

Poetry Moments

Produced by Seattle World School students,
the Vietnamese Friendship Association,
and Jack Straw Productions

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Introduction

Welcome to Poetry Moments, produced by Seattle World School students, Jack Straw Productions, and the Vietnamese Friendship Association. The Seattle World School is a Seattle public school for newcomers to the United States. In this project, Vietnamese high school students worked with Jack Straw's professional writers, vocal coaches, and audio engineers to write, perform, and record their own poetry.

Kim Hua Thao, classroom teacher

These students have been in the U.S. for about 1 month to a year. It has not been easy for them to blend into a new culture and learn a new language at age 17 and older, but they are trying their best as they know that it's the key to their future success. After-school classes have helped them to bridge the gaps. I can't say thank you enough to Jack Straw's wonderful team for all of the valuable opportunities that they have brought to our school and our highly in need students. The vocal trainings with their coaches Christine and Meg have helped students to become better readers and speakers. The poetry sessions with Jack Straw's wonderful, experienced writer, Laura, have exposed them to different styles of writing and helped them to express themselves freely, creatively. Thank you for everything, Jack Straw!

Laura Gamache, Jack Straw teaching artist

This spring, sun outside, after school, Ms. Kim's Writing Club students sat in Room 20, writing. They wrote "I Remember" sentences like Joe Brainard's from his book, *I Remember*. Student Quan Huynh's "I Remember" plays with the form as deftly as an accomplished soccer player moves the ball towards the goal.

For another Writing Club project, students listed three to five objects important in their life histories. In "My Hat," Hoang Pham talks about an important friendship through the black baseball cap he keeps inside a box inside a suitcase.

Most of the writing in this anthology was inspired by Naomi Shihab Nye's poem "The Words Under the Words." Like Nye, these writers wrote portraits of loved ones through parts, like hands, days, voice, eyes, and hair. Cat Tuong's mother lives in Vietnam, but Cat's writing brings her here in "My Mom."

When you have to learn a new language to do it, it is an achievement to be able to count change in a grocery store or to understand which bus to take home, but it is a movement of the heart to be able to speak one's inner truths in an adopted language. All of these writers have made this transformative voyage. Read on!

Joan Rabinowitz, Jack Straw Executive Director

One day, after VFA asked if we could help their students who were having trouble speaking out loud in English, I sat in on one of their after school classes. I listened to lively conversations almost entirely in Vietnamese between Kim and her adoring students as they worked on their English writing. Since then, for over two years, Jack Straw vocal coaches have gone to the Seattle World School twice a week to help the students speak and read out loud. Each year, Jack Straw writers have expanded students' comfort with English as they encouraged their creativity.

During one class, I watched as students listened to Laura read a poem about a woman's grandmother through her hands, eyes, voice. They seemed a bit confused by the poem, and some seemed frustrated when asked to write their own poem like the one she had read. And yet, with Laura's encouragement, the students reached beyond their initial concern and flourished. When Laura later read them their own poems, she saw a look of wonder as the students realized how good the poems were that they had written in English. And, then in the Jack Straw studios, the students went one step further, working with our vocal coaches, to read and record their own poetry.

This anthology is the second time we have had the wonderful experience of working with Kim Hua Thao and a group of new Vietnamese students at the Seattle World School. I hope you will enjoy their stories as much as we all do!

Hoa Phan

I Remember

I remember that the cat was looking at me when
I climbed up the coconut trees.

I remember one time nobody was home with me.
I felt scared of the ghost.

I forget the smell of my rice field
in the morning.

I remember everything in my house including the
dog and chickens.

I remember someone played with me when my
house didn't have light.

I remember stealing plums from my
neighbor's garden and running away.

I forget how to make a kite from paper.

I remember that I rode my bike to go to
school every morning.

I remember that I saw Ms. Kim and
she was very pretty in my eyes.

I forget how to take care of my plantation.

I remember the first time I came to Seattle,
everything was new to me.

I forget how to write a good
paragraph in my language.

I remember that my mom always cooked savory
food for me.

I remember that I skipped class and climbed
the fence to hang out with my friends.

I remember I rode the bus with my
friends to go on a fieldtrip.

Hoang Huynh

I Remember

I remember I was playing marbles
and they felt cold and dry.

I remember when I ate a tasty hamburger
at MacDonalds.

I remember how relaxed I felt when I
listened to Vietnamese music at night in Vietnam.

I remember when I saw the big mall in Seattle
for the first time.

I remember every Saturday I played soccer
with my friends after we ate breakfast.

I remember the first time I rode a bicycle
when I was seven years old.

I remember the name of my first girl
friend. I broke up with her.

I remember the first person I met
at this school.

I remember I was naked in the rain when
I was five years old.

