

Santa Barbara Public Library x Mission Poetry Series
Teen Poetry Workshop: Poetry as a Portal to Imagining Worlds
with Crystal AC Salas



“Poetry is not a luxury” A truth, and also the title of a vital essay by Audre Lorde.

Let’s think about a prevailing word you may have been hearing a lot over the last couple of years: “*unprecedented.*” What does that word mean to you?

How has this word been used to describe your generation? Your responsibilities in the future?

The weight AND liberation of this word! Either way, it takes imagination.

So, let’s write a poem. Why?

“It [poetry] is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.”

-- Audre Lorde, in her essay “Poetry is Not a Luxury” which always inspires me to keep this imagining at the forefront. I highly [recommend it!](#)

Some examples of poets imagining places into existence:

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- “Dinosaurs in the Hood” by Danez Smith ([poem](#)) ([performance](#))
- “Pocha Heaven” by Sara Borjas ([poem](#))
- “Mexican Heaven” by José Olivarez ([poem](#))
- “All My Friends are Sad and Bright” by Cam Awkward Rich ([poem](#))

Imagining Worlds

List as many places/institutions you can think of that you interact with literally or conceptually in your daily life. They can be physical spaces but also concepts (Family! Social norms!) or media/virtual spaces.

Examples: a heaven, movie, classroom, family dinner, church, mall, restaurant, island, a park, TikTok account, Wikipedia page, etc.

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Of these places, which of the following might be...

A version you know to be true and alive, but that you feel no one else sees or understands.

or

A space you often wish could be changed, revised, remixed, and/or healed in some way.

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Pick one of these spaces.

Write a poem in which you imagine one of these places as more accommodating to some aspect of your identity.

Who is there?

Who isn't there?

What are the people doing in this place? What are they saying?

What are they eating? What is the décor like?

What do they long for?

What does media look like here?

What behavior is acceptable, unacceptable, forgotten, celebrated?

How is safety accessed?