

STUDENT VOICES DURING A PANDEMIC



BUILDING BRIDGES OVER ZOOM

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Herstory brings student communities together with the belief that each of us has an important story to tell, and that writing our own stories, while listening to the stories of others, can change the world for the better.

"Each of us has a poetry of experience hidden deep inside us, that can be called into being out of the stream of memories that bubble up to the surface from our hope and our anger and grief. When we dare to imagine that someone might hear us and actually care, bit by bit, we break out of the silence and isolation that is the fate of so many."

Adapting a
time-trying
methodology
for writing,
listening, and
learning
to teaching via
ZOOM

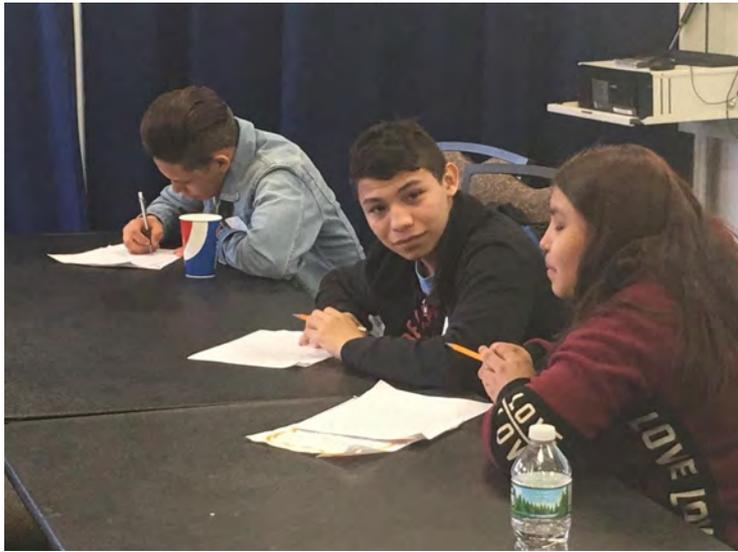
PASSING ALONG THE DARE TO CARE

A Mini-Memoir Course for Younger Writers



ERIKA DUNCAN

When normal life is suddenly halted, how can teachers and counselors create a sense of connection and purpose?



How can you build on the loneliness and need for connection so particular to this time?

