relevant texts, the self, and the world is a more just and effective way to deal with gatekeepers like standardized tests—a way that is essential for marginalized youth.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy has become a powerful way to recenter education to give the home cultures, languages, and life experiences of marginalized students the importance they need in the classroom

(Lopez, 2011). According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), culturally relevant pedagogy is “a pedagogy of opposition” that is “committed to collective, not just individual, empowerment” (p. 160). Ladson-Billings’ (1995a, 1995b) foundational writing on CRP focuses on three propositions: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness.

- Academic Success: “Culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to students’ ‘academic needs’ and get students to ‘choose’ academic excellence” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160).
- Cultural Competence: “Culturally relevant teachers utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 161).
- Critical Consciousness: “Students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 162).

Ladson-Billings defined academic success as not simply making students “feel good,” but encouraging students to “choose academic excellence” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). In culturally relevant teaching, students learn in many ways (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Teachers who support academic success in culturally relevant ways use students’ experiences, cultures, and languages as teaching tools (Osorio, 2018). They make their lessons fit their students’ needs and have high expectations for all students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In any approach to learning, students must be able to read, write, problem-solve, and more, in sophisticated ways. Given the demonstrated text complexity of young adult (YA) literature (Glaus, 2014), we believe that YA literature centering the Latinx identities and experiences provides rich opportunities to promote academic success.

Cultural competence refers to teaching students to recognize and respect their own values and experiences while navigating cultural contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Culturally relevant teachers help students learn about and appreciate their classmates’ and their own cultures. Ladson-Billings (1995a) suggests that teachers “use students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (p. 161) to help students become more culturally aware. Latinx YA literature can provide Latinx students with mirrors of their own lives and simultaneously provide dominant identity youth with a window into Latinx experience, potentially disrupting the ethnocentrism that results from being surrounded by mirrors that reflect your identity as universal or standard (Bishop, 1990).

In a recent study, Saco (2022) examined the results of providing culturally representative YA literature in the ELA classroom. Saco claimed that Latinx YA literature provides validation and a sense of belonging to Latinx readers by reflecting their experiences, identities, and cultural heritage.

Similarly, Polleck and Epstein (2015) conducted a study with females of color using Latinx YA literature. In this study, participants experienced affirmation of their identity through discussions centered around characters and experiences that resonated with their own lives.

The development of critical consciousness is just as crucial as students’ academic achievements and cultural competence. According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), critical consciousness means to “take a critical stance, and challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p.160). Drawing from Freire’s (2000) idea of *conscientização*, developing a critical consciousness means becoming aware of the social, cultural, economic, political, and historical issues that have led to social injustices, inequalities, and dominant ideologies in the classroom. To cultivate a critical consciousness, one must first acquire a vast amount of knowledge



about the world in order to be able to identify and critique the various social and political issues that exist in it. Having a critical consciousness also means actively fighting the repressive aspects of one's life.

Babino et al., (2019) examine multilingual text sets for promoting social justice in literacy education, emphasizing the need to engage Latinx students in meaningful discussions about social issues. Similarly, DeNicolo and Fránquiz (2006) argued that multicultural literature engages readers in critical encounters with social injustice and allows them to examine their own personal beliefs. Both Freire (2000) and Ladson-Billings (1995b) believe that it is the responsibility of educators to foster environments that are liberated from oppression and injustice and to involve students in the movement toward social transformation. Pedagogies employing Latinx YA literature are one tool, among many that are needed, for developing the critical consciousness of youth, particularly when those texts provide youth with opportunities to investigate the power dynamics that lead to social inequities.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Though we have used the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* throughout, our more inclusive vision of literacy learning for Latinx youth in Texas is also informed by the evolving conceptualization of CSP, or culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). This is both an extension of CRP and a critique of common ways it has been implemented in classrooms.

While representation of Latinx identities in classroom texts is important to us, the nature and quality of those representations are also important. The work of curation is constant, and the work is not done just because the books are on the shelf or in the curriculum.

