

Generating Ideas &

“I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast”

Poem by Melissa Studdard / motionpoem by Dan Sickles

Lesson plan by Saara Myrene Raappana

Time: 50 minutes

In *Going Home*, Thich Nhat Hanh writes:

“This piece of bread is the body of the whole cosmos. ... Look deeply and you notice the sunshine in the bread, the blue sky in the bread, the cloud and the great earth in the bread. Can you tell me what is not in a piece of bread? The whole cosmos has come together in order to bring to you this piece of bread.”

Poet Melissa Studdard’s “I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast” is written *after* (in response to) Thich Nhat Hanh. Studdard’s poem bends Hanh’s idea of bread into a pancake and uses first person singular and past tense verbs to make the experience more immediate. The film “I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast” removes itself further from the original impetus, including no eating or food at all.

Many of us think that we have to come up with NEW ideas. But it’s common for poems to converse with other poems, paintings, etc.

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

1. consider the ways in which several pieces of writing “talk” with each other
2. analyze the ways that those pieces of writing work both together and independently
3. apply the lessons learned to writing a draft of a poem

MATERIALS

- “I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast,” the poem & the motionpoem: motionpoems.org/episode/i-ate-the-cosmos-for-breakfast/
- Pen/paper or other writing implements
- Short poems, essays, or prints of paintings for the students to “converse” with during the writing prompt

ACTIVITIES

1. The Poem (20-25 mins): Have students read the “I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast” handout (don’t show them the *Going Home* quote yet) and answer, either in small groups or in class discussion, the following questions:

- a. What are some qualities that all the images from this poem have in common?
- b. The poem says that the pancake is “creation flattened out”—how does the poem prove that argument? How does it expand that argument?

Now show students the quote from *Going Home* that “I Ate the Cosmos” responds to

- c. What images do the quote and the poem have in common?
- d. What images does the poem have that the quote doesn’t? What do these new images accomplish?
- e. Now that you’ve read the quote, does the meaning(s) of the poem change at all? If so, how?

2. The Film (20-25 mins): Watch the film adaptation of “I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast” without sound. Ask them to make a list of the images that appear.

a. What images do the film and the poem have in common? What images do the film and the quote have in common?

Then show the students the questions below, give them a chance to read them, and have them watch the film again, with sound, with the questions in mind. After they’ve watched the film again, have them answer the questions in small groups or in class discussion.

b. What images does the film have that the poem doesn’t? What do these new images accomplish?

c. Now that you’ve seen the film, has the meaning of the poem changed for you at all? If so, how?

3. Depending on class time, have students complete this exercise in class or at home:

WRITING PROMPT

Choose a poem, quote, or picture that you find compelling, and write a poem in response to it. Don’t describe what you’re responding to—write a poem in first person where you’re doing something that evokes the thing you’re responding to.