



The Poetry Workshop Lesson Plans  
February-April 2021



and the ones who stood without sweet company  
will sing and sing  
back into the mountains and  
if necessary  
even under the sea

*we are the ones we have been waiting for*

June Jordan

from *Poem for South African Women*

Presented to the United Nations

August 9, 1978

Sometimes our writing can give us a better understanding of ourselves—connecting our intellect and our hearts—finding another way to see. Poetry can carry our most deeply held ideas and beliefs made manifest into art, and the ways we interact with our society are often defined by those same convictions and perspectives. These poetry workshops invited a glimpse into that possibility—of exploring the heart with a willingness to greet those who have another perspective.

In 2021, as part of the Why It Matters Civic and Electoral Participation initiative, Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities hosted an online series of community poetry workshops. The larger series consisted of educational events about justice, current local legislation, histories of suffrage, and examples of youth civic leadership and activism.

—Lyz Soto



We are the ones we have been waiting for . . . .  
—June Jordan

Because I could not wait for death. . . .  
—Emily Dickinson

This tree will be here long after you're gone  
This land will always be your home. . . .  
—Hanale Bishop

Liberation is birthed not borrowed . . . .  
—‘Thilani Lasconia

I am LIFE/LINA‘LA  
I am STRENGTH/MINETGOT  
I am LOVE/GUINAIYA. . . .  
—Mary Therese Perez Hattori

On the other side of yesterday, my ancestors had a vision, of a new place they could  
call home—the Lagoon of Life, an island risen . . . .  
—Carol Ann Carl

Just cuz you live the third  
Biggest city on the Big Island  
No mean you live in one city . . . .  
—M. G. Martin

Any decent realtor . . . chirps on  
about good bones: This place could be beautiful,  
right? You could make this place beautiful.  
—Maggie Smith

I don't write no haiku . . . .  
—Richard Hamasaki

My mother is the ocean, remind me of the reality to keep my mind open!  
—Navid Najafi

. . .an impatient moon fishes for the morning  
—Albert Wendt

Oh, but my Aunties fought,  
they fought with words or with signs, they fought . . . .  
—Isabella Pasa

our bodies teach us many lessons  
the farther away we get from our hearts, the smaller our arteries become. . . .  
—Maira Pirsch

the uncle on the microphone/telling his story  
about cleaning up bombs/on other islands  
when he was young.how beautiful the fish shimmered . . . .  
—Aiko Yamashiro

In this place years ago  
they educated old language out of you . . . .  
—Robert Davis Hoffman

Remember some of us did not believe in the future  
And that was the unmaking of the world.  
—Lyz Soto



# Objective

- Participants will craft several lines of rap/poetry describing themselves, where they come from, who/what is most important to them and what story they want to tell the world.
- We will explore the importance of drawing inspiration from and celebrating our cultural, familial, and personal foundations.
- Participants will be prompted to identify and explore special and unique aspects of themselves through a series of discussion points and writing prompts.
- We will go through a series of activities which will build on one another and ultimately lead to writing a final cohesive poem/rap.
- We will learn how to count beats and put our poems/raps over music utilizing rhythm, cadence, tempo, and flow. Concepts of originality, style, and freedom of expression will be discussed in detail.
- Participants will be encouraged to share what they write with the group. The workshop facilitator will guide by example and provide participants with tools to utilize in preparing for and building confidence about public speaking and performance.

## Introduction (10-15 mins)

- Artist/facilitator performs and tells their story

## Activity One: Freewriting & Open Dialogue (15 mins)

- Who are you? Describe yourself in three or more words. (e.g., Compassionate, honest, powerful)
- What is your favorite thing to do? List several activities that first come to mind (e.g., write lyrics)
- What are your greatest strengths? (e.g., open minded, writing, take care of my family)
- List several of your heroes. Can be real life or fictional. (e.g., my dad, Bruce Lee, Peter Tosh, Mossadegh, 'Umi a Līloa)
- List at least three of your favorite natural phenomenon, works of nature. (e.g., thunderstorms, the ocean, the sun, Lilinoe)
- Each participant is encouraged to share at least one word they wrote and tell us why they chose it. Others will be asked to let us know if they used the same word and if it means the same thing to them.

## Activity 2: “I am I be” (10-15 mins)

- Complete at least four I am I be phrases using answers from activity one. (I am.... I be....)
- Use your creative imagination to write unique lines, mixing and matching your words/attributes in unexpected ways.

## Activity 3: Rhyming Word Bank (10-15 mins)

- Take the last word of your favorite I am I be phrase and list as many words as you can that rhyme with it. They don't have to be perfect rhymes and you can take some artistic/creative liberties as long as you can make them flow and sound like they rhyme.
- You can also use phrases. Be creative! (e.g., Family: battery, actually, calamity, alchemy, commonality, center of gravity, virtual reality, Milky Way galaxy, personality, hospitality, humanity, etc...)



# I AM I BE

## Poetry Workshop

Created by  
**Navid Najafi**



#### Activity 4: Counting Bars (5-10 mins)

- We will learn BMP (beats per minute) and how to count bars (measures) of music on several example beats at different speeds.
- We will discuss tempo, cadence, and flow with several examples given from mainstream artists and the facilitators own work.

#### Activity 5: Put It on a Beat (10-15 mins)

- Start with your favorite I am I be line then write a third line which may or may not rhyme with your first line. It's up to you if the third line rhymes but it should continue the thought/meaning of your first two lines.
- On the fourth line you will select one of the rhyming words you just listed and use it to complete your 4-line rhyming rap!
- Use cleverness and d creativity to link your rhyming words. The idea is for it to flow and have meaning. You can use artistic liberty once again and change any part of your rap that doesn't make sense or flow the way you want. \*No wrong way of doing it
- If you choose to go in your own direction and away from the I am I be structure that's ok just pay close attention to the message/story you are presenting to your audience.
- You can continue this pattern to write as many lines as you can. Two lines are known in hip hop terminology as one bar, so four written lines are two bars, generally.

Remember there is no one right way to create, it's all about your creativity and personal style.

