

Healing the Hearts and Minds of Educators Through Poetry

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Abstract

As an educator it has become abundantly clear to me that the work we do begins within. How we show up is determined by how, and who, we are in our hearts, minds and spirits. For me, poetry is a gateway. Poems can speak truth to self, truth to others and truth to power.

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As an educator it has become abundantly clear to me that the work we do begins within. How we show up is determined by how, and who, we are in our hearts, minds and spirits. We may work to plan lessons and curriculum. We may strive to help our students be the best they can be. We may give our all and work tirelessly at what we do. But, unless we develop our internal capacities for mindful attention and deep listening we cannot truly meet our students where they are. Unless we can begin to confront our own biases towards others and the harms we cause, we cannot create justice and kindness in our classrooms.

For me, poetry is a gateway. Poems can speak truth to self, truth to others and truth to power. In the poem, Journey Towards Gentle, I reflect the words, concerns, frustrations and hopes spoken by a diverse group of educators grappling with racialized trauma. In the poem, Story, I remember one of my mentors who helped me understand that whether it be the South's story of our country's beginnings, our own ancestral story, the scientific story of evolution or the story of Adam and Eve, we can choose to use any story to either separate us or to understand each other. In my final poem, Be a Mountain, I wanted to express what I believe to be the deepest purpose we have as educators, which is to be the rock, to provide perspective and solidity in a world that is so easily swayed and tumbled. Learning to sit like a mountain, to be mindful of all that happens within us and around us, we remain strong, resolute and solid.

Journey Towards Gentle

Pause
before filling up space
A lighter touch

Sit
with the truth of things
A looser grip

"It"
is not such a big deal
A fresh moment

Dissolve
the harm done
An out-breath

Make
good friends with yourself
An open-hearted mind

Be
honest with what is now
A time to wonder

Listen
to nature and heed her lessons
A new calling

How courageous are you
To
Allow your load to lighten
and cure your ignorance?

To
Do no harm
By starting with yourself?

To
Wait
So wisdom can begin to root and form?

To
Put down the gavel
Take off your cloak of protection
And open up to
Gentle?

Story

It was you who taught me
It is all a story
It's about how you weave your moments
Into the words you speak to others
About who you are and where you come from
It's about how many stories can live at once
And all be true

My story
Holds the stories of
those who came before me
There is love and hope and pain
In their stories
that I am discovering
in my own

Stories are strings that connect us
Tie us together
And sometimes bind us like prisoners
If we believe them too strongly

If we can remember that they are just stories
As true and real and important as they may feel
Then maybe they can be rewritten
So new stories can take their place

And our histories need not become
Our futures

Be A Mountain

Be a mountain
Where so much happens
Plants grow and die
Trees fall
People walk and climb
And leave their trash

But the mountain remains

Wind moves things on the mountain
Snow, rain, hail
blanket, flood and lash
Sun scorches and helps things grow
Clouds roll by or cover its peak

But the mountain is still

Loggers strip the mountain
Fires singe and rage and kill
People build houses
Animals live and die
Raise their young
Make homes in trees and caves

But the mountain never dies

Be a mountain
That majestic presence
That allows for all this to happen
On its surface
But in its core
It is rock

Because the mountain is solid

You know in your ancient wisdom
That the trees will grow back
Birth and death are fluid
Weather changes
Nothing stays the same
The truth is in your center

Because the mountain just sits there

Being a mountain

Acknowledgement

Lea Carla Abrams is an educator, writer and poet. Her experience spans from early childhood and K-12, to the college and graduate level. She has served as a teacher, counselor, coach and division head in Waldorf, progressive and independent schools for 40 years. Lea has written curriculum and taught writing to children as well as to educators. As a mindfulness instructor, she has brought mindfulness programs into both schools and non-profit organizations. She presently serves as a consultant bringing mindfulness, SEL and racial justice initiatives to schools. She uses poetry as a catalyst for authentic change, and uses music, art and dance to create powerfully integrated learning experiences. She serves as an active member of TEL, an organization committed to transformational educational leadership, as well as a facilitator for Millennium Forum, which is an organization that conducts circles of growth and trust for teachers and educational leaders.

Currently, Lea is working on a book of her poems and writing a memoir of her grandmother. She is a mother, grandmother, cat lover and beach and nature lover. Practicing loving kindness and engaging in authentic relationships is her goal each day, wherever she happens to be at any given moment.

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