

Reading

My Honest Poem

Directions: Read Rudy Francisco’s spoken-word poem, which he has performed live at events like Button Poetry Live and the Individual World Poetry Slam finals. Underline or place a star alongside lines that stand out to you.

By Rudy Francisco

I was born on July 27th; I hear that makes me a Leo.
I don’t really know what that means.
I’m 5 foot 6 . . . and a half.
I weigh 145 pounds, I don’t know how to swim,
And I’m a sucker for a girl with a nice smile and clean sneakers.

I’m still learning how to whisper;
I’m often loud in places where I should be quiet,
I’m often quiet in places where I should be loud.
I was born feet first and I’ve been backwards ever since.
I like ginger ale . . . a lot.

I’ve been told that I give really bad hugs.
People say that it feels like I’m trying to escape;
Sometimes, it’s because I am.
Secretly, I get really nervous every time someone gets close enough to hear me breathe.

I have this odd fascination with things like sandcastles and ice sculptures;
I assume it’s because I usually find myself dedicating time to things that will only last a few moments.
That’s also why I tend to fall in love with women who will never love me back.
I know it sounds crazy but it’s actually much easier than it seems,
And to be honest, I think it’s safer that way.
You see, relationships, they often remind me that I’m not afraid of heights or falling,
But I’m scared of what’s gonna happen the moment that my body hits the ground.

I’m clumsy.
Yesterday, I tripped over my self-esteem, I landed on my pride, and it shattered like an iPhone with a broken face.
Now, I can’t even tell who’s trying to give me a compliment.
I’ve never been in the military but I have this purple heart;
I got it from beating myself up over things I can’t fix.

I know this sounds weird,
But sometimes, I wonder what my bed sheets say about me when I'm not around.

I wonder what the curtains would do if they found out about all the things I've done behind their backs.
I've got a hamper that's overflowing with really, really loud mistakes, and a graveyard in my closet.
I'm afraid that if I let you see my skeletons, you'll grind my bones into powder and get high on my fault lines.

Hi, my name is Rudy.

I enjoy frozen yogurt, people watching, and laughing for absolutely no reason at all,
But I don't allow myself to cry as often as I need to.

I have solar-powered confidence.

I have a battery-operated smile.

My hobbies include editing my life story, hiding behind metaphors, and trying to convince my shadow that I'm someone worth following.

I don't know much but I do know this;

I know that heaven is full of music.

I know God listens to my heartbeat on his iPod.

It reminds him that we still got work to do.¹

Connection Questions

Directions: Discuss the questions with your group. Assign the following roles: *facilitator*, *note-taker*, and *summarizer*. The facilitator will keep time and lead the discussion. The note-taker will record the group members' ideas on this handout. The summarizer will report out to the class.

1. Which line or lines of "My Honest Poem" spoke to you and why?

2. Consider Rudy Francisco's craft—the writing moves he makes in his poem—and how these choices impact the poem's overall effect on the audience.
 - a. What patterns of repetition do you notice? What is the overall impact of this repetition, both when listening to and when reading "My Honest Poem"?

 - b. Where do you notice sensory details—sight, sound, touch, taste, smell? Put a star by what you think are the *three* most powerful sensory details and discuss why you chose them.

¹ Rudy Francisco, "My Honest Poem," performed at Beltway Poetry Slam, The Fridge, Washington, DC, November 12, 2012.

c. What choices did Francisco make when delivering his poem to a live audience? How was the experience of watching his performance similar to or different from reading the poem on the page?

3. Now that you've considered Rudy Francisco's craft, zoom in on the second-to-last stanza for some close reading. Discuss the details he uses and what they can teach us about his identity and about ourselves. There are sentence starters that you can use to generate thinking (or ignore if you have your own ideas).

Specific details	What does the text say?	What does it mean?	Why does it matter?
"solar-powered confidence"	<i>When something is solar-powered, it . . .</i>	<i>So if confidence is solar-powered, it means that confidence . . .</i>	<i>This matters to Rudy/me/the world because . . .</i>
"battery-operated smile"	<i>Things that are battery-operated tend to . . .</i>		
"editing my life story"	<i>When you edit something, you . . .</i>		
"trying to convince my shadow that I'm someone worth following"			

4. Now zoom out and think about the poem as a whole. What aspects of the poet's identity seem easy for him to share with his audience? Which aspects seem more difficult? How do you know?

5. What information do you think the poet might be withholding from you, the audience? Why can it be hard to talk about our identity with others?

6. In your opinion, what is the most valuable idea in this poem or the part that you most want to remember? What makes you say that?