Ladson-Billings (2014) notes that CSP responds to the ways “the fluidity and variety within cultural groups has been regularly lost in discussions and implementations of culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 77).

In thinking about her words, we have been careful to select and recommend texts here that reflect the fluidity and hybridity of culture generally as well as Latinx culture(s) specifically. Additionally, Ladson-Billings (2014) asserts that even when culture is addressed in expansive ways, pedagogy can still fail to take up the socio-political dimensions of CRP, “dulling the critical edge or omitting it altogether” (p.77). This leads us toward a curriculum that includes multiple representations, opportunities to investigate those representations, and support for understanding the power dynamics shaping socio-political issues that are within books but also real lives.

A Call to Action

Our own experiences as students and teachers inform this call to action. As a Latinx student who moved to the U.S. from Puerto Rico in the fifth grade and attended predominantly white schools, Esmeralda had a hard time connecting with the instruction because none of the texts reflected her culture. Aimee developed strong reading skills reading similar texts but not the cultural competence or critical consciousness needed to see beyond her own white and middle-class experiences. As teachers and teacher educators, we have found that this continues to be the status quo in schools.

Latinx youth bring cultural value to the classroom that is often very different from the cultures valued in canonical texts (Howard, 2003). It is important for teachers to be open to using culturally relevant texts in the classroom and “convert this knowledge into culturally

responsive curricular designs and instructional strategies” (Gay, 2002). Teachers always want their students to understand the texts they read, but teachers need to understand that students comprehend what they are reading if they can make connections and relate to the narratives they are reading (Gay, 2010; Marzano, 2007).

To create classrooms and environments that are culturally responsive for all students, it is important to first write a culturally responsive curriculum. Unfortunately, teachers are constantly under pressure to implement a curriculum that focuses on students passing standardized tests and meeting grade-level standards (Ellis & Eberly, 2015). The curriculum focuses on learning basic reading skills such as making predictions, inferring, and summarizing. Teachers can use the following questions as they plan for culturally relevant pedagogy:

1. How can I structure discussions to allow students to express their feelings about their experiences in the outside world?
2. What socio-political issues are students concerned with?
3. What culturally relevant texts can be used to help students gain a broader understanding of socio-political issues?
4. In what ways can I provide students with an authentic platform to use the power of their words in the classroom?



Incorporating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Using Latinx YA Texts

Getting students active in social and political issues is crucial to a culturally relevant curriculum that builds critical consciousness. Socio-political information helps students develop critical thinking in classrooms. According to Muhammad (2020), criticality is the ability to grasp power, privilege, social justice, and oppression, especially for historically oppressed minorities. Criticality allows students to question the world and its texts to understand history, power, and equity. She argues that “teaching criticality humanizes instruction and makes it more compassionate” (Muhammad 2020, p. 117). Table 1, along with Appendix A: Culturally Relevant Books with Latinx Characters, provides a list of socio-political books teachers can use to help adolescent students develop critical thinking skills, a sense of social justice, and a sense of identity. These books, as outlined in Appendix A, specifically highlight Latinx characters and contribute to creating stronger relationships, empowering students’ voices, and fostering critical thinking.