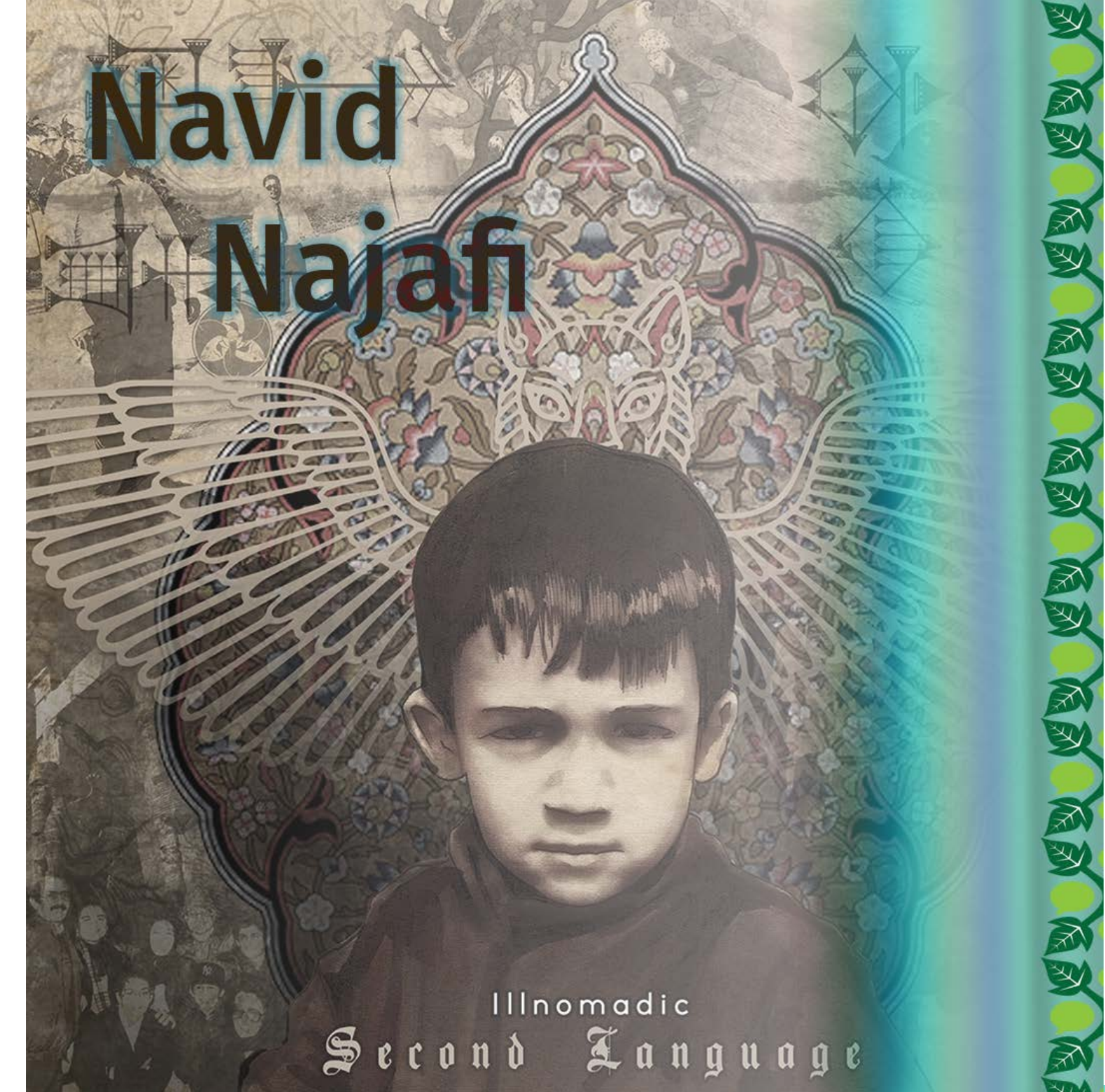
What you are trying to say and how you play with the

words are always up to you.

Be original!

#### Activity 6: Collaboration (time permitting) (10-20 mins)

- Participants will be grouped up in break-out rooms to co-create several lines by mixing and matching what they have already written or by coming up with new lines together (number of participants will determine pairings/groupings)
- Sharing/Performing (10-15 mins)



#### Navid's example rap:

I am compassionate,  
I be taking care of family.  
I got their back  
always charging up their battery.

Right, they center me like gravity.  
My father is my galaxy.  
My mother is the ocean, remind me of reality  
to keep my mind open!



Opening Poem:

Just Enough

Soil for legs  
Axe for hands  
Flowers for eyes  
Bird for ears  
Mushroom for noses  
Smile for mouth  
Songs for lungs  
Sweat for skin  
Wind for mind

—Nanao Sakaki

Ground Rules

Sharing is strongly encouraged.

Supplies

Bring a page to write on and something to write with.

Exercises

Sourcework—finding the “why” behind your action and intention

- Part 1—Using the taro plant as a visual. Ask participants—why is it important to grow taro? Why are the taro leaves important? Why is the stem important? Why is the root important? As participants are responding, record their answers.

Goal: to collect a variety of responses that have varying degrees of impact from the universal to the deeply personal.

- Part 2—Invite participants to choose a community problem they would like to solve. As they share

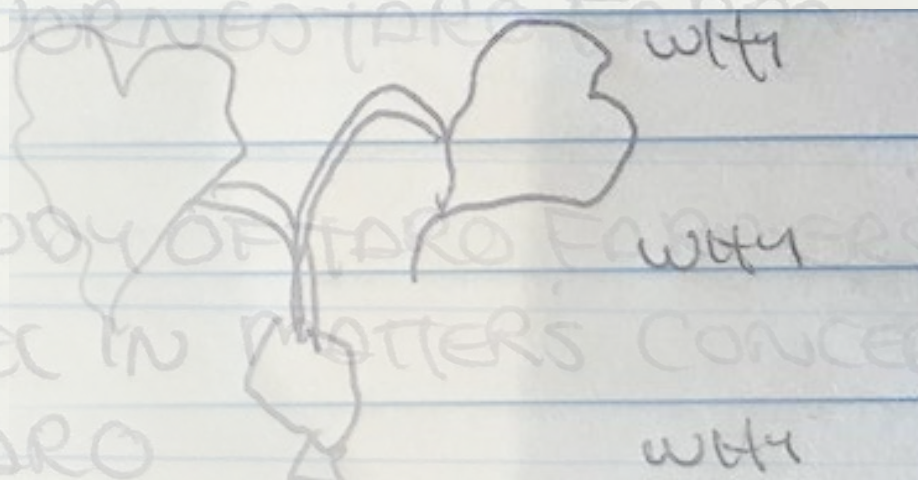
Participants receive a set of tools and techniques encouraging a writing/creative approach to “be like water,” which is based on the philosophies integral to farming. These tools can aid in sustaining creative passions, even during tumultuous times.

their thoughts, replace the “why growing taro is important” heading with their topic and ask the “why” questions again. Why are these issue important? Goal: to facilitate participants thinking deeply about their topic from the leaves to the root.

- Part 3—Have 1 minute of everyone writing followed by sharing.

Song Mapping—finding a “room” of your own

Many writing philosophies suggest a writer must find a “clean safe well lit space of their own to write,” but for many of us such a place is not an option. How do we keep writing anyway?



Hanale Bishop



MAPPING SURVIVAL  
Poetry Workshop

Created by  
Hanale Bishop



- Part 1—Share about your process for finding good places to write.