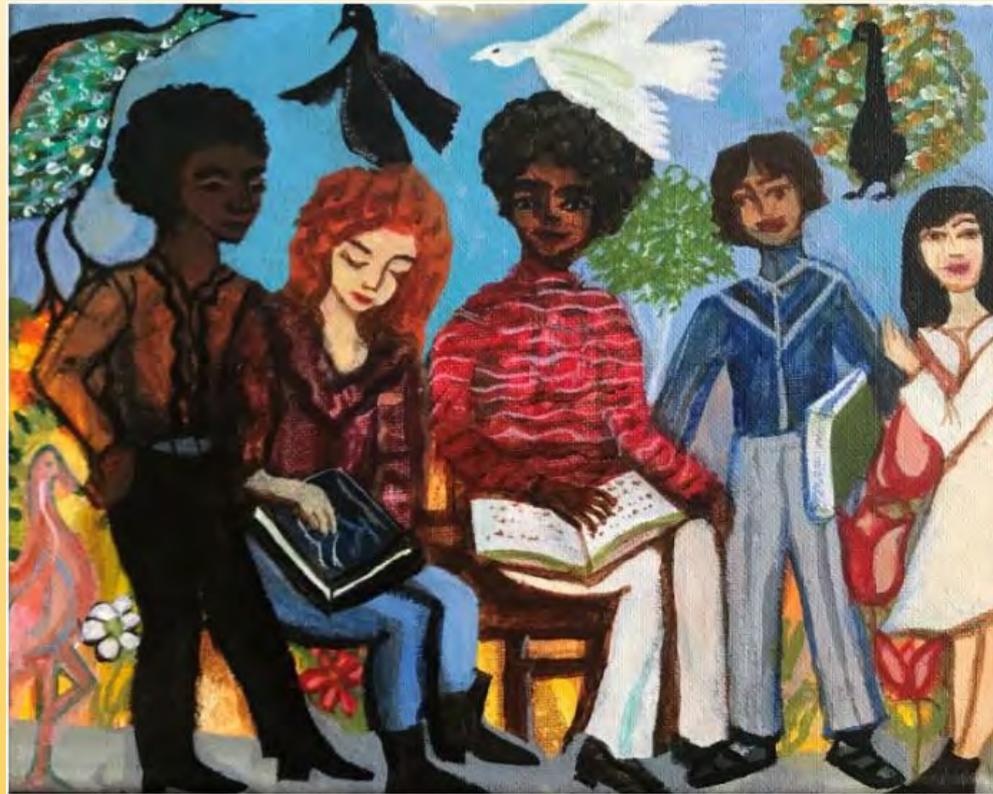


Dare Number One:

If the world could hear your story, and really understand what you and your community are going through right now, might you become an agent of change?

If your words had the power to break through the coldness of the zoom screen and come to life... what is the one thing that you most want to change?

Why do you want/need to tell your story?
Is it to figure something out for yourself? To help
particular strangers understand your unique
experiences? To help someone
close to you understand?



Painting by Gwynne Duncan

Oral Imaging Before Anyone Writes



Learning to engage your zoom listeners in painting a scene is a game everyone can play

When you start out with zoom, it really doesn't matter who has the technical writing skills and who doesn't.

The trick is to paint a scene vivid enough to startle everyone on the zoom into attention, even when they are horribly zoomed out and don't want to respond to another cold square.

Each of our stories could make a difference...but how can we get strangers to listen to them?

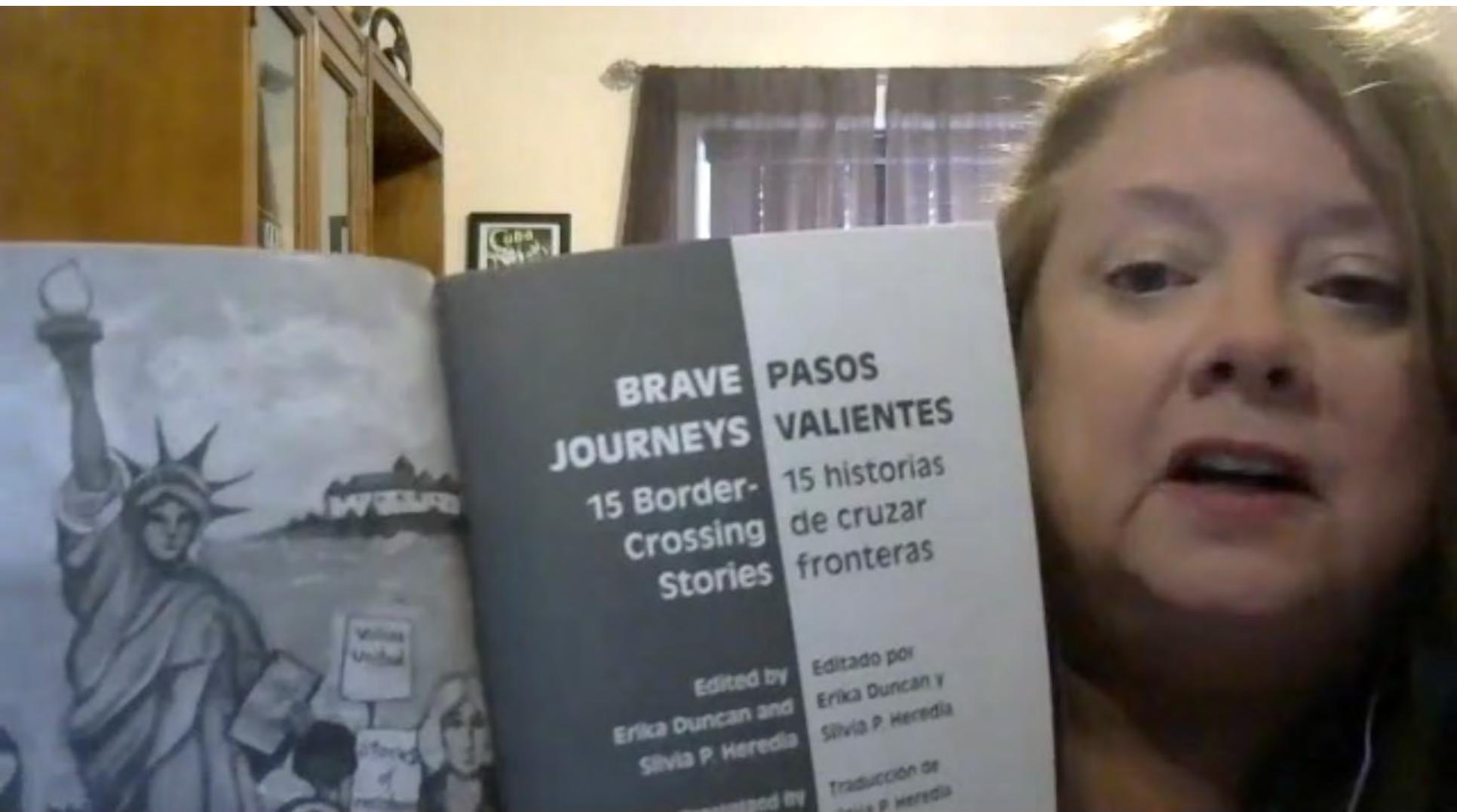
INTRODUCING:

The Imaginary Stranger Reader

"The person who doesn't intrinsically care about what happened to the narrator, unless the narrator finds a way to draw her in."

The Imaginary Stranger Reader is anyone and everyone. Anyone who might pick up your book in a bookstore or walk by as you tell your story. How can you keep that Imaginary Stranger listening, reading, and caring?.

WHERE WILL YOU MEET YOUR IMAGINARY READER?

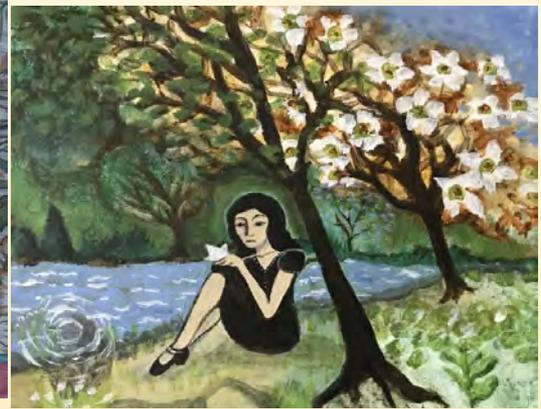


Introducing....

The Page One Moment

"The moment in which the storyteller decides to meet the Stranger/Reader, walking in on any chapter of her life."

Which moment of your life goes on the first page of your book? What is the first thing you want an Imaginary Stranger to see you doing? To hear you thinking?



- If you were to pick a “Page One Moment” in this time of pandemic, would we meet you spraying buildings to help put food on the table, or talking to your favorite stuffed animals?
- Would we meet you working on the land, or sitting and contemplating life as you hold your favorite basket, work the land or sit under your favorite tree?