Socio-political topic	Novels
Sexuality/LGBTQ+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Poet X</i> by Elizabeth Acevedo • <i>Gaby, A Girl in Pieces</i> by Isabel Quintero • <i>The Moon Within</i> by Aida Salazar • <i>Abuela, Don't Forget Me</i> by Rex Ogle • <i>Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe</i> by Benjamin Alire Sáenz • <i>When the Moon Was Ours</i> by Anna-Marie McLemore
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Poet X</i> by Elizabeth Acevedo • <i>Clap When You Land</i> by Elizabeth Acevedo • <i>Citizen Illegal</i> by José Olivarez • <i>Red Hot Salsa</i> by Lori Carlson and Oscar Hijuelos • <i>When the Moon Was Ours</i> by Anna-Marie McLemore • <i>The Queen of Water</i> by Laura Resau and Maria Virginia Farinango • <i>Wild Tongues Can't Be Tamed: 15 Voices from the Latinx Diaspora</i> edited by Saraciea J. Fennell
Race/Racism and Discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We Are Not from Here</i> by Jenny Torres Sanchez • <i>Citizen Illegal</i> by José Olivarez • <i>Don't Ask Me Where I'm From</i> by Jennifer de Leon and Elena Garnu • <i>Out of Darkness</i> by Ashley Hope Pérez • <i>The Queen of Water</i> by Laura Resau and Maria Virginia Farinango
Inequity, Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Furia</i> by Yamile Saied Méndez • <i>The Far Away Brothers: Two Teenage Immigrants Making a Life in America</i> (Adapted for Young Adults) by Lauren Markham • <i>We Are Here to Stay: Voices of Undocumented Young Adults</i> by Susan Kuklin
Courage and finding one's voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Jumped In</i> by Patrick Flores-Scott • <i>The Poet X</i> by Elizabeth Acevedo • <i>Gaby, A Girl in Pieces</i> by Isabel Quintero • <i>Living Beyond Borders</i> by Margarita Longoria • <i>Iveliz Explains It All</i> by Andrea Beatriz Arango and Alyssa Bermudez
Immigration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Citizen Illegal</i> by José Olivarez • <i>The Distance Between Us</i> by Reyna Grande • <i>Crossing the Wire</i> by Will Hobbs • <i>Emilio</i> by Julia Mercedes Castilla • <i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> by Sonia Nazario • <i>We Are Not from Here</i> by Jenny Torres Sanchez • <i>Indivisible</i> by Daniel Aleman • <i>Don't Ask Me Where I'm From</i> by Jennifer de Leon and Elena Garnu • <i>Disappeared</i> by Francisco X. Stork • <i>Voces Sin Fronteras: Our Stories, Our Truth</i> by the Latin American Youth Center Writers
Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Your Heart, My Sky: Love in a Time of Hunger</i> by Margarita Engle • <i>Illegal</i> by Bettina Restrepo • <i>When We Make It: A Nuyorican Novel</i> by Elisabet Velasquez

Table 1. Culturally relevant books for Latinx adolescents

In addition to including books focused on socio-political issues, teachers must facilitate critical conversations (Schieble et al., 2020; Stovall, 2006) using open-ended questions to develop deeper connections, empower students’ voices, provide students with opportunities to engage in critical analysis of the texts they read, and help students think critically when using culturally relevant

texts in the classroom. In order to engage students in critical conversations, teachers need to go beyond the scope of the text and ask questions that give students the opportunity to share their thoughts on the significance, interpretation, and perspectives. Table 2 shows open-ended questions teachers can ask to facilitate critical conversations in the classroom. These questions enable students to take a stance and critique what the characters said, the characters' positionality, and the way they as readers connect with the text. Students move from passively absorbing information from a text to actively engaging with it as they seek to construct meaning.

Open-ended questions teachers can use to lead critical conversations in the classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexuality/LGBTQ+ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › How do gender and sexuality shape our lives? › How do we come to understand our gender identity and sexual orientation? • Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › What is identity? › How do our identities change or shift over time? • Race/Racism and Discrimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Have you ever felt “different” because of your race/ethnicity? How did this affect you? • Inequity, Equality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Why is it important that young people have equal opportunities to receive education? • Courage and finding one’s voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › What are the things that empower you to use your voice? • Immigration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Why do you think people immigrate to this country? • Religion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Should young people be free to choose their own religion or lack thereof? • Poverty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › What are the social, economic, political, and environmental causes and consequences of poverty?

Table 2. Open-ended questions teachers can use to lead critical conversations in the classroom

Using Elizabeth Acevedo’s *The Poet X* to Empower Bold Readers, Writers, and Critical Thinkers

Fortunately, there are many authors who dedicate themselves to writing books with characters and narratives that represent the diversity of our students. These texts not only represent the lives of our students but also empower diverse students to advocate for difficult situations and topics of interest. In Table 3, we included four lessons with open-ended questions to discuss identity, silence, the power of words, sexuality (LGBTQ+), and religion. All of these topics are represented in selected poems from Elizabeth Acevedo’s novel *The Poet X*. Each lesson encourages students to write about a socio-political issue that the protagonist Xiomara encounters as she explores her own intersectional identities as a young Dominican American female wrestling with her feelings about topics like religion, gender, and sexuality.