Example: Hanale shared about the different locations where he wrote songs in 2020 (in his truck, the restroom floor, and at the park, etc). His family was displaced from their home due to flooding and lack of safety). He found places because he sought them and because he needed them.

- Part 2—Ask participants to think of “safe places” to write tying it to a chosen theme.

Example: Hanale’s wife Meghan chose “letting go” as her theme, so her “safe places” held that thought for her, such as healing workshops, the ocean, or quiet. Writing down either single words or phrases. The intent is that the participants can learn to “map” or identify safe places to write from.

- Part 3—2 minutes of writing followed by sharing.

### **Word Saving—Building your own thesaurus**

- Part 1—Akin to seed saving, write down words that make an impact on you and save them for later. Also write down the context in which they were used, the circumstance, or the story. This practice deepens the meaning of these words for you and that depth will be felt in your writing.

Example: Jockey—when he explained how to close the steamer lid at the poi factory. Uncle Paul said: lower the steamer lid, jockey it around till it fits.

- Part 2—Have participants choose a word that stands out from the previous two exercises. Write it down and write a story about that word. The hope is that, with context behind the word, it stands out stronger within the

writer’s piece and thus strengthens the “truth” behind it.

### **Dragonflying—nurturing your hook**

Your “hook” helps your poem or song grow. By nurturing it—giving yourself space to meditate on your “hook,” you are letting your plant get stronger, letting your water deepen, letting dragonflies (thoughts) circle and grow stronger.

### **Moon Goal—meditations take form**

- Part 1—Akin to planting on a full moon when plants thrive in the moonlight, let your meditations take form when your creative output feels like its at its highest potential.
- Part 2—Have participants identify a hook, be it a word or a phrase, from previous 3 exercises that could revolve around their chosen topic. Write using the “hook” as a prompt.
- Part 3—Write as little as four lines, rhyming is unnecessary (5-10 minutes depending on how participants are feeling).
- Part 4— As part of the process of identifying a “hook.” Encourage participants to give themselves time to think on a central theme, and to set dates to write based on highest potential output and efficiency based on the energies of the moon and personal schedule. This kind of planning can help create a strong piece that is close to the writer’s own inner truth.

### **Sharing and Closure (15 minutes)**

### **On Songwriting:**

Vocalizing a hook—Use example of [Bobby McFerrin “playing” the audience](#), which is a lesson in expectation, but also shows that everyone has the innate ability to instinctively produce basic musical scales.

Apply those scales to the “truth” you aim to discover in your writing. Imagine the words as plants, and that plants speak in vibrations, with the truth resonating at the highest vibration.

Therefore one should speak truth to their plants, thus obtaining the highest possible resonance in their work.

As the truth unfolds, feel free to pair your writing to an existing popular song, which give you an opportunity to get a feel for the practice, while keeping to your own story. Strengthening your own words will make the result stronger than the source material.

### **Intention:**

*Participants of any age can learn a little bit more about themselves and their surroundings. They can also learn that strengthening their own inner knowing can help support any level of engagement and participation — finding avenues towards a combined consciousness of civic engagement.*

### **Takeaway—Mapping Survival**

*Participants are left with a host of tools to add to their creative process. With these exercises, they have identified a community topic and its varying levels of importance ranging from universal to deeply personal. They have safe places to write from with a “map” of places to create from, and have begun developing a newfound awareness on how to add new places. They have also learned a means to identify and strengthen words for later use.*



# Objective

In this workshop, Aunty Pua will help participants explore the many roles of poetry as message and messenger, bridge and bridge builder, doorway and boundary, activist and priest. Participants will tell the story of their names, the story of their community, and the story of their gifts, and will practice seeing the beauty and humanity in themselves and each other.

## Introduction (20 minutes)

Aunty Pua opened the space by asking us to think about the ways poems are prayers. Words are medicine. She also asked us to think about everyone in the room as worthy of our best. It doesn't matter if there are two people or if there are three hundred; they all deserve the best we can give.

Opening poems:

[“How to Be a Poet” by Wendell Barry](#)

[“Stuggle” by Mel King](#)

[“Losing a Language” by W. S. Merwin](#)

[“Choosing My Name” by Puanani Burgess](#)

## Breakout into Small Groups (20 minutes)

This is our opportunity to tell our stories, to witness other's stories, and to begin creating the reservoir we can return to when we write.

Share:

- The story of all of your names—the name you give yourself, the name given to you by your family, the name used by society
- The story of your community
- The story of your gift—As an example of this idea, Aunty Pua shared with us the story of a young man from Wai'anae, who would call the fish and they would come to him. A gifted and thoughtful fisherman, he is mindful of the ocean and its bounty. He never takes more than he needs, and if the ocean doesn't have enough to give, he doesn't

There is the stereotype that the writer is an isolated soul—working feverishly into the wee hours of the night . . . alone. Aunty Pua reminds us that words hold sacred and healing powers, that poetry can be like prayer, and that we often find what we want to say when we are in conversation with other people, because stories aren't much until they are told. She also reminds us of the power in names—many of us have many names. They allow us recognition. They cause us pain. They protect us. They are our stories and our prayers.

take at all. His gift is not one typically marked or valued by our current institutional educational system, yet it is precious and life affirming.

## Large Group Share (15 minutes)

Invite at least one person from each group to share about some of the stories shared in their smaller group.

## Second Small Group Share (20 minutes)

Ceremony—The Weather Ball and the Blue Sky

When we gather in groups there are moments for ceremony—moments for honoring, witnessing, and appreciating.

In your groups tell two stories:

1. What is the weather like inside of you today?
2. Tell about a blue sky moment—a moment that produced wonder and joy for you

## Large Group Share (15 minutes)

Invite at least one person from each group to share about some of the stories shared in their smaller group.

## Free Writing (10 minutes)

Using some of the words, phrases, ideas, and stories from the reservoir you created during sharing and talking story with your groups, see where these ceremonies take you and where your words might heal and protect. Prompt: I am a poet . . .

## Sharing Writing with Your Workshop Community (20 minutes) Mahalo

# Puanani Burgess



**The Role of Poetry  
& the Poet in Building  
the Beloved Community**  
Poetry Workshop  
Created by  
**Puanani (Aunty Pua)  
Burgess**





# Objective

Through this workshop we hope to facilitate participants in valuing the importance of documenting their own lives and experiences, understanding the importance of letters in Hawaiian history and ‘ōiwi poetics as a tool for liberation, understanding that documentation in many mediums is essential, and understanding the role that poets/po‘e mele play in preserving history, by creating a safe space for artists of all backgrounds to haku mele.