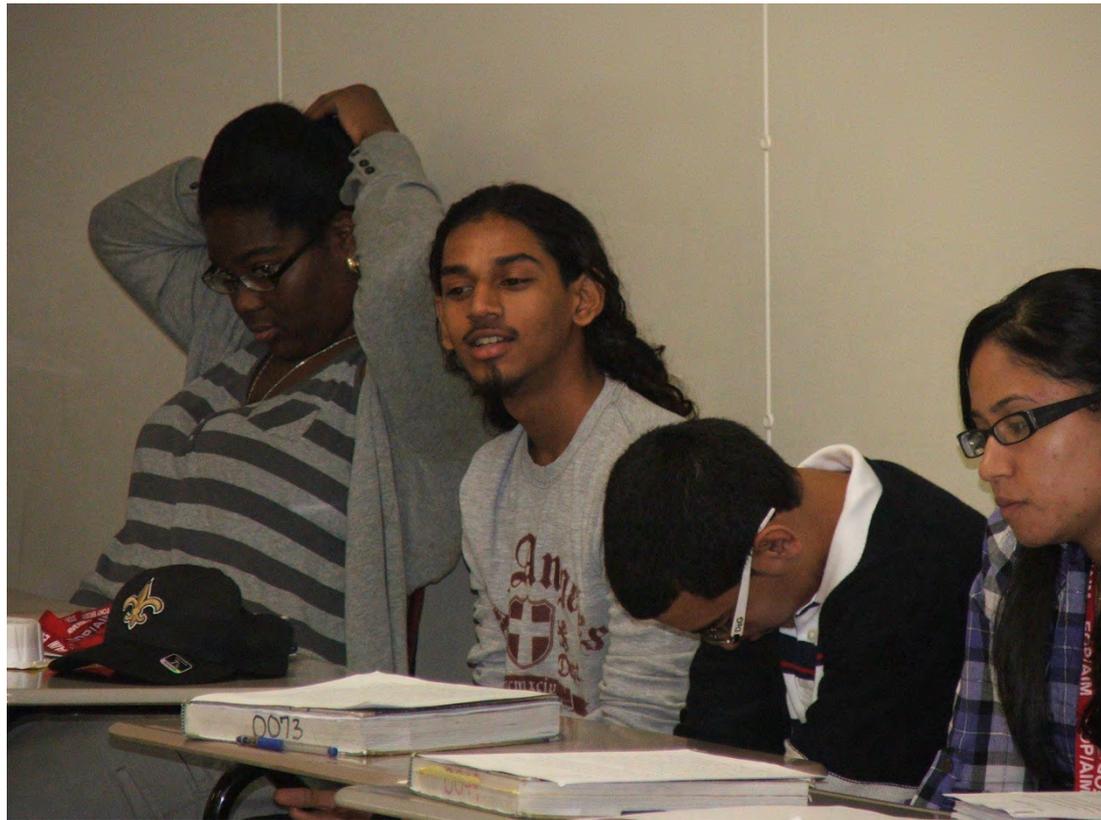
Paintings by Gwynne Duncan

Dare Number Two:

Playact your Page One Moment in front of your zoom audience to try it on for size.

As you playact your scene, imagine each word as if it would be happening on the page.

Letting your own story brew, as you wait for your turn to join in the playacting game



Introducing the concept of "There-ness" as opposed to "About-ness"

"This will be a chance for everyone in the zoom rectangle to experiment with the magic of bringing a listener into a place where it feels as if she is actually inside of the narrator, as opposed to merely telling "about" what is happening/what happened."

As each student imagines the scene she is playacting as if someone is reading it on the page- everyone else will be asked to start daydreaming opening moments and scenes.

Dare Number Three:

Start writing your story when you can find a minute to be alone.

Have the courage to write it from the heart, instead of trying to write it perfectly, in order to keep it as strong and alive as what you shared when you playacted it for your zoom audience.

Remember that you are daring the reader to stay with you...

"The magic of bringing a reader into a place where it feels as if she is actually inside of the narrator, as opposed to merely telling about what is happening/what happened."

Strategies to bringing the reader "there":

- using the senses (what sounds, tastes, smells, are in this moment? Where do they come from?)
- using vulnerability: what are you feeling in this moment that someone might not see from the outside?
- What fragments of songs, meditations or back stories come into your head as you recreate a forgotten moment in time?

Dare Number 4: Read your story aloud to your zoom audience.

This will be scary the first time, but it will get easier as you go along, knowing that everyone in your zoom circle is as frightened as you are, but also that everyone wants to be heard

Reading what you wrote in solitude to your new zoom friends

- Finding the pleasure of sharing a secret with someone who has begun to truly know you through your words
- Knowing that your words helped others to embrace your honesty and pain



Dare Number 5: Keep your story going week after week.

Sustaining your story:

