

READING COMPANION

Now in Color, by Jacqueline Balderrama

Sample poem:

Finger Puppet in the Likeness of Frida Kahlo

From the pedestal of a hand, she nods. Three flowers in her hair, red rebozo across her shoulders, Frida as a finger puppet speaks to children about beauty. Do they already know what is different about Frida's appearance? She faces the world through the stare in each wounded portrait—a deer saying, *pain comes in every color*; two Fridas in a wash of storm clouds; a woman rooted in recline. The window of her chest delivers a vine, and it's reaching toward you.

Questions to consider:

1. In "relato," the speaker says "I've learned to collect what's scattered." How is collecting what has been scattered by immigration and colonialism explored in *Now in Color*?
2. How does exploration of color change throughout this collection, from poems such as "Study of Two Hands" to ones such as "Santa Catalina"?
3. How do poems such as "Afterlife" explore the relationship between body and place? How is this complicated by immigration and the forced displacement of peoples?
4. How does the series of vocabulary poems in this collection address language, translation, and the loss/change of language with immigration and assimilation?
5. How do the movie stars such as Rita Hayworth, and the advent of Technicolor films, serve as symbols in this collection? Consider "My Rita Hayworth," and the lines "she's always / fragmented, always / at least two places at once."

6. Why do you think Balderrama uses a collection of Picasso drawings and paintings to explore her “family mythology”? What space does the lens of art provide?
7. Locate and discuss some of the places in this collection where Balderrama looks at questions of borders and belonging. Compare what she has to say through her poems with what we have access to in the news and media.
8. *Now in Color* alternates between examining the past and looking at the present, through a personal lens and also through art, culture, and history in the public domain. What effect does juxtaposing these have? Consider “Mexico as Mexico, 1914,” “Fragmented Apology, 2006,” and “Water, 2014.”

Writing prompts:

1. Write a poem that also becomes your own definition of a word, as Balderrama does throughout this collection.
2. Choose a piece of art and write an ekphrastic poem in response to it, such as “*La Llamada*” or the sections in “*Alternate Ways to Paint*.”
3. Begin a poem with a story from the news or an historic occurrence that also has a personal connection to you or your family.
4. Using the series “*Alternate Ways to Paint*” as a reference, use artwork of your choosing as a new way of thinking about, and telling, a personal story in a poem, or poems.

Other Perugia books that could pair with this collection:

Beg No Pardon, by Lynne Thompson

Each Crumbling House, by Melody S. Gee

Gloss, by Ida Stewart

The Work of Hands, by Catherine Anderson

Areas of study in which to teach this title:

Ethnic & Gender Studies

Women's Studies

American Studies

Creative Writing/Poetry

Latinx Studies

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