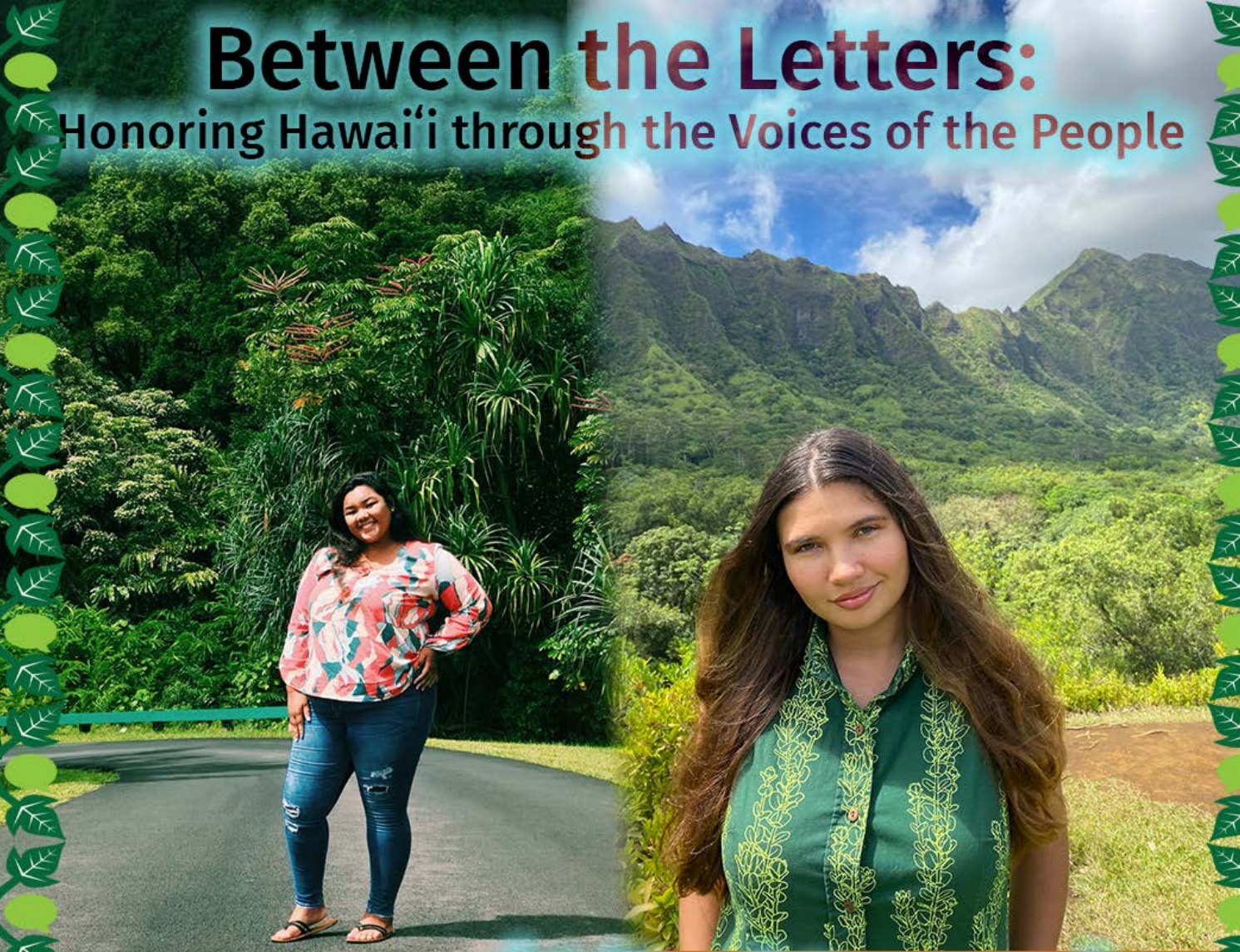
## Workshop Agenda


- Let people in from the virtual waiting room and play music while people get settled.
- Introductions and introduce writing exercise
- Context set up and pre exercise “presentation”
  - \* Jonah Kūhiō, civic engagement and its importance in community
  - \* Jonah Kūhiō’s writings and letters as evidence/epistolary poems
  - \* Emphasis of poets/writers/artists = true keepers of time and documents
  - \* Examples of letters/epistolary poems as key documents in Hawaiian history
- Questions listed. “What would you ask your kūpuna?”
  - \* Collect questions from participants
  - \* Set up writing prompt (question they choose to answer and intro saying “To My Mo‘opuna”)
- Writing time
- Share back
- Final thoughts and mahalo

TIME	FACILITATOR TASKS	PARTICIPANT ENDEAVORS
5 MINUTES	Facilitate letting folks into the classroom and playing music for people as they trickle in. Queue up powerpoint/google slides.	Get settled in the zoom room. Have a paper and pen or some type of writing utensil ready.
15 MINUTES	Individual introductions. Name, ‘āina, and the work that they do, and a kupuna we bring.	Introduce themselves using their name, ‘āina, and a kupuna they bring.
10 MINUTES	Introduction to writing exercise. What is an epistolary poem? Show an example of an epistolary poem. Ask if there are any questions. Segue into why epistolary poems are useful. <b>Historical context:</b> March 26 is Jonah Kūhiō Day Example: He created civic clubs and advocated for civic engagement. He was responsible for meticulous documentation.	Take notes on what an epistolary poem is and observe the example. Ask if there are any questions.  <i>Understand the works and contributions that Prince Jonah Kūhio made to civic engagement. Highlight that he was an amazing writer and that his letters and documentation were not just acts of civic engagement but of survival.</i>
5 MINUTES	ASK: What are some things that you would want to ask the kūpuna you brought with you today?	Write down a list of things they would want to ask their kūpuna.
10 MINUTES	Shareback and compile a list of these questions. Maybe have these questions posted in the chat.	Shareback questions either verbally or in the chat.
10 MINUTES	“To my mo‘opuna” •Have participants pick one question that was compiled in the list. • Instruct participants to start their epistolary poem with “To my mo‘opuna” and answer the question that they wish to pose to their kūpuna.	Pick a question to ask.
10 MINUTES	<b>Small Group Shareback:</b> Put participants in breakout rooms so that everyone has the opportunity to share.	Shareback
15 MINUTES	<b>Large Group Shareback:</b> Share out in the main room. 2-5 participants depending on time and what’s being shared.	Shareback if comfortable
15 MINUTES	Final thoughts and mahalo	Final thoughts and mahalo

# Between the Letters:

Honoring Hawai‘i through the Voices of the People





Why It Matters  
CIVIC AND ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

## ‘Ihilani Lasconia & Isabella Pasa



External Resources: [NHSS](#), [HCFH](#), [KAHEA](#)



*Inspired by youth spoken word and other poets, we will explore together how to strengthen our emotional connection and intimacy to large historical events or community issues, as well as develop our own brave spaces where we can speak truth to power.*

**Intro to this workshop and our intentions (15 minutes):**

As we step into this workshop, we ask that you think about an historical event and its impact on your life / family / community.