In addition, Appendix B has an example of the detailed lesson “Silence and the Power of Words” where students learn to understand the importance of having a way to express themselves and feel heard. Students describe the impact of slam poetry on Xiomara in *The Poet X*. Students learn about themselves, their community, and the world by analyzing, writing, and performing socially themed slam poems.

Conclusion

We have argued that incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum and the classroom is critical to the success of our Latinx students. We recognize that this work pushes against the status quo, including the intense pressure to focus on traditional academic skills and standardized test success. However, we believe in Ladson-Billing’s assertion that “the real beauty” of culturally relevant teaching is the “ability to meet both demands without diminishing either” (2014, pp. 83-84). That is, we can attend to the intertwined cultural well-being and academic success of Latinx students through culturally relevant literacy teaching.

Lesson	Learning Objective	Inspirational Poems from <i>The Poet X</i>	Open-ended questions about the <i>The Poet X</i>	Writing Activity
Lesson 1: Identity	In this lesson, students explore the identity of the character in <i>The Poet X</i> .	“Names” (p. 7) “Rough Draft of Assignment 1—Write about the most Impactful day of your Life.” (p. 39) “Rough Draft Assignment 2—Last Paragraphs of My Biography.” (p. 126) “A Poem Mami Will Never Read” (p. 233)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways do you connect with Xiomara? • How does Xiomara feel about herself as an individual? 	Students write an “I Am From” poem that is based on their personal experiences and thoughts/feelings. Utilize http://www.georgeallayon.com/where.html to guide students and provide examples.
Lesson 2: Silence and the Power of Words	In this lesson, students understand the importance of having a way to express themselves and feel heard.	“Spoken Word” (p. 76) “Holding a Poem in the Body” (p. 79) “Slam Prep” (p. 344) “Poetic Justice” (p. 349) See detailed lesson for more poems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is Xiomara shielded by silence? • What harm does Xiomara’s silence cause to those who are closest to her? • How do words liberate her? • In <i>The Poet X</i>, how does Xiomara reconcile her own silence? 	Students write a poem in which they share their experiences with feeling heard and what that means to them.
Lesson 3: Sexuality/LGBTQ+	In this lesson, students will demonstrate an understanding of people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community.	“Gay” (p. 177) “How I Feel about Attention” (p. 48) “Games” (p. 49) “After” (p. 52)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does Xiomara embrace or resist the gender expectations she perceives in her world? • How do expectations about gender and sexuality impact Twin (Xavier)? 	Students write a poem about embracing or resisting expectations about gender and sexuality.
Lesson 4: Religion	In this lesson, students will develop an understanding of religious beliefs.	“Confirmation Class” (p. 12) “First Confirmation Class” (p. 24) “Father Sean” (p. 25) “Father Sean” (p. 123) “Verses” (p. 306)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might the story be different if Xiomara’s mom practices a different religion? • What does Xiomara think about religion? 	Students write a poem that reflects their beliefs and feelings about religion and the effects it has on their lives.

Table 3. Open-ended questions and writing activities to discuss socio-political issues using *The Poet X*

We also recognize that this work will occur in a tense political climate. Though we have never felt broad political support for culturally relevant pedagogies during our teaching careers in Texas, the forces behind book banning and anti-CRT legislation, which often target the very books and approaches we advocate for here, feel more organized and materially impacting than in the past. This backlash is an attack on Latinx youth and others in Texas; it is an attempt to dehumanize and to erase and to thwart the progress that has been made.

However, we also assert that this is a reason to amplify the use of critical and culturally relevant approaches in Texas classrooms as well as in our preparation for teaching. All youth, but especially those in the crosshairs, need affirmation and tools for understanding and altering the injustice around them. This need is urgent and thus requires educators to prioritize that need over our own fears. We hope that the rationale and tools we have shared here provide support for teachers who are already doing and illustrate the possibilities for those who are just beginning.