I remember on Valentine's Day I kissed
my girlfriend when she sat near me.

I remember the first time I played basketball
in America after I had new friends.

I remember I went to school on Monday.

I remember I drank the milk of my mom
until four years old.

Huy Nguyen

My Great Grandmother

My great grandmother's eyes are filled with kindness,
which are behind pure, sparkling glasses.
Her eyes always watch her great-grandchildren playing.
Those eyes notice different parts in the exciting movies.
Her eyes look at God's statue when she sits in the
hammock.

Her legs walked back and forth in her home many times,
or swung on her hammock when she was praying.
But her legs grew weaker and weaker over time.
Finally, she lay on her bed most of the time.

Her hands worked to earn money for her family herself.
Those hands held tools she used in her hard life.
Her hands counted money that she earned carefully.
She counted the beads while she was praying every day.

When I look at my great grandmother's old portrait,
I need some time to know it was my great grandma.
Her skin was white and no wrinkles in the portrait
but when I knew her, she was completely different.
Still, her kindness hasn't changed.

Bao Chau Nguyen

My Mother

My mother's hands are smooth. Her hands take care of me when I am sick. Her hands lead me to go to school every morning. When I'm hungry, she cooks for me. She cooks Vietnamese foods that are very delicious. My mother's hands do housework every day. She takes care of our family carefully.

My mother has a sweet heart. My mother's heart always loves me and our family. Her heart is warm, I felt that when she took care of me. When I fell down in the grass, I was scraped and felt hurt. My mom helped me to stand up. At that, I felt love from her heart to me.

My mother's voice is soft. Her voice reads the stories to me every night. She taught me everything I didn't know. She also told me how to have a better life. When I do something bad, she told me the right way. When I was a baby and I was crying, she sang to me so I could sleep.

Thien Phan

My Grandfather

My grandfather's hands resemble a thistle
the hands of a long day at work.
When I was sick, he put his hands on my head.
He used his hands to play badminton.
He told me to get up early every day.

My grandfather's days are made of uniforms.
He measured the size to make a beautiful uniform.
It took a lot of days to make it.
His days work like a circle moon stays in the sky.
He wrote the size to make the uniform correct.
I looked at him to learn how to make clothes
from one day like one little starts next to the moon.
He also used a motorcycle to travel to another
teacher's house when my parents were going to work.

My grandfather's voice says, "What future do you want
to have?"
He told me to make good grades at school.
He told every good thing to me like older people
start a good life for young children, start
the first step.
He said to me, "How do you
grow a fruit and use the plants for a doctor?"

My grandfather's hair is shiny black with
a little white color.
His hair is like a big ocean with fishes.
The hair is black. Every time when my
grandfather saw many white hairs, he changed it
to black again.

I love my grandfather very much.
I also miss him very much, and nobody
knows about grandfather in the
blue sky looking at me.
He's like a big fish that stays in the ocean.
He smiles at me when I do the right
thing with my friends and family.
My grandfather died after I moved to
Seattle with my family.

Quan Huynh

I Remember

I remember those days I lived with my wonderful brother. Those were the good days.

I recall that day I played soccer with my brother while it was pouring down rain.

How can I forget when my brother and I beat up a boy, and later being chased by his strange friends. What a funny memory.

I don't remember how many matches (in soccer) I have watched.

I have just forgotten that one time at midnight I had escaped with my brother to a coffee store and watched soccer on a big TV.

How could I remember all the things I ate in Vietnam?

I miss the best couple of things I ate, "Bánh tráng trộn" and "trà sữa."

I remember when I was a playful boy, my favorite thing I liked to do was to turn on the big speaker and listen to music until some neighbors got mad and came to put the blame on me.

I recall in the morning in my country it was my custom to take the road and to take a deep breath of fresh air.

Teach me, how could I forget these things?

Yen Huynh

My Grandmother

My grandmother's hands remind me of yarn,
weaving beautiful scarves and hats.

When I wanted to learn
her hands taught my hands how to weave
beautiful green scarves.

She cooks with her hands,
and cooks many kinds of foods.
She cooks with all of her heart.
My family loves her foods.

My grandmother is loving,
loving me and my family.
When my mom and dad go to work,
she goes to my house,
she takes care of me.
She always hugs me,
her heart is very warm,
and she shares her self with me
when I am sad.

My grandmother's eyes are brown.
They are big and shiny.
When I was a little child,
she read stories to me.
She did not see me when I was growing up
because she went to Seattle,
but she saw me very happy and grown up
when I came to Seattle.

She said to me, "When you are happy,
I am happy, too."
I want to live with her.
I always miss her and I love her.
She is part of my heart.

Dǔng Cao

My Sister

My sister's hair is dark
her hair is long and smooth
When she walks under the sunshine
her hair is sparkling and looks so beautiful.