*Reminders:*

No wrong answers

The standard is yourself

**BRING THE HEART!**

Facilitators share their own poems crafted to embrace the heart.

**1. Intro and viewing of [2011 Guåhan poem](#) (10 minutes)**

Poet and Mentor Melvin Won Pat Borja— “When step on to the stage, give your performance everything. Know that you did the best you could do. Leave your heart on the stage and you will regret nothing.”

Viewing of Guåhan poem—Notice how the use of island and ocean imagery to connect their story.

**2. Large Group Discussion (5 minutes)**

*What feelings or reactions did you have?*

*What felt powerful and why?*

Facilitators also share observations and reactions

**3. Small Group Discussion (groups of 3-4, 10 minutes)**

Share:    Name

A community you belong to

A historical event that happened before you were born that had a meaningful impact on your life, your family or loved ones, and your community

*Examples:*

Lyz—The Philippine-American war and the annexation of Hawai’i by the US made it possible for my grandfather (and many other Filipinos) to immigrate to Hawai’i as laborers in the early 20th century.

Aiko—Tetsu no Ame / Battle of Okinawa. March - July, 1945. 149,425 Okinawans were killed, died by suicide or went missing, roughly half of the estimated pre-war 300,000 local population.

**4. Free Write (5-6 Minutes)**

Write with reflection on your historical event and its impact on your life / family / community. Try to use as much detail as you can—this can include how ideas and experiences look, but also things like smell, taste, touch, and sound.

Prompts:

When we/I were/was young, we were taught. . .

I was . . . the first time I heard . . .

In Grandma’s house, my favorite story . . .

Once upon a time . . .

My Grandma/Grandpa/etc said . . .

At 5 minutes give 1-minute warning and instructions:

At the bottom of your page: list questions for yourself.

Examples:

What voices/parts are missing?

Who did you not write about?

What more do you want to find out and how would you do it?

**5. Group writing activity—Creating a Word Palette—Building your dictionary (10 minutes):**

Example: Use water as an example of extended metaphor/imagery. Name kinds of water including nouns, adjectives, and verbs of how water acts, what water symbolizes—teardrop, Oceania, Pālolo Stream, trickles, surges, envelopes, evaporates, drips, transformation, fluidity, drowning, fertility

**6. Intro and viewing of [2014 Washington DC poem “Waters”](#) (10 minutes):**

Pay attention to water as a unifying theme.

Notice similarities to Guåhan poem and the use of body movements and performed emotion as part of the form of the poem.

**7. Large Group Discussion (10 minutes):**

*What feelings or reactions did you have?*

*What felt powerful and why?*

**8. Free Write (15 minutes):**

Go back to your historical event/community freewrite, explore the words from our water word palette, and see where this takes you. At a future time, you could use this exercise choosing another metaphor/image and creating a palette for yourself.

Prompts:

Underwater is where I learned . . .

I know I am of the sea . . .

The rain at my house . . .

60% of my body is water . . .

Notice the possibilities of change or movement that your metaphor gives you.

It could be like in the “Waters” poem, where the metaphor gives the poem a large theme, or the Guahan poem where metaphor is used to give visuals to ideas, like when they talk about a hand like the sea being simultaneously gentle and deadly. Example: “they tried to bury us, they didn’t know we were seeds”

These poems hold defiance, transformation, resilience, and joy—all potential motivators to facilitate real change. Remember that genuine emotion is powerful, as are you and your body, don’t apologize for experiencing or showing emotion as part of your art.

**9. Group Share, Feedback, and Thanks (20 minutes)**

Bonus poem: Denver poem, [“The Lobster Speaks”](#)

Some page poets who have inspired us: Ross Gay, Natalie Diaz, Donovan Kūhiō Colleps



# The Heart of the Matter

## Poetry Workshop

Created by

# Aiko Yamashiro

# Lyz Soto



# Objective

Hawai‘i is home to many different racial and ethnic groups of people. Sometimes it is thought of as a harmonious melting pot of different people. But does the melting pot metaphor really honor the full identities, histories, and realities of all the people who call Hawai‘i home? How do we make sense of the identities we carry and the realities we find ourselves in?

As a white woman who is not originally from Hawai‘i, I (the facilitator) find myself grappling with the ways I see myself and the ways I am often seen by others (as Haole), and wonder how to make sense of it. Using writing tools learned in spoken word poetry communities, we’ll talk about how to write and keep writing by creating word banks, freewriting, and exploring the work of other poets. This workshop will build upon humanities scholars, who engage with Hawai‘i’s complex relationship with identity and colonization – and give space to participants to co-create futures where we honor our full selves and the place we call home.

## Welcome & Agreements

- Embrace Discomfort
- No wrong Answers
- The Standard is Yourself
- Everyone Writes
- Accept Non-Closure

## Ideas & Context

Two Common Discourses of Race in Hawai‘i: Melting Pot & Racial Conflict (& the Grey Area)

## Word Banks or Word Palettes (10 Minutes)

- Building the word palette, have participants name some things/ideas they associate with “Hawai‘i” examples: home, ‘āina, kapu aloha, traffic
- Continue with “Kuleana” examples: responsibility, kupuna, joy
- Continue with “Languages” examples: ‘Ōlelo, Ilocano, Chuukese, English
- Continue with “Things associated with nature” examples: mountains, droplet, wildfire

## Names & Free Writes

- 3 Names you call yourself
  - 3 Names you are called
  - These names mean . . .
- 5 Minute Free Write—What is the “heart” of the names we are called? I am called . . . This name means . . .

## Deepening Ideas: Secondary Texts—

Understanding History

- [“Hawai‘i” - Pacific Tongues](#)
- [“Brave and Startling Truth” by Maya Angelou](#)
- [Haoles in Hawai‘i by Judy Roher](#)

## Creation of Text (10 Minute Free Write)

Prompts:

- Dear Hawai‘i....
- The grey area I live in ....
- My Kuleana is....

Questions behind the writing:

What are we giving to the place we live? The place we are from?  
What do we owe to our children?

## Share & Discussion

Mahalo





Kaselehlie,  
Mwohn ahi pan patohieng nan pwukoah wet,  
ih tiengki ei sakaradahp keipwenih oh wahu  
pan kupwuren enihlap, wauniki lapalap  
akan, kahlap akan kouruhsie, oh waunihki  
mehlel irail akan me iang poahsonehda  
sapwelimatail doadoahk en rahnwet, oh  
pil irail akan me pwilikihdi sapwelmomwail  
ansou pwe kumwail en kak iang karonge oh  
kadehde doadoahk wet.