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Appendix A

Culturally Relevant Books with Latinx Characters

- Acevedo, E. (2018). *The Poet X*. HarperCollins.
- Aleman, D. (2022). *Indivisible*. Little, Brown.
- Arango, A. B. (2022). *Iveliz explains it all: (Newbery Honor Award Winner)*. Random House.
- Atta, D. (2021). *The black flamingo*. HarperCollins.
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Appendix B

Detailed Lesson: Silence and the Power of Words

In this lesson, students understand the importance of having a way to express themselves and feel heard. Students describe the impact of slam poetry on Xiomara in *The Poet X*. Students learn about themselves, their community, and the world by analyzing, writing, and performing social justice-themed slam poems.

Enduring Understandings:

Words have power. Words break silence.

Lesson Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, students will:

- demonstrate understanding of the importance of self-expression and feeling heard.
- compose slam poetry that effectively addresses an issue of social justice.

Essential Questions:

- How does our ability to use language empower us?
- In what ways do we use words?

Step 1: Ask students to select a poem from the list and have them annotate the poem as they read.

The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo

- **Part 1:** In the Beginning Was the Word
 - › “Mira Muchacha” (page 6)
 - › “Spoken Word” (pages 76-77)
 - › “Holding a Poem in the Body” (pages 79-80)
- **Part 2:** And the Word Was Made Flesh
 - › “Catching Feelings” (pages 104-105)
 - › “Sometimes Someone Says Something” (page 110)
 - › “What We Don’t Say” (page 176)
- **Part 3:** The Voice of One Crying on the Wilderness
 - › “First Poetry Club Meeting” (pages 256-257)
 - › “Nerves” (page 258)
 - › “When I’m Done” (page 259)
 - › “Compliments” (page 260)
 - › “Here” (page 264)
 - › “Signed Up” (pages 277-278)
 - › “The Mic is Open” (pages 279-280)
 - › “Invitation” (pages 281-282)
 - › “Longest Week” (page 293)
 - › “If Your Hand Causes You to Sin” (pages 304-305)
 - › “Burn” (page 308)
 - › “Slam Prep” (pages 344-345)
 - › “Poetic Justice” (pages 349-350)
 - › “At the New York Citywide Slam” (page 353)

Step 2: Encourage students to share their thoughts on the poem they just read. Students will present a significant line and explain its significance to *Xiomara*. Students should consider talking about themes in the poem that emphasize the value of speaking up, being recognized, and being true to oneself. Teachers can use the following prompts to facilitate critical conversations among students.

- “Why does slam poetry matter to *Xiomara*?”
 - › “Slam poetry matters to *Xiomara* because...”
- “What is the poem about?”
 - › “The poem is about...”

- “What specific words or phrases in the poem stuck out for you?”
 - › “The words or phrases that stuck out to me were...”
- “How are the words or phrases important to *Xiomara*?”
 - › “The words or phrases are important to *Xiomara* because they show...”
- “How do you think *Xiomara* feels about _____? How do you know?”
 - › “I think *Xiomara* feels _____ about _____. I know this because, in the poem it says...”

Step 3: Familiarize students with slam poetry by providing background information using resources such as the *Poetry Foundation’s* (n.d.) Glossary of Poetic Terms and a catalog of videos including youth slam competitions from Houston organization *Write About Now* (n. d.).

Step 4: Have students come up with a list of words, phrases, and ideas that describe social justice.

Step 5: Working with a partner or independently, ask students to choose a social justice topic they find personally meaningful and compose a slam poem about it. Encourage your students to write freely and without fear of criticism.

Step 6: Have students present their slam poems to the class. Encourage students to perform their poems using a microphone, projector, or smart board.

Step 7: Gather students together to discuss what they learned from listening to each other’s slam poems. Teachers can use the following questions to facilitate a discussion with their students:

- “How does slam poetry raise self-awareness?”
- “Do you think slam poetry can represent marginalized voices?”
- “How can words promote social justice in the classroom?”