

# East Side Voice Project

3-week project

## Objective

This project will document the voices of the people from the historic east side of San Jose, California through persona poems and short monologue prose pieces, giving these underprivileged and underrepresented characters a voice in contemporary literature. The mission of this project is to open a dialogue and facilitate greater cultural understanding between ethnic groups.

Each student will create monologue piece portraying characters based on real people who live and/or work on San Jose's east side, characters representing a diversity of walks of life and age groups. Students will meet and interview east side residents and workers in their neighborhoods and work places, then write character-driven monologues in poetry and prose, based on these individuals. The purpose of constructing these monologues is to expose the full dimension of the lives of east side residents to the wider audience, lives that are quite diverse, representing a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds and attitudes--a quite different American reality than that depicted in the media and in mainstream works of American poetry, fiction and non-fiction.

## Assignments

Workshop students are expected to complete an interview assignment and either one poem or one short prose assignment based on the interview and the materials covered in the workshop. You will receive feedback on your work, and you will be expected to make revisions based on the feedback to your poem/short prose before submitting the final piece. (You may write more than one piece and conduct more than one interview.) You can also participate in a recorded reading of your work to be included on the website. (Multimedia projects are encouraged.)

Always include your name, the date, and the description of the assignment on the right hand corner of everything you turn in.

## Writing Awards

There will be three writing awards giving at the end of the project to three best pieces.  
First prize: \$300, Second prize: \$125, Third prize: \$75.

## Persona and Voice: Ask yourself these questions to develop the persona for your poem/short prose.

1. What is your persona's/character's name? Nickname?
2. What are your persona's/character's facial features: hair color? Eye color?
3. What are his/her physical traits? a birthmark? a scar?
4. What are his/her favorite things?
5. Who are your persona's friends and family? Who does she surround herself with? Who are the people your persona is closest to? Who does he wish he were closest to?
6. Where was your persona born? Where has she lived since then? Where is home?
7. Where does your persona go when she's angry?
8. What is her biggest fear? Who has she told this to? Who would she never tell? Does she have a secret?
9. What are her goals, desires, challenges and habits?
10. Has she ever been in love?
11. What does this persona need to say? or do? or have? or obtain?
12. What is your character's mood: melancholy, lamenting, angry, excited, hopeful, afraid, or humorous?

### Interview Tips

1. Use the above questions to develop your own questions for the interview
2. Get the respondents involved in the interview as soon as possible.
3. Before asking about controversial matters (such as feelings and conclusions), first ask about some facts. With this approach, respondents can more easily engage in the interview before warming up to more personal matters.
4. Intersperse fact-based questions throughout the interview to avoid long lists of fact-based questions, which tends to leave respondents disengaged.
5. Ask questions about the present before questions about the past or future. It's usually easier for them to talk about the present and then work into the past or future.
6. The last questions might be to allow respondents to provide any other information they prefer to add and their impressions of the interview.

### Interview Assignment

Think of people living or working in the East Side who you have access to and would like to interview. Why are they interesting to you? What do you want to know about them?

#### *In class assignments*

1. Make a list to possible people to interview
2. Make a list possible interview questions
3. Practice interviewing a classmate

#### *Due next week*

Type up the name of the person you're interviewing, how you know him/her, a short description of why you picked this person, and the list of questions you want to ask.

### Poetry Assignment

1. Written in first person from the point of view of the person you interview
2. Focus on one event in the speaker's life (it does not have to be a significant event)
3. Include 2 metaphors and/or similes (use concrete language)
4. Include at least one description of the place where this event happened
5. If possible include at least one description of the speaker
6. Type up your questions and answers and turn it in with your typed poem
7. Every interview must be turned in with a release form

A **simile** is a literary device where the writer employs the words "like" or "as" to compare to different ideas. It can be a strong word to use as a describing word in a simile or metaphor.

Example \_\_\_\_\_

A **metaphor** is similar to a simile; however, this literary device makes a comparison without the use of "like" or "as." Example \_\_\_\_\_

### Prose Assignment

1. Written in first person from the point of view of the person you interview
2. Focus on one event in the speaker's life (it does not have to be a significant event)
3. Think of this assignment as a cross between a journal entry and a news story, the speaker is recounting the event like a news story, but in his/her own voice like s/he is recording in a journal
4. Include **who** (description of the person), **when** (the time this story takes place), **where** (description of the setting) and why this event is important to the speaker
5. Include 2 metaphors and/or similes (use concrete language)
6. Type up your interview questions and answers and turn it in with your typed prose assignment
7. Every interview must be turned in with a release form