

**PRE-READING REYNA GRANDE'S *THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US*:  
TOSSING WORDS AND LINES**

**WHAT**

The Folger Method gets all students unlocking all kinds of texts, not just Shakespeare. Use the Folger essential strategy of tossing words and lines to help students discover the language of Reyna Grande's memoir *The Distance Between Us*.

**WHY**

*The Distance Between Us* is full of juicy language, rich imagery, compelling storytelling, and big questions that matter in a big way. Starting with a single word is the least intimidating way to begin studying a work of literature. In this lesson, students enter a new text at the level of a word, and through familiar actions: throwing, catching, and shouting. And all this focus on the words, words, words gets students doing close reading on their feet! In groups and as a class, students will speak and listen to powerful words—and later, lines—from Grande's memoir and use this experience to make inferences about the mood, setting, conflict, and characters of the text. They'll also get excited and motivated to keep studying *The Distance Between Us*, to move on to bigger challenges like grappling with whole speeches and chapters. Finally, this lesson sends the message that learning will be all about the sparks that fly when students, with all their unique experiences and perspectives, connect directly with vivid language.

**HOW**

**BEFORE CLASS:**

1. In a coffee can or basket, create a collection of strips of paper or index cards, each with a single word or short phrase from *The Distance Between Us*. Read on for our pre-made, ready-to-cut strips of words and lines for tossing. We've made the handouts for you!
2. Gather several beanbags (or foam balls, or socks tied in knots). Make sure you have 1 for each group.

**IN CLASS:**

**ACTIVITY #1: TOSSING WORDS**

This activity works best with groups of 6-8 students, so if you have a class of 6, you can do multiple rounds of this activity. If you have a class of 36, invite students to form 6 groups of 6.

1. Students get into circles of 6-8. You visit each circle: each student pulls a slip out of the can and reads it quietly without sharing. You leave a beanbag with someone in each circle.
2. Off they go: in each circle, the student with the beanbag pitches it, along with her word or line, to another student in the circle. (That's right: you speak your word when you throw the beanbag.) She catches it, pitches it and her word to yet another student, and so on. Keep Grande's language and the beanbags going for 6-7 minutes or so. Every student will have said her piece several times by the time you wrap up. You'll have a whole room of students moving and sending Grande's language to one another! *Note: Avoid correcting pronunciation and*

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## EDUCATION

*supplying the definition. Your job is to let students own the words and the process and to discover for themselves. At this stage, what matters most is not correctness but rather engagement and comfort with the language. If students are saying the words and enjoying their sounds, they're on target! Students can determine and clarify important word meanings later.*

3. Reconvene as a whole class. On the board, compile everyone's words.
4. Invite responses to the activity. Students should think-pair-share the following questions, one at a time.
  - a. How did it feel to say the words out loud?
  - b. If you're unsure about your word, what do you think it might mean? What makes you say that?
  - c. Based on all these words today, what kind of world do you think we're about to enter? What makes you say that?
  - d. What else can you infer about this text, based just on these words?

### **ACTIVITY #2: TOSSING LINES**

Repeat all the steps for ACTIVITY #1, but with lines instead of words this time. In the debrief, ask students if and how their inferences about this text have changed. Before moving on to the next activity, make sure every student has access to all the words and lines from today.

### **ACTIVITY #3: JOURNAL WRITING**

Ask students to do a quickwrite or a journal write in response to the following prompts:

1. If you were to tell the story of your life, what are 30 words that would help readers enter the world of your story?
2. Try writing the opening sentence of your life story using at least 1 of these 30 words.

Keep this activity informal. Think of it as an opportunity for students to deepen awareness of themselves and others—and practice their writing—in a low-stakes way. At this point you don't need to define memoir, and students don't need to share their writing with the class. Students are on the path to connecting with Grande's story and discovering the genre of memoir for themselves. Have patience and trust your students.

### **HOW DID IT GO?**

Was every student engaged? Did students make text-based inferences and predictions about *The Distance Between Us*? Was everyone's voice honored and amplified? Did you, the teacher, get out of the way? Was your classroom buzzing with words and lines and activity? Are students eager to read more of Grande's memoir and do more of this kind of interactive, on-your-feet reading? Are they making personal connections to the text? If so, way to go, and keep on with this!

For more lessons like this one, and for more on the Folger Method, check out [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu). Questions? Email us [at educate@folger.edu](mailto:educate@folger.edu) or tweet us @FolgerED.

**TOSSING WORDS: *THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US***

Abuela	Dress
Suitcase	Shyness
Flowers	Photograph
Feet	Paperwork
Border	Marry
Reached	Decision
Citizen	Childhood
Story	Forgive
Home	Jealous
Sister	Tears
English	Separated
Spanish	Dream
Work	Imagined
Classroom	Reading
Remembered	Eyes
Books	Writing
Papi	Beautiful
Myself	Music
Friends	Mami
Hair	Scorpion

TOSSING LINES: *THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US*

Does my mama love me?

Making sure their mother wasn't looking, I stuck my tongue out at them.

I felt as if I had a guitar inside my head.

Don't you think there's beauty here, too?

Do you think he understood what I said?

I imagined living in the perfect little village with all my family.

But I crawled under a table and cried about the dress.

I pretended I was turning into a dove.

My mouth watered at the thought of sinking my teeth into the mango's crunchy flesh.

My mouth watered at the thought of sinking my teeth into sweet, fluffy concha de chocolate.

I could smell the beans boiling, the meat frying, the chilies and tomatoes roasting...

I would be somebody he could be proud of.

I wanted to tell him I would be different, that I would do what Mago and Carlos hadn't done.

Then I discovered my hero, there on TV.

Maybe I could be a movie extra and make money and rent my own place.

I was so happy about the food that for a moment I forgot I was supposed to be mad.

I felt so good in my bright yellow dress that my mother had bought for me.

"Focus on school," I heard the other me say.

What group did I belong to?

She was always asking me about my latest story, my latest poem.

All I could do back then was to allow myself to dream.

I wanted a fresh start.

I walked and immersed myself in the redwood trees, smelling the pungent scent of their needles.

I looked at the ocean, and I realized there was no need to be afraid.

I have never forgotten where I came from.