**Lyrical Questions Exercise**

The Process

This is a beautiful exercise that may take you places you didn't expect to go. Please proceed step by step—it's **crucial** not to look ahead at upcoming slides—and trust the process, even if it seems odd. What happens may surprise you!

**STEP ONE: Make a list of 7 lyrical questions about your own life.**

You may wonder, “What is a lyrical question?” There’s no definition, but you might think of “lyrical” as being song-like. Poetry is lyrical as well. The main thing is not to feel that you have to be literal, unless you choose to be.

Here are some examples of lyrical questions from others who have done the exercise:

- Where do I let the blue in?
- How do I girl?
- Will the cycle ever end?
- What if we had gotten a hamster instead?

Make sure they are **REAL questions** that you have about your own life. You will be sharing them with one other person, but they don’t have to make sense to anyone but you.

**STEP TWO: Interview your partner about their life using your lyrical questions.**

Here’s where it gets interesting!!

Work with a partner, either in person or remotely via Skype or FaceTime or another platform.

You will ask each of your lyrical questions to your partner and your partner, understanding the question however they choose, will answer from their own life and experience. You are interviewing the partner about **their** life, you just happen to be using your own lyrical questions.

The partner should not try to answer the questions with you in mind, or give you advice. The partner answers strictly from their own perspective about their own life.

For example, Steven will interview Gina about her life using HIS lyrical questions. He might ask, “Why can I never catch the ball?” and Gina will answer that however it makes sense to her in terms of **her own** life.

Steven asks Gina all seven of his lyrical questions and makes notes if it helps him remember what she has said. Then Gina interviews Steven using all seven of her lyrical questions.

You can trust this strange step—it’s magical!
STEP THREE: Make a gift for your partner that reflects something you heard in the interview.

Using materials you find around the house or in the classroom, make a gift for your partner that reflects what you heard from your partner in the interview. The gift can take whatever form you choose.

I’ve seen students make collages, mobiles out of sticks and images, a song recorded on an iphone, comics, nests, folded paper objects, knitted pieces, etc etc.

STEP FOUR: Present your gift to your partner.

If you are together in a group, you can present your gifts for one another, providing context for class members about why you made what you did.

If you are working remotely, you can show your interview partner via Skype or FaceTime the gift you made from them. Tell them why you made it, what it signifies. Take some photos and/or pop it in the mail to your partner so they can remember the gift.

STEP FIVE: Reflect on the process.

Write a reflection about the experience of doing this exercise.

Why/how does it work to interview someone about their own life with questions from your life? What would have happened if you had interviewed each other using questions such as “Where are you from? What do your parents do?” How did the randomness/strangeness of the questions affect your answers?

How did it feel to make and receive your gift? Did it affect your relationship to your partner? If so, how?

OPTIONAL: Further exploration

If you want to learn about the rich and profound implications of gift-giving, I recommend Lewis Hyde’s book titled _The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property_.

For an in-depth description of using this exercise in an Anthropology class, follow this link: https://us8.campaign-archive.com/?u=a2ffa14c4a3c79ddcc1b20faa&id=1bf08afc4e

--Exercise developed by Ross Gay, described here by Jane Hilberry