



# Essential Words: LTAB Online 2020

## Lesson plans and writing prompts for teens



### The Situation is Gratifying: Home & Family

by Katja Foreman-Braunschweig

DURATION: 1.5 hours

GRADE LEVEL: High School

WRITING LEVEL: Developing Writers

FOCUS: home, family

EXAMPLE POEM

[The Situation is Gratifying](#)

by Carlina Duan

FOR TEENS, BY TEENS  
A lesson plan from InsideOut's Youth Advisory Board

Check in | 15 minutes

If you could be anywhere right now, where would you feel the most at home?

OR Who is a family member that you miss?

Resource Building | 15 minutes

Make a few lists:

- Write a list of the **images** you associate with home. (EXAMPLE: smells, sights, sounds, etc.)
- Write a list of **phrases** that have been said to you, that have stayed with you for a long time.
- Write a list of **people** who are family to you, but who are **not** blood-related.

FREE WRITE | **Whatever comes to mind, write without stopping for 5 minutes.**

Close Reading | 20 minutes

READ | [The Situation is Gratifying by Carlina Duan](#)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How does history affect this poem, both textbook history and the poet's personal history?
- What recurring images does the poet use?
- Why do you think the poet breaks this poem into three parts?
- What is your favorite line in the poem and why?



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### Writing Prompt | 20 minutes

Think about your own home, your history, your personal narrative, experiences, and feelings. **Write a poem using the images, objects, and people from your earlier lists.**

### Share Out | 15 minutes



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### the situation is gratifying by Carlina Duan

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形势喜人 —Yan Guiming, October 1974

*i.*  
mao makes thick lines in my red  
book. ants make thick lines in  
the sand. china makes a thick line  
down a stratosphere. my father's name  
is a thick belt around my waist. what I  
should lose encircles me: chain link  
fence, my sister's face—pruned & pitted  
in the dark. last year I carried sweet  
potatoes in a barrel & stored them  
beneath a bed. last year I sold many  
dark hunks of coal. my father came  
home & took off his stethoscope.  
my father came home & lined  
his forehead with sweat. I was  
a small line of army ants beneath  
the bed. my father was a long line  
of men who lost their jobs. I was  
fighting for breath when they shut  
down the universities. my sheets  
stunk with sweet potato. my sheets  
stunk. bodies rained sweat. *gratifying*  
as in my sister chased me beneath  
the persimmon tree but I was  
quick, quicker. I descend from  
a lineage of flat lines. we compose  
a horizon. red pearl as in red sun as in  
a father's mouth when he tells us  
to shut up, things are *gratifying* while

his eyes cut what is sweet into tiny disks.

*ii.*  
there is a myth about monkeys trying  
to catch the moon inside a well. their  
tails curl around each other as they  
lower themselves into the water. they  
push wet fists through the moon for  
days, & on & on the water ripples.

*iii.*  
what I am is monkey. pushing my hand  
through the reflection of a moon. a decade.  
a persimmon tree with all its leaves shaking  
shadows onto yard. what I am is taut  
line stitching me to my father, who is  
also nation. who is also bone. no spoons  
in the household but a rack of skinny  
meat. no spoons in the household  
but a line of daughters looking  
their red books in the eye. *the situation*  
*is gratifying.* the situation slid me across  
a sink. my father was my father until  
I watched him turn his mouth into  
a pearl. soundless when the Red Guard  
implied *counter-revolutionary action* & he  
said nothing. flattened from my father  
into a line of water. they took him away,  
made my face river. made  
an entire country flood.

[the situation is gratifying by Carlina Duan, Winter Tangerine](#)