

**Lesson: Our Community**  
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## **Lersson — Our Community**

### **Lesson: The “Sixth Sense” - Your Imagination**

In **Lesson 1** you learned how to write poems using the five senses. In **Lesson 2** you’re going to learn how to use “**the sixth sense of poetry**” – **your imagination**.

You will focus on the community in which you live. We all live in communities that have developed certain characteristics of their own over the years. Many of these features give people a sense of pride in their community. Often, poets use their imagination to celebrate the community in which they live in original, striking, and insightful ways.

As poets, your next task will be to use your imagination to get a new view of your community. In order to celebrate your community (that is, the city, town, neighborhood, district, or region in which you live), you must identify the place, explore its history, and learn about its people.

To see an example of what I mean, I want you to read two poems of mine that celebrate a city, a neighborhood, and a region, where I have lived for many years. I came to live to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1977 when I decided to pursue my graduate studies at Stanford University. In the “**Afterword**” I wrote for ***Iguanas in the Snow and Other Winter Poems / Iguanas en la nieve y otros poemas de invierno*** (Children’s Book Press, 2001) I expressed the appreciation I feel for the region that has given me a deep sense of community:

“These poems celebrate Northern California, where I have lived for more than two decades. Although I no longer live in San Francisco, I try to spend at least one day a week in the city. The rhythms of the markets in Chinatown and the music of the Mission District make a beautiful contrast to the quiet streets and bustling campus in Davis, California, where I now live. On a clear day, I can see the snowy crest of the Sierra Nevada in the distance.”

### **First Poem**

Read the first of two poems carefully.

#### **City of Bridges**

I dreamed  
a city  
resting  
  
among happy  
rolling hills  
and streetcars  
  
with houses  
that look like  
doll houses

and buildings  
decorated  
like pastry

I dreamed  
a city open  
to the sea

soaking  
her feet  
in a bay

friendly  
very joyful  
and kind

with bridges  
ready to  
embrace us all

a city  
where people  
become

bridges  
to each  
other

Read the whole poem a second time. Notice that in the first four stanzas I give some physical or exterior descriptions of the city of San Francisco. Discuss and answer the following questions together with a classmate:

- How do you explain the title “City of Bridges”?
- What physical features of San Francisco appear in the first four stanzas?

On the second part of the poem I give some almost psychological descriptions of the city.

- Can you tell where I made use of my own imagination in the second part of the poem?
- How do you interpret the stanza that says, “with bridges/ ready to/ embrace us all?”
- What do the last two stanzas of the poem mean to you?

## Second Poem

In discussing my first poem, maybe you noticed that I made use of my imagination when I gave the city some attributes usually reserved for persons. I imagined the city “**resting**” and “**soaking/ her feet/ in a bay.**” In poetry, this is called **personification**.

Now I want you to read a second poem of mine in which I use personification to celebrate the oldest building still standing in San Francisco. This old Spanish mission reflects the deep historical roots of the Latino community in the region. In a footnote that appears on the same spread after the poem, I wrote:

“**Mission Dolores** (founded in 1776) was one of 21 missions established by Franciscan friars when California belonged to Spain. It is located in the Mission district, the main Latino barrio or neighborhood of San Francisco.”

### **Mission Dolores**

grandmother  
dear to all  
San Francisco

you are  
the oldest  
building around

you've  
been here  
so long

a barrio  
has grown up  
around you

your adobe  
walls are  
made

of earth  
mixed  
with love

in winter  
they keep  
you warm

just like  
my grandma's  
broad arms

Read the whole poem a second time and answer the following questions together with a classmate:

- Why is this building called “grandmother”?
- Can you tell where I made use of my imagination?

- What insight into the history of the Mission Dolores does this poem give you?
- Using your own imagination, can you come up with original ways to celebrate a building, monument or landmark in your community?

Before you write your own poem, I want you to follow these steps:

- **Step 1 Identify your community**
  - **Step 2 Use your imagination**
  - **Step 3 “Show, don’t tell”**
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### **Step 1: Identify your community**

Respond to these questions by writing down the answers with as many details as possible:

- ***Identify the community in which you and your family live.*** What are the main characteristics of your community ?
  - ***Write down at least three things you like most about your community.*** What do you enjoy most about your community?
  - ***Identify at least one feature you consider unique to your community.*** What about your community makes it so special?
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### **Step 2: Use Your Imagination**

Use your own imagination to describe your community. You can come up with original ways to compare and celebrate your community by focussing on one of the special features you wrote down at the end of **Step One**. You’ll use the answers to these questions to write your poem.

- *What is the history of the special feature of the community?*
- *In what way does this feature give people a sense of community?*
- *Can you compare this feature to something else?*

In order to make a comparison, you can use **similes** and **metaphors**.

**Similes** are comparisons that use the words “**like**” or “**as**”:

with houses  
that look **like**  
doll houses

and buildings  
decorated  
**like** pastry

In **metaphors** two things that are usually unrelated are identified as sharing the same characteristics:

a city  
where **people**  
become

**bridges**  
to each  
other

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### Step 3: “Show, Don’t Tell”

Specific details and description are very important in poetry. One golden rule in poetry is “**show, don’t tell.**” In many ways, poems are like photographs made up of words. Instead of a visual picture, a poem gives us a verbal picture. The reader understands what you mean, not because the poet tells him or her about it, but because the poet makes him or her see and feel it.

When you think about your community:

- *Try to include specific details in your description of that special feature.*
- *Try to “see” and “explore” the community with your five senses and your imagination.*

As you think of details, words, or images, write them down.

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### Lesson – Our Community

#### Your Assignment: Write a new poem using what you have learned in Steps 1, 2, and 3

- This poem could be in **free verse**, meaning that the lines of the poem do not necessarily **rhyme** or sound alike.
- This poem could be **symmetrical**, meaning that stanzas have the same number of lines. The stanzas of my poems, “**City of Bridges**” and “**Mission Dolores**”, are symmetrical – they each have three lines.
- Your notes should help you focus on what things look like – the sense of sight. Try also to include the other senses you learned to use in **Lesson 1**: smell, taste, touch, and hearing.
- Make sure your poem also includes the sense of imagination. Come up with some new insights that could surprise the readers.

