

Poetic Expressions Inspired by Nature

by Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz



Patagonia Nature Conservancy Bird Sanctuary

On June 10, 2015 11 students from the Patagonia Youth Enrichment Center joined Seeds of Stewardship for the second installation of our Arizona Arts on the Trail program. This outing was focused around poetry, and exploring a sense of home and a connection with nature through language. We met up at the Youth Center, then the students received a handout with two poems by Ofelia Zepeda. Zepeda is a Tohono O’odham scholar and poet who writes extensively about her relationship with the desert. The two poems we read were about the special qualities of rain in the desert, and also included themes of home, and being connected to your home in a sensory way. The students were asked to consider what smells and sights and sounds represented the desert to them.

After a half-hour of reading and talking about Zepeda’s poems we set off to the Patagonia Nature Conservancy Bird Sanctuary, a beautiful oasis down by Sonoita Creek. It was a beautiful afternoon to be out in the shade of the riparian area. Many different birds were audible and we caught glimpses of a few.



Lalo explores Sonoita Creek



Jose leads his partner to his tree

The focus on smell and touch in the Zepeda poems was a perfect segue into a “Find your tree” exercise. Students were paired up and given bandanas, then they took turns leading each other carefully to different trees and feeling and smelling them before trying to find their way back after their blindfolds had been removed. After everyone had a turn to go we circled up and had a discussion about what they enjoyed and didn’t enjoy about the exercise, and what was surprising for them. Some noted that their least favorite part was the lack of control they felt when they were blindfolded. Almost all of them

said that they enjoyed the team-work aspect of being with their partner, and many said that they were also surprised that they found their tree so quickly.

After the exercise we hiked further before making our way to the creek to find a good spot for more observation and poetic inspiration. The students all sat down and spent a minute with their eyes closed, focusing on what they were hearing, smelling and feeling. They shared different things: “I heard a lot of different birds;” “I felt the wet mud;” “I smelled the creek;” “I felt the bugs!” Then we spent time writing poems together. I gave students the prompts, “What this place would say if it could talk” and “Something beautiful you saw today.” From these ideas the students took turns writing a line and then folding it over so that they couldn’t see the direction of the

poem until it was complete. When we put all the lines together the students were very impressed with their work.

If This Place Could Talk

*If this place could talk, it would say
To plant more trees.*

It would yell, "don't throw trash!"

*"I'm gonna kill you."
Creatures ask their prey for forgiveness.*

*Don't step on me!
"There's nothing to be afraid of, I will not hurt you!"*

*The trees would say "nice and cool."
This place is very calming.*

"I have many adventures ahead."

We spent the last half hour snacking and wading in the creek observing the crayfish. Many of the students had never been to the Preserve and told Anna Coleman, Director of the Youth Enrichment Center, how exciting it was to discover this beautiful place so close to their homes.



Sonoita Creek offers a wilderness experience close to home

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