



Essential Words: LTAB Online 2020

Lesson plans and writing prompts for teens



The Gift & the Curse

by Ellen Chamberlain

DURATION: 1.5 hours
GRADE LEVEL: High School
WRITING LEVEL: Experienced

FOCUS: conflict, place, home
KEY TERMS: paradox
EXAMPLE TEXT: [Thinking American](#)
by Hayan Charara

Check in | 15 minutes

What is a characteristic or talent you have that may be considered both a gift and a curse?
What makes it a gift? A curse?

Resource Building | 15 minutes

KEY TERM | **PARADOX**: a person, situation, or action having seemingly contradictory qualities or phases.

EXERCISE | Make a list of:

- 5 **adjectives** (descriptive words)
- 10 locations in **the city you live** (your home, the library, your favorite park, school, etc.)
- 3 destinations **outside of the United States** (cities, countries, attractions or special sites, etc.)
- 5 **types of people** you'd meet on a bus

Close Reading | 20 minutes

Thinking American by [Hayan Charara](#)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Has the speaker abandoned the city or saved himself? How do you know this?
- If Detroit represents any other city, where is there to go?
- After reading the poem, do you want to stay or go? Why?

Writing Prompt | 20 minutes

Write a love / hate poem to a city you know well. Include lines that explore why you will always stay or immediately go.
OR **Write about the topic of your choosing but in metaphor.** Try not to reveal your subject until the final line or stanza.

Share Out | 15 minutes



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Thinking American by Hayan Charara

—For Dioniso D. Martínez

Take Detroit, where boys
are manufactured into men, where
you learn to think in American.
You speak to no one unless someone
speaks to you. Everyone is suspect:
baldheaded carriers from the post office;
old Polish ladies who swear
to Jesus, Joseph, and Mary;
your brother, especially your brother,
waiting in a long line for work.
There's always a flip side.
No matter what happens,
tomorrow is a day away,
or a gin bottle if you can't sleep,
and if you stopped drinking,
a pack of cigarettes. After that,
you're on your own, you pack up
and leave. You still call
the city beside the strait home.
Make no mistake, it's miserable.
After all, you bought a one-way
Greyhound ticket, cursed each
and every pothole on the road out.
But that's where you stood
before a mirror in the dark,
where you were too tired
to complain. You never go back.
Things could be worse. Maybe.
Detroit is a shithole, it's where
you were pulled from the womb
into the streets. Listen,
when I say Detroit, I mean any place.
By thinking American, I mean made.

[Thinking American by Hayan Charara, Poetry Foundation](#)