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?
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
the situation is gratifying
by Carlina Duan

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