The Workshop

In this workshop, we explore ekphrasis (ehk – fray – sis OR ehk – fruh- sis)—writing in response to visual image—and ekphrastic (ehk – frass – tick) poetry. We will be virtual witnesses to images of different spaces and acts of civic engagement. From our act of witnessing we hope to articulate our own poetic narratives seeded from the emotions or inspirations elicited from these images.

INAGOFLI’E— Define inagofli’e. Although gofli’e’ today translates into caring for someone, watching out for someone, or friendship, the older meaning of it is to “really see someone.” expressing care for someone else as the ability to truly see them. [Learn more from Michael Lujan Bevacqua.](#)

EXAMPLES OF EKPHRASIS— [An ekphrastic poem](#) is a vivid description of a scene or, in modern times, it is often a description of a work of art. [Resource for teaching ekphrastic poetry.](#)

Some classic examples:  
In Homer’s epic poem, *The Iliad*, the speaker describes in great detail, the shield of Achilles, in about 150 poetic lines. Another example is “[Ode on a Grecian Urn](#)” by John Keats; the poet describes the scenes of life that are on the outside of the urn, reflects on the nature of an urn—a vessel for ashes of the dead, an object that will outlast generations:  
When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st,  
“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”  
As another example, [Carol Ann shared an ekphrastic poem she wrote in memory of Iremamber Sykap](#), who was a 16-year-old Micronesian boy was fatally shot by HPD in April 2021. The boy’s name is Iremamber Sykap. Carol Ann wanted to tell what was not being reported in the media. Iremamber was our youth. He was a mentor and a poet. Most importantly he was a child.

As daughters of Micronesia who currently live in Hawai‘i, joining you now from the ahupua‘a of Kalihi and Waikikī, we acknowledge with gratitude and deep respect, the kanaka maoli of Hawai‘i nei. As many of you know, Micronesian communities are mourning a loss which Carol Ann will share shortly. Today many Native Hawaiians and many people of Oceania and voyaging communities are mourning the loss of Pwo Chad Kalepa Baybayan. In each encounter, I have been touched by his warmth and aloha for Micronesians. In 2010, [in a piece published by the Star Advertiser](#), he wrote about the contributions to Hawai‘i” by one of his mentors, Papa Mau, of Satawal, FSM.  
We begin by describing the terms we will use in this workshop and the words we have used in our title, sharing examples of this kind of poetry, and guiding you through activities in which you will begin to create your own poems.

POEMS OF WITNESS

KADEHDE—the Pohnpeian word for witness—is a derivative of two terms “ka”—to make, and “dehde”—clear. To kadehde is to watch something or someone so closely and so intently that the may exist with true clarity in your mind’s eye.

To begin practicing their own poems of witness, share a visual piece of art or of an image as an ekphrasis prompt. Mary and Carol Ann used [the video of the performance of Kū Ha’aheo E Ku’u Hawai‘i](#).  
10 Minutes—Free write some ideas, descriptions, thoughts, reactions, the beginnings of poems of witness. Invite participants to focus on a single image or video, or the totality of the images they would have seen thus far.

SHARING

Mary shared the concept of connection—I irensia na’lā’la’ i espiritu-ta, Our heritage gives life to our spirit. Mary discussed her commit to using technology to empower indigenous peoples and build communities in the aether of cyberspace, envisioning herself and others as taotao tinifok manglo’—people of the woven winds.

Invite people to share a stanza or a few lines of their poems.

CLOSING—Mary and Carol Ann  
Fuetsan Famalão’an—circle back to Iremamber Sykap—a moment of witnessing—picture your sons, brothers, fathers, uncles, grandsons, nephews in your past, present, and future. Tap into the strength and power of women and let’s make things happen through our testifying, witnessing, and creating programs for our youth, sharing our empathy and aloha for those who are grieving, and fill our spaces, communities, the world with LIFE, STRENGTH, LOVE. To everyone, remember, you are life, you are strength, you are love.

As a final piece of potential ekphrasis, we invite you to watch [Maisa the Chamoru Girl who saves Guåhan](#).





# Objective

In this two-hour workshop, participants explore the power of their family connections to civic engagement, and use their personal heritages as sources from which to create new works that weave a new voice and presence into their lineages. Before gathering , participants research their heritage and family history, locating primary source documents from their ancestors’ written histories, including: journals or diaries, newspaper articles (example: an article covering an issue that might have impacted your family), court documents, yearbook quotes or letters. These documents can also be fairly recent, like an email from ten years ago. Then, participants are instructed in the art of making a blackout poem or erasure poem using these documents. Each participant will leave the workshop with an original poem sourced from their personal heritage of civic engagement.

## Introduction (20 minutes)

What is poetry? What is erasure poetry? As an intro to this workshop, definitions are given to help participants, particularly poets at the beginning of their journey) develop an understanding of how poetry and forms of poetry are discussed, defined, and practiced.

Examples and Resources for Erasure Poetry:

[“Declaration” by Tracy K. Smith](#)

[“Find Original Poetry Hiding in the Pages of Your Paper” NYT article](#)

[“The Race Within Erasure.” A lecture by Robin Coste Lewis](#)

Facilitator also shares example of their own creation.

Example: M.G. Martin shared an erasure poem he created from the obituary of his grandfather, Hawai’i labor activist, George Martin. By highlighting/ deleting phrases and passages, M.G. showed how the emphasis of a document can be reshaped and a new story can emerge.

## Group Discussion (5 minutes)

## Opening Free Writing (15 minutes)

Prompts:

1. Imagine you have to describe your family to someone who’s never met them before. What makes your family unique and different from others? What are your family’s most important traditions, values, and stories? What do you most love about them, and what frustrates you the most about them?
2. You can only keep one memory about your family. Which one would you keep and why?
3. Write down phrases you remember your chosen family member saying, or write down sayings/phrases/idioms that are multi-generational within your family. Then answer the following questions: Who said it? Why did they say it? Whom did they say it to? Describe where they were when they said it. Add any details that will recreate a time when you remember hearing that phrase.

Provide artifacts for participants.

Sample documents for erasure experiments:

[Farming on Lana’i is Phased Out](#)

[Raising Cane—Stories From the Plantations](#)

[Strikers, Scabs, and Sugar Mongers](#)

[1987 Hotel Negotiations](#)

[The Hilo Massacre](#)

[The Local 5 Strike](#)

[Island Used as Bomb Range is Symbol of Hawai’i Protest](#)

[The Sacred Bones of Maui](#)

Participants choose a document and using the erasure/blackout technique experiment with carving a new story or an additional layer of the story from that pre-existing document. Alternatively, participants can do a free write based on the document.

## Share with the Group (20 minutes)

Sharing is strongly encouraged, but not mandatory.

## What Story Did You Bring? (15 minutes)

Have 3-5 participants share the documents they brought and tell the story behind them.

