

# **Building Empathy: Putting Yourself in Others' Shoes Through Poetry and Movement (4th to 12th grade)**

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## **Facilitators:**

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**Poetry** is the language of the heart. In this activity participants will experience how “walking someone else’s shoes” can be used to reveal empathy, questions, camaraderie, biases and imagery. Each participant will choose a marginalized group (from the list provided or otherwise) and adopt the identity of a person from within it for the duration of the exercise. Individuals will choose five words to define or describe how they feel or are viewed first from society’s perspective and then from their own perspective (their new identity). Using their new identity and the words they’ve identified, participants will create and share autobiographical poems, deepening the connection to personal identity, community, the world, and art.

## **Example:**

Exercising Empathy Through Art by Wanderer (Cydnee A. Reese)

Identity: Woman married to a woman. I am a mother. I am a creative.

Words from society: Sin. Nurturing. Emotional. Perverted. Lazy.

Words from within: Misunderstood. Loving. Happy. Hurt. Canceled.

### **EXAMPLE I:**

When I love, it is emotional. It is a sin?

Misunderstanding me is lazy. Do you know where I have been? Hurt has been my friend.

You pervert my happiness and cancel me.

But still my heart is nurturing

### **EXAMPLE II:**

Sin more to hide hurt. Emotional world this is.

Lazy loving is commonplace. Vengeful? No. Happy? Yes. Misunderstood be my bliss.

Come to me to feel free I will feed thee I am nurturing.

But canceled are the days of disrespecting me freely.

**Dance Overview:** In the dance lesson, students demonstrate and express feelings through body movements. Students create a dance expressing a sensory response to language they created based on ‘walking in another’s shoes.’