

A NEW SPECIES OF BEAUTIFUL

A Five-Workshop Curriculum on Identity & Self-Examination to Accompany *Floating, Brilliant, Gone* by Franny Choi

CONTENTS

Animal Instincts (“The Hindsight Octopus”)	2
<i>A fun introduction to using poetic form to talk about oneself.</i>	
Call & Response (“Chinky”)	3
<i>Writing letters to and from the world about how our bodies are perceived.</i>	
First Time / Last Time (“The Mirror”)	4
<i>Drawing connections between form and content while examining formative experiences.</i>	
Speaking Back (“To the Man Who Shouted ‘I Like Pork Fried Rice’)	5
<i>Using extended metaphor to respond to moments we have felt undervalued by society.</i>	
It’s Complicated (“Metamorphosis”)	6
<i>Altering images in extended metaphor to speak about complex/hybrid identities.</i>	

All source poems can be found in *Floating, Brilliant, Gone*, by Franny Choi ([Write Bloody Publishing](http://WriteBloodyPublishing.com), 2014, ISBN: 978-1-93912-43-6), available for purchase at <http://bit.ly/fbgpowells>. Feel free to modify & reproduce for non-commercial purposes as long as original source is credited.



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Workshop I: Animal Instincts

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- Examine one aspect of their own personalities through metaphor
- Brainstorm a list of poem topics and choose one
- Follow an example of a poetic form and build upon it

POEM:

“The Hindsight Octopus” (p. 31)

EXPLORE:

1. Read “The Hindsight Octopus.”
2. Discussion Questions:
 - a. What form does this poem take?
 - b. What does the octopus represent?
 - c. Have you ever felt like the Hindsight Octopus? Which parts of this poem do you identify with?
 - d. Why do you think the poet chose to talk about anxiety in this form?

WRITE:

1. Brainstorm a list of emotions you’ve experienced today (e.g., confusion, anger, boredom)
2. Brainstorm a list of aspects of your personality (e.g., funny, neat freak, introverted, class clown)
3. Choose one of these. (It doesn’t have to totally describe you! It can just be the one you’re thinking about today.)
4. As a class, brainstorm some other headings (such as habitat, diet, behavior) that you could include on your own animal fact sheet.
5. Choose an animal to represent your emotion/personality aspect and give it an awesome name.
6. Write your own animal fact sheet, with information for at least three headings.

SHARE & DEBRIEF:

1. Did anyone write about a part of themselves that they don’t always like very much? How did it feel to write about it this way?
2. Do you ever feel like you don’t understand part of yourself? At what times do you feel that way?

Workshop 2: Call & Response

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- Write a letter from the world to a body part and a letter in response
- Use concrete details to write about abstract concepts
- Write from the perspective of an inanimate object

POEM:

“Chinky” (p. 37)

EXPLORE:

1. Read “Chinky.”
2. Discussion questions:
 - a. Why do you think the author chose to write about her eyes?
 - b. How and from whom do we receive messages about our bodies? (Where do we find “letters from the world”?)
 - c. How are these two voices different? (Think about tone, diction, rhythm, etc.)

WRITE:

1. Brainstorm:
 - a. A part of your body that you sometimes try to hide
 - b. A part of your body that the world seems to have a lot to say about
 - c. A part of your body that you have wanted to change
2. Choose one body part from this list and list:
 - a. some words that the world uses to speak about it
 - b. images that come to mind (think about shape, size, texture, even sound)
3. Write a letter from the world to this body part. Then write a letter in response.
 - a. Alternatively, students can switch poems and write the response letters for each other!

SHARE & DEBRIEF:

1. Which letter was easier to write? Why?
2. How do race, gender, and class show up in these poems?

Workshop 3: First Time / Last Time

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- Reflect on moments that shaped their identities
- Make connections between form and content

POEM:

“The Mirror,” p. 34

EXPLORE:

1. Read “The Mirror.”
2. Discussion questions:
 - a. Why does the child tell her reflection to “go back to where you came from”?
 - b. What do you think the child is learning or wrestling with by looking in the mirror?
 - c. What are examples of mirroring you find in the poem itself?
3. In pairs, discuss:
 - a. What was the first time that you were aware of your race, class, or gender (choose one)?
 - b. What was the most recent time that you were aware of your race, class, or gender?
4. Share some of these responses out loud.