## Free Writing/Erasing (15 minutes)

Using the document you brought with you or one of the samples provided, create a poem by erasing/highlighting words/phrases/sentences in that document. Try to keep the order of your erasure poem consistent with the original.

## Share with the Group and Closing (30 minutes)

If it’s a small group try to get as many people as possible to share, if it’s larger try to get 10-12 people to share.

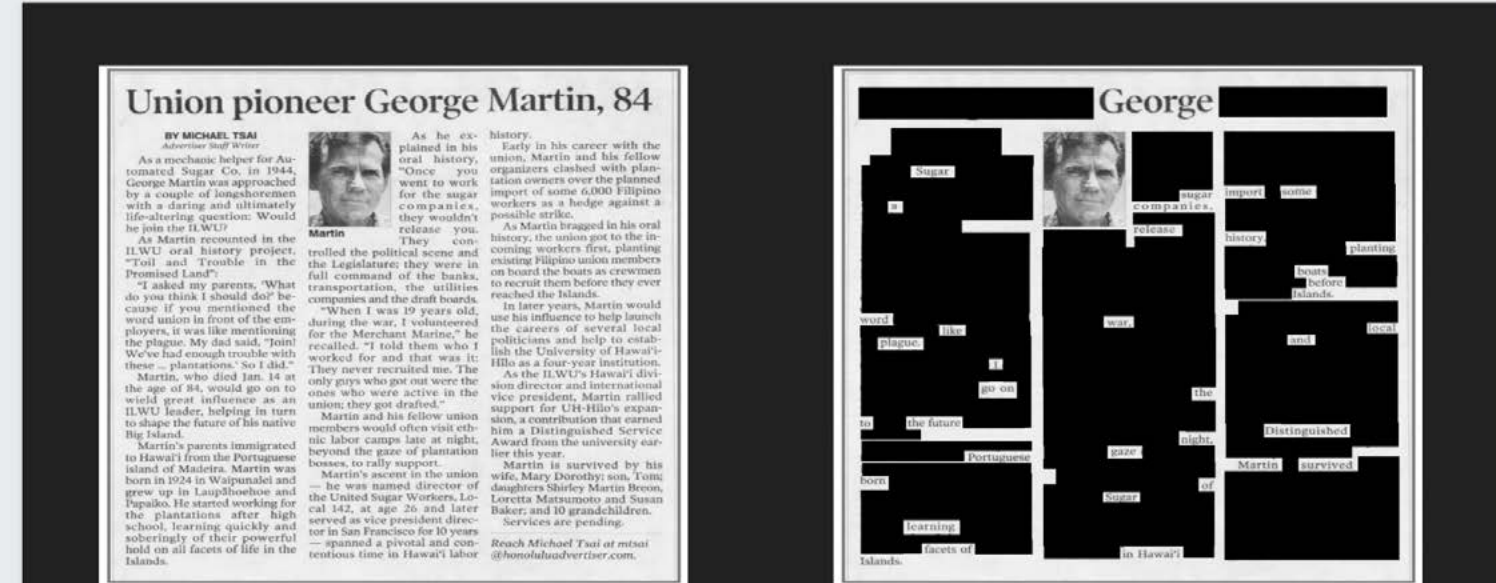
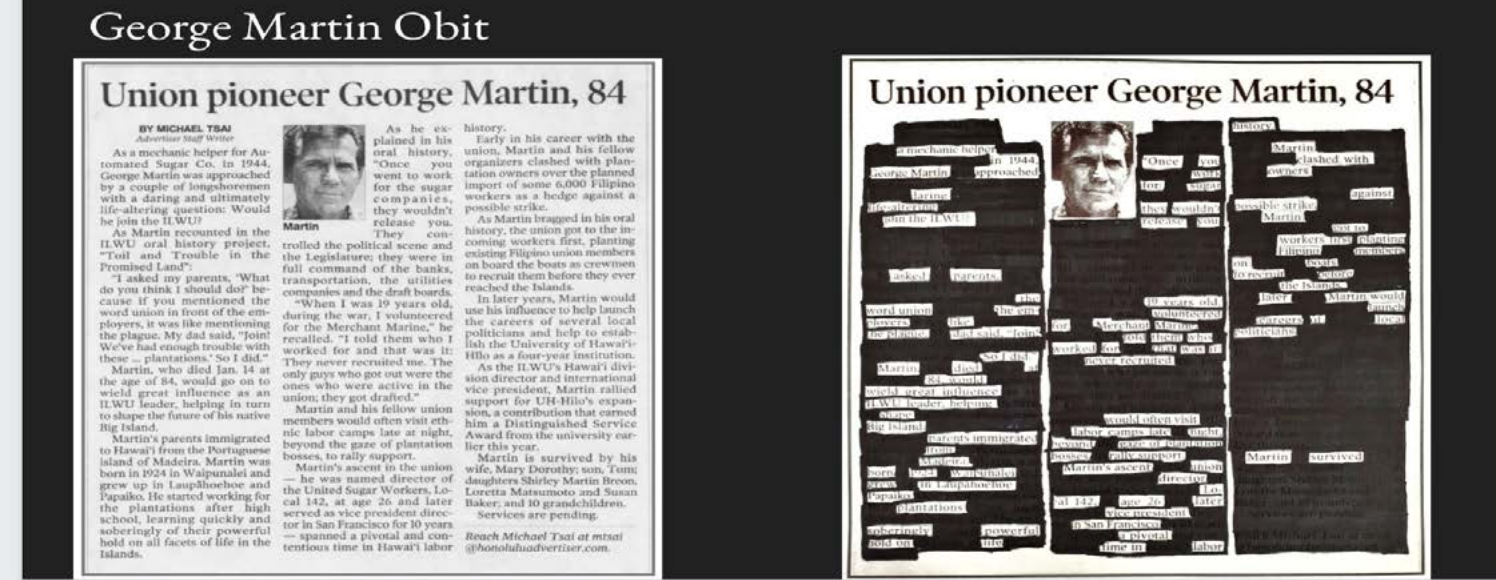
## Mahalo Nui Loa

# Why It Matters Poetry Workshops

## Finding Family Poems:

## Shared Histories of Civic Engagement

### The Merwin Convergancy with M.G. Martin & Sara Tekula



Poem by M. G. Martin | Click on photo to view poem full size.



## Poetry Leader Bios

### Hanale Bishop

Hanale Bishop is a father, taro farmer, singer/songwriter and sometimes poet. Having grown up in Kahaluu/Waiahole during the Waiahole water rights struggle in the early 1990s, and also during the ice epidemic in Kahaluu thereafter, both of these early experiences led Hanale to a lifestyle of full-time farming, poi making, water rights activism, as well as a commitment of community strengthening and enrichment by way of farmers market cooperatives and land- and water-based awareness. All balanced by a passion for writing and music, to which Hanale is a twice Hokuhanohano-nominated recording artist.

