



Let's Meet Juan Felipe Herrera, Our 21st U.S. Poet Laureate

by Jackie Huss Hallerberg

Grade level: grades 3 & up...

Theme: *Use of descriptive language, personification, imagery, and imagination*

Brief Description of Activities:

1. Ask who knows what a Poet Laureate (PL) is. Discuss PLs at different levels – US, State, County, City – and what it takes to become one.
2. Share a brief bio of Juan Felipe Herrera. Could expand on his bio, depending on the grade levels. Discuss his upbringing and what he might have experienced as the child of migrant farmers. What would he have seen, heard, felt? What about his language? How would this have affected his poetry?
3. Play short video clip of Herrera reading “Five Directions to My House” at: <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/video-juan-felipe-herrera-reads-five-directions-my-house>
4. Discuss the word “house” and extend the meaning of house from the actual physical house where a student might live to an imagined or surreal house from our dreams or perhaps even the “house” where the “soul” resides. Students come up with a good mix of “houses” with which to work.
5. Share sample poems, including ones you might have written to the prompt.
6. Write a poem with the class first or have students write independently, depending on setting and skill level of students. Give students a graphic organizer with prompts or blank paper to write their poems. For “early birds” or teens, you might also invite students to write directions to their “heart.”
7. Allow 10’ time for writing and an additional 10’ for sharing with the class.
8. Art extension (separate activity): Students could illustrate their “house.” Offer a variety of materials, including collage items, pencils, paper, gel pens, etc.

FIVE DIRECTIONS TO MY HOUSE

by Juan Felipe Herrera

1. Go back to the grain yellow hills where the broken speak of elegance
2. Walk up to the canvas door, the short bed stretched against the clouds
3. Beneath the earth, an ant writes with the grace of a governor
4. Blow, blow Red Tail Hawk, your hidden sleeve—your desert secrets
5. You are there, almost, without a name, without a body, go now
6. I said five, said five like a guitar says six

Sample Student Poems

Five Ways to My Soul
by Pippin Forrest

1. Follow the feline with a never-ending thrum pulsing in her throat
2. Burrow into the tree, the tree of empathy. Feel other beings and comfort them
3. Dream in a far off land of horrors and of wonders. Let dreams unveil the world as it is and how it's meant to be
4. Feel the giggling tingle in your throat that let's you know that you have made, you have created
5. Endure the ailing sting of the loss of a piece of warmth ripped from your life
6. This should assist you in knowing my soul as you know your own

Five Directions to My House
by Samuel Velazquez

1. Go to the land of California, kept alive by all four forces of elements
2. Walk through the passage between two lands
3. Find the forest of light and darkness, slowly growing
4. Listen for the rumble of the great beasts living in the scorched rivers
5. You arrive at my house and see the black cat watching you, but also me, watching from within
6. If your journeys fail, ride a great beast through the scorched river on to my house

Five Directions to My Heart
by Jackie Huss Hallerberg

1. Go to the roundabout and circle four times or until you have worn away all the rough places
2. Walk slowly with desire until every chamber comes alive - this may take awhile
3. Find enough tender words to erase any doubt and fill the holes with kindness
4. Listen for the surging, the flow that pushes resistance away
5. You may arrive unsure of what lies ahead. Go on
6. I said five but six will ensure a happy ending. I never said it was the fastest route. Go ahead and knock – don't hesitate now