WRITE:

1. Choose one of the formative moments that you discussed.
2. Make a list of objects that were present (literally or figuratively) when this moment occurred. Choose the one that feels most exciting to you right now.
3. Describe everything you can about this object. Consider its size, shape, physical properties, smell, taste, sound, texture, etc.
4. Write a poem telling the story of the first or most recent time you were aware of an aspect of your identity. The only rule is that the poem must in some way become the object you chose. (For example, if your object is a door, the poem could be shaped like a door, contain a hole, open into a new poem once you turn the page, etc.)

SHARE & DEBRIEF:

1. How did it feel to reflect on these moments of learning? Are they incidents that you think about often?
2. How many of the experiences people talked about were positive? How many were negative? Why do you think that is?

Workshop 4: Speaking Back

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- Write in response to a time they felt undervalued by society
- Analyze an extended metaphor and construct their own
- Modify an image to alter its meaning

POEM:

“To the Man Who Shouted ‘I Like Pork Fried Rice’ at Me on the Street”, p. 38

EXPLORE:

1. Read “To the Man Who Shouted....”
2. Discussion questions:
 - a. What surprises you about this poem?
 - b. What associations does the speaker draw between Chinese food and the sexualization of Asian American women? Is the speaker refuting or claiming these associations?
 - c. What happens at the end?

WRITE:

1. Think of a time when someone or something made you feel weak, ugly, or worthless (choose one). Jot down just a sentence or two about it.
2. What was the person (or institution) really saying in that moment? Translate it as simply as possible.
3. Brainstorm some *things* that are weak, ugly, or worthless (whichever you chose):
 - a. Think of: animals, objects, weather, plants, landscapes, buildings, etc.
 - b. Choose one or two of these images to work with.
4. If you could respond to that person or institution, what would you tell them?
5. Now for some magic! Take the (weak, ugly, or worthless) images you chose and do something to them to turn them powerful, beautiful, or valuable.
 - a. Examples: a rusty penny multiplies a million times; a landfill is paved over and planted with grass and flowers
6. Write a poem in which you speak back to the person or institution, using the images you chose as your guide.

SHARE & DEBRIEF:

1. How did it feel to speak back in this way?
2. How is it different from actually engaging with the person in the moment?
3. Aside from poems like these, what other opportunities do we have to speak back?

Workshop 5: It's Complicated

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- Make connections between two different identities they carry
- Use a related set of images in an extended metaphor

POEM:

“Metamorphosis” (p. 64)

EXPLORE:

1. Read “Metamorphosis”
2. Discussion Questions:
 - a. What story is being told in each column?
 - b. Can you point out every instance that the butterfly/caterpillar metaphor appears in the poem? Why do you think she returns to this image? How does she subvert or challenge it?
 - c. Do you think the speaker is able to resolve these two identities?
 - d. Have you ever felt torn between two parts of yourself?

WRITE:

1. Make a list of opposing sides of yourself. They can be two identities that have been in conflict with each other at some point (e.g., queer and Muslim; Haitian and American). Or they could just be different aspects of your personality (e.g., funny and introverted).
2. Choose one pair and brainstorm:
 - a. A time you felt comfortable in one aspect of yourself
 - b. A time you felt comfortable in the other aspect of yourself
 - c. A time you felt these two sides were in conflict
3. Think of an image (or two related images) that can represent both sides of you.
 - a. To do this, you might want to start with one image from one identity and go from there. For example, if you chose funny and introverted, start by thinking about an image that can represent “funny.” Say you choose a rubber chicken; then, think about how you can change that image to represent “introverted.” Maybe it’s an actual chicken? an egg? a rubber eraser?
4. Brainstorm a list of everything you can think of that is related to this image pair.
5. Write a poem grappling with the two sides of yourself, using your image as your guiding force.

SHARE & DEBRIEF:

1. Did you try to resolve the two identities in your poem? Why or why not?
2. Why do we feel like we can’t be more than one thing?
3. What’s the value of having a complex identity?