### Puanani Burgess (Aunty Pua)

Puanani Burgess is a Zen Buddhist priest, poet and community mediator from Wai‘anae, O‘ahu. Puanani Burgess was once a committed protestor and resister. She developed her skills as a law student to become what she calls a “dragon feeder” – someone able to navigate the complex rules of a large system like government or the DOE the way one might negotiate with a stubborn dragon. Puanani Burgess is a process designer and facilitator for Building the Beloved Community, a community-building and conflict transformation process based on bringing people face to face for ceremony, storytelling, and healing circles of trust and respect.

### Carol Ann Carl

Carol Ann (Karahahn) Carl is a daughter of the island of Pohnpei. Birthed by the waters of dahusokole and raised by the kousapw’s of Lehdau and Areu, she currently resides in Kalihilihiolaumiha where she works as the Grants & Development Assistant at Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services. She is a storyteller, activist and activist whose collective work KEWERIWER is the canoe that carries echoes of ancestors past and future, rooting her to the home she voyages from.

### Mary Therese Perez Hattori

A daughter of Guåhan (Guam), Mary Therese Perez Hattori is one of nine children of Paul Mitsuo Hattori who was originally of Kalihi, and Fermina Leon Guerrero Perez (familian Titang) of Chalan Pago. Dr. Hattori is Acting Director of the Pacific Islands Development Program at the East-West Center and affiliate faculty of the University of Hawai‘i. She is a community organizer and advocate for Pacific islanders in Hawai‘i, author, poet, public speaker, and philanthropist.

### ‘Ihilani Lasconia

‘Ihilani Lasconia is a Kānaka Maoli poet from Waimānalo, O‘ahu. She is currently a senior at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, majoring in Ethnic Studies, with a minor in Political Science and Women’s Studies. ‘Ihilani believes that art is foundational to liberation and that spoken word and poetry provide some of the most meticulous documentations of resistance through rhythm, imagery, and capturing the essence of ea through ‘ōlelo.

### M. G. Martin

A teacher and poet, M.G. Martin grew up on Hawai‘i island in the town of Waimea. He currently teaches middle school English on the island of Maui and is earning a M.Ed from the University of Massachusetts. M.G. is the author of U U O U (Cyberwit, 2020) and One For None (Ink., 2010). M.G. has performed on stages in San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, San Diego, Portland, Boston, New York City, Seoul, and Honolulu. His poems have appeared in Bamboo Ridge, ZYZZYVA, Tinfish, PANK, and Sink Review, among others. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, led writing workshops for the Red Cross, and was a 2018-19 W.S. Merwin Creative Teaching Fellow. Find him online at mgmartin.ink.

### Navid Najafi

Navid Najafi aka Illnomadic is a founding member of local conscious rap collective, the Super Groupers, and a two-time Nā Hōkū Hanohano Hip Hop Album of the Year award winner. Born in Tehran, Iran and raised in New York, Najafi found home when he moved to Hawai‘i after high school. Aligned with the core Hawaiian values of Aloha ‘Āina, Najafi has become an active artist, organizer, teacher, mentor and volunteer in the community. As a native

Farsi speaker, Najafi considers English to be his second language but discovered that music and art often operate as a universal second language. His style is activated hip hop with lyrics that explore themes of migration, culture, solidarity and home. Navid is currently the Learning Programs Coordinator at the Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture and Design in Honolulu. He is also the co-founder and an administrator/artist for Soundshop, a hip hop education workshop series at the Honolulu Museum of Art.

### Isabella Pasa

Isabella Pasa is an active ‘Ōiwi poet from Pūlama, Ko‘olaupoko, O‘ahu. She is currently a junior studying English with a focus on creative writing and poetry at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Bella spends her time dissecting and creating different stories through various styles of poetry. Language is the soul of Hawai‘i—whether we are remembering our history and kūpuna or using it to reclaim our ‘āina as well as ourselves. I believe that as po‘e Hawai‘i, every time we pick up a pen to write, we are adding more and more strength to the Hawaiian Renaissance by weaving our voices together.

### Moira Pirsch

Moira is the Education Director at the Maui Arts & Cultural Center. She is a poet, scholar, and organizer from Madison, Wisconsin. She has over a decade of experience working with community initiatives on social justice, the arts, and education. Her work focuses on the power of the arts to transform, uplift and empower communities. She believes in miracles.

### Lyz Soto

Lyz is a page, stage, and visual poet with families from Ilocos Norte, Texas, Alabama, the Visayas, Germany, Guangdong, England, and France. She was born on the Hāmākua coast on the island of Hawai‘i and raised on the islands of Maui and O‘ahu. She has worked with Youth Speaks Hawai‘i and Pacific Tongues teaching spoken word and poetry to youth in Hawai‘i, Aotearoa, Papua New Guinea, and the Marshall Islands. Lyz has had the privilege of witnessing poetry transform people’s lives. She believes in the possibility of better futures for all of us.

### Sara Tekula

Originally from Long Island, New York, Sara has lived on Maui since 2004 where she works tirelessly as a mother, writer, educator, media maker, community advocate, and nonprofit leader. Her writing has been featured in Maui Time Weekly, edible Hawaiian Islands, American Forests Magazine, and Green Magazine, among others. Since 2010, she has been a part of the team at The Merwin Conservancy, where she now serves as Director of Programs and Communications, developing public programs and media projects at the intersection of the arts and ecology. She has taught entrepreneurship and marketing classes at University of Hawai‘i Maui College since 2011, co-founded and produced TEDxMaui, and currently serves as a board officer for Montessori School of Maui and Nā Koa Manu Conservation. She holds a B.A. degree in Psychology from the University of Southern California.

### Aiko Yamashiro

Aiko was raised in Kāne‘ohe and her families were raised in Kāne‘ohe, Pu‘unēnē, Yanbaru, and Agaña Heights. She has taught decolonial Pacific literature and community-engaged poetry for the UH Mānoa English Department as well as in partnership with community organizations and events. Her doctoral dissertation that she finally finished in 2020 was on the power of community-engaged poetry, sharing stories of the annual collective collaboration Nā Hua Ea, and a few of the inspiring Hawai‘i poetry hui who came before and after. Her poetry and essays can be found on Ke Kaupu Hehi Ale, blackmail press, Spiral Orb, and on the radio with It’s Lit with PhDJ. She is thankful for her ancestors and friends who hold her to a high standard of excellence.

***Mahalo nui to the [Andrew W. Mellon Foundation](#) for funding such innovative civic efforts, and the [Federation of State Humanities Councils](#) for administering this national initiative. Mahalo nui to our amazing poetry leaders for creating spaces of reciprocity, learning, and empowerment. Spaces where we can grow deeper kuleana to our home.***