My sister's eyes are shiny.
Her lashes are long and dark.
Her eyes can look across the country.
When you look at her eyes
you can see her feeling.

My sister's mouth is small
but she can speak English very well.
She likes to talk every day.
When she talks her mouth is so lovely.

My sister's voice is sweet like honey.
When she talks her voice is like a bird's chirp.

My sister's hands are straight.
Her hands always work hard.
Her hands can type very fast.
She always takes care of her hands.

My sister's feet are strong.
She likes to travel.
Her feet can walk everywhere.
She likes to walk every day.

Gia Bao Van

My Teacher

Ms. Kim is the best teacher
but sometimes she looks like a female tiger.
She is really fun.
Her hands look soft
but she uses her hands to get my friends
back to class.

Her hair is long.
That makes her more beautiful.

Her mouth looks like the mouth of a bird
but she can spit out fire.
Her mouth shows me how to spell and read.

Her voice is so loud.
It helps me with my pronunciation.

She has a concave scar on her legs
but they walk fast to get the homework for us.

Her face is beautiful with the sweetest smile.
When she talks, her pretty face with the best
smile makes people feel happy.
But at times that lovely face can become like
a monster!
with an evil smile and fire in her eyes.

She has a lot of courage
because she never quits with anything.
I want to be courageous like her.
She is forceful.

Sometimes she thought she was the Queen
but really that is the truth.
However, she's nice to me, and I like her.
She will become the best teacher of all.
Thanks Ms. Kim a lot for teaching me so much.
You are an angel in my eyes.

Cat Tuong

My Mom

My mom's hands are wrinkled
because she works hard to raise me.
But they are soft when she holds my hand
to walk on the street.
Her hands took care of me when I was sick.
Her hands are red from cooking for me the delicious
foods.
Her hands have become spotted and wrinkled over time.

My mom's eyes are deep, shiny and black.
My mom's eyes have dark circles because she works late.
And when I was sick, she didn't sleep to take care of me.

I remember when I did not study and had bad scores,
she just said to me, "It's okay. Try to get a higher score."
Or when I did bad things,
she didn't scold me, she just explained to me why
they were bad.
But when I looked in her eyes, her eyes were very sad.
And I felt remorse because I caused her sadness.
When I had fun, her eyes smiled with me.
That made me happier.
When I was sad, she looked at me with a loving gaze.
Her gaze was affectionate and warm.
I shared with her my sad story.
She helped me reduce my sadness.

My mom's arms are skinny, soft and white.
When I was a baby, her arm carried me and lulled me
to sleep.
When I was a kid I slept on her arm.
I was comfortable and fell asleep,
and I slept well on her arm.

She told me when I was a baby, and I was sick,
I cried so much and she needed to carry me
on her arm all night.
When I got home after school she would hug me.

I remember with her arms she hugged me
when I was sad, crying or happy.

Now, she is living in Vietnam. I miss her very much.
I want her to live with me.
And I want her to kiss me, hug me, let me sleep
on her arm, and cook for me delicious foods.
I wait for that day. Don't leave me again,
Mom . . . I miss you.

Sang Hong

I Remember

I remember I played marbles at my friend's house yesterday.
I remember I rode my bicycle in Vietnam.
I remember I watched a movie in my home yesterday.
I remember I read a book in my home yesterday.
I remember my old friend, his name is Linh, in my country.
I remember I ate lunch, pizza, in my school.
I remember I touched the basketball in the gym yesterday.
I remember I ate cake on my birthday.
I remember I listened to music in my room yesterday.
I remember I saw a big dog near my house yesterday.
I remember I ate candy. It was sweet.
I remember I played soccer in the gym yesterday.
I remember I touched the boy in gym.
I remember I played very good basketball at gym yesterday.
I remember I swished the basketball in the gym.

Bao Nguyen

My Grandmother

My grandmother's hands resemble poetry,
the most beautiful poems I have ever heard.

When I was a kid she held my hand and
walked with me to the beach every Sunday.
I felt warm and safe when she held my hands.

She cooked me my favorite food by her
soft and skinny hands.
I appreciate her for what her hands have
given to me.

My grandmother took care of me when there
was nobody around me.
She stayed up late to take care of me
when I got sick.
I just wanted to know why she was so sweet
and loved me so much.

Her heart was with me all the time in Vietnam,
and it reaches me here in Seattle.
The love that she has given to me now, it
is still here, and I hope it stays with
me forever.

Hung Ta

Miss Kim

Miss Kim's hands look soft, skinny
like the skin of a baby.
The hands used to write.
The hands used to tap us when we are
joking with her.
The hands did many good things for us.
The hands tired because of us.
The hands of the good teacher.