Developing a new set of writing skills

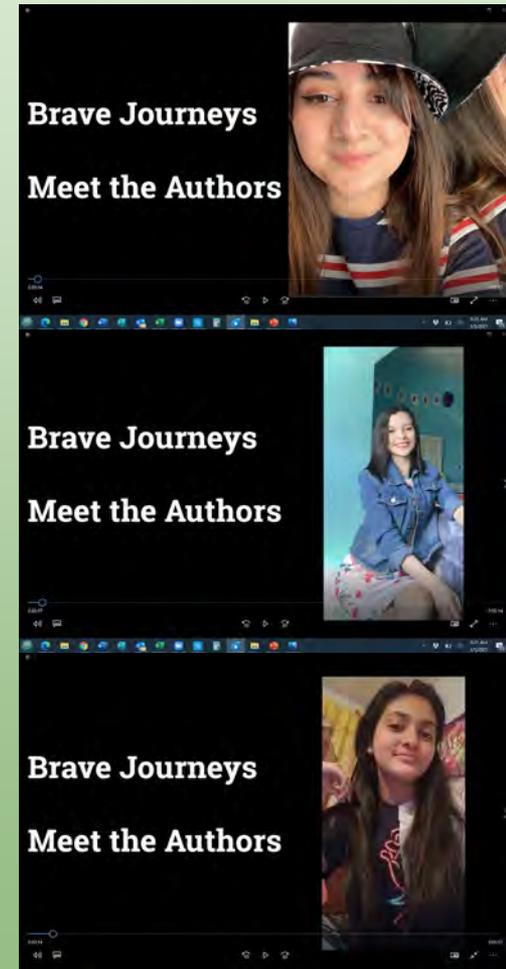
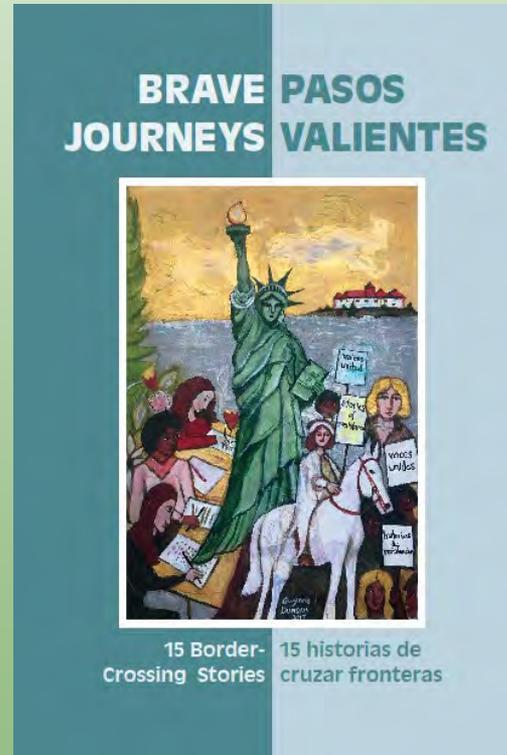
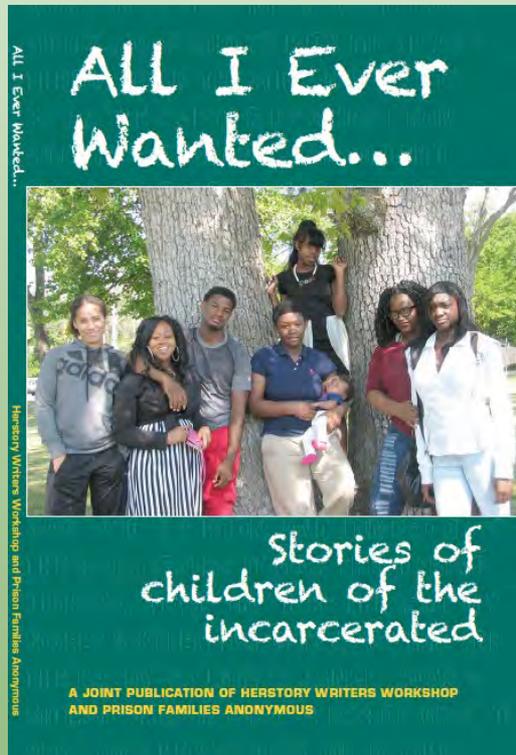


*Connecting the dots as you set out
how you got from here to there...*

Leading to...

- Understanding past choices in a way that will free you to make new future choices
- Beginning to see yourself as an actor in the story of your life, instead of just a passive victim
- Surprising yourself with lost moments of power and beauty
- Learning new compassion for the other players in your drama
- Finding places for your sorrow and rage that others can truly share, as together you work toward change and healing

Dare Number 6: Imagine that someday you might write a book that real strangers will read



Knowing that your words



**Helped others embrace your
honesty, pain and joy**

Herstory

WRITERS WORKSHOP



If you are interested in learning more about our trainings, retreats, and ongoing workshops for young people, or our publications and online readings, please...

Visit our Website at www.herstorywriters.org

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Thank you!

Special thanks to Alison Turner for her concept of the dares instead of the conventual system of prompts, picking up on the essence of the pedagogy