Miss Kim's days are made of pens,
papers, smiles and anger because she's tired.
She used pens and papers to write a lot
of assignments.
She used pens and papers to write grades.
She used pens and papers to write
many lesson plans.

She was tired because she wrote a lot
of assignments, grades and lesson plans
for us.

She was tired because she was yelling
at us when we did something wrong.
She was tired because she was worried
about us.

But she always smiles.
She always smiles although she has
a lot of problems.
She always smiles even when she is very tired.
She always smiles because she is devoted
to teaching us. She is a good teacher.

Hoang Pham

My Hat

I like my hat because two years ago my best friend gave it to me when I was sick and hospitalized in Viet Nam. Then I came here. He didn't. I think my hat is the best. I never wear it because it is very important for me. The hat is black, like a baseball hat.

Right now my friend is in the Vietnamese army. He wants to move up the ranks. He wants to have a good future. I worry about him. When I miss him, I just look at the hat. His name is Tuan. He is 20 years old. I met him when I moved to middle school in Vietnam. We have been friends about eight years. I know he wants to help his family in the future because they are so poor. He could not afford to go to college.

Sometimes I look at the hat and think about him. I put the hat in a box and put the box in my big suitcase I keep under my bed. I hope someday he will be successful.

Phat Hyunh

June 15

June 15 at the airport, a figure will be missing in Vietnam. I must leave everything behind, friends and relatives.

Actually, now I still miss them. They have left an impression in my heart. I carry with me many beautiful memories.

I remember one night sitting on the stone bench in my village. It made me recall the night I met my girlfriend for the first time. Rare as true love is, true friendship is rarer. Beside love, I also cherish my childhood friendships. They are my best friends, and we played nude in the rain together. When we were in fifth grade, we played the “Battle of the Children.” We always jointly shared sorrows together at midnight.

Since I had to leave them behind in my hometown, I often dream about them. Sometimes I wonder, “Where are my friends? Where have the fun days gone?”

Hung Nguyen

My Mother and Father

My mom's hand was holding my hand
the first time I went to school with wet hands.

My mom's voice often yelled at me
when I made a mistake.

My father's hands sometimes whipped on my butt
when I bullied the others.

Phuwanat Nguyen

I Remember

I remember when I hid from my mom under the couch.

I remember a very little doll I lost under the front porch and never found.

I remember Christmas Day in this country.

I remember when I was eating candy with my little sister.

I remember when I screamed so loud in the closet but nobody could hear me.

I remember when I learned about synonym words.

I remember when I used to eat food under the table.

I remember when I was walking but I forgot where I was going to.

I forget the smell of my house in Thailand.

I forget the antonym word for confident.

I forget the look of my cities in Thailand.

I forget anything about Thai Terrorism.

I forget how to spell the word foundation.

I remember when I was having fun with my friend in this school.

I remember when I didn't eat lunch for two days.

I remember that I almost lost my backpack.

I remember when I wasn't paying attention while riding a bicycle so I hit a tree.

I remember when my mom used to cook me Pad Thai.

I remember when I used to eat two different types of food at the same time, like pizza with spaghetti.

Acknowledgments and Credits

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The Jack Straw artist team included writer Laura Gamache, vocal coaches Christine Marie Brown and Meg McLynn, audio engineers CJ Lazenby and Tom Stiles, designer Levi Fuller, and Executive Director Joan Rabinowitz. Special thanks to Seattle World school students, teacher Kim Hua Thao, assistants Peter Hong and Skyler Mendoza, and Principal Martin O'Callaghan, who all helped make this book and CD possible.

Jack Straw Productions is the Northwest's non-profit audio arts center, dedicated to the creation, production and presentation of all forms of audio art. To find out more about this and other Jack Straw programs, email us at education@jackstraw.org or visit us at www.jackstraw.org.

Jack Straw Productions

Staff

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Poetry Moments CD track listing:

1. Opening Credits (0:27)
2. Hoa Phan: I Remember (1:46)
3. Hoang Huynh: I Remember (1:25)
4. Huy Nguyen: My Great Grandmother (1:56)
5. Bao Chau Nguyen: My Mother (1:23)
6. Thien Phan: My Grandfather (3:15)
7. Quan Huynh: I Remember (1:32)
8. Yen Huynh: My Grandmother (1:35)
9. Dũng Cao: My Sister (1:28)
10. Gia Bao Van: My Teacher (2:19)
11. Cat Tuong: My Mom (3:17)
12. Sang Hong: I Remember (1:41)
13. Bao Nguyen: My Grandmother (1:00)
14. Hung Ta: Miss Kim (2:00)
15. Hoang Pham: My Hat (1:40)
16. Phat Hyunh: June 15 (1:37)
17. Closing Credits (1:01)

Total running time: 30:17