

Reading

Identity

by Julio Noboa Polanco

Let them be as flowers,
always watered, fed, guarded, admired,
but **harnessed**¹ to a pot of dirt.

I'd rather be a tall, ugly weed,
clinging on cliffs, like an eagle
wind-wavering above high, jagged rocks.

To have broken through the surface of stone,
to live, to feel exposed to the madness
of the vast, eternal sky.
To be swayed by the breezes of an ancient sea,
carrying my soul, my seed,
beyond the mountains of time or into the **abyss of the bizarre**².

I'd rather be unseen, and if
then **shunned**³ by everyone,
than to be a pleasant-smelling flower,
growing in clusters in the fertile valley,
where they're praised, handled, and plucked
by greedy, human hands.

I'd rather smell of musty, green stench
than of sweet, fragrant lilac.
If I could stand alone, strong and free,
I'd rather be a tall, ugly weed.

¹ **harnessed**: tied

² **abyss of the bizarre**: strange and mysterious depths

³ **shunned**: avoided

Connection Questions

1. How does this poem make you feel? What does it remind you of?
2. In your opinion, what is the speaker's attitude toward the flowers in the poem? How do you know?
3. In your opinion, what is the speaker's attitude toward the weed in the poem? How do you know?

Prepare a Choral Reading of the Poem

Your group will now prepare a choral reading of the poem. Don't worry, you don't have to perform it for the class!

To prepare, discuss why you think certain words and phrases are more or less important. Then decide how you can use your individual and collective voices to convey this distinction. Try to capture the speaker's attitude toward the flowers and the weed in the poem. You can play with the volume, tone, and speed of your voices to express the ideas and feelings in the poem.

Directions: As a group, reread the poem stanza by stanza. For each stanza, discuss the following questions:

- Which words, phrases, or lines are most important and should be read by all of us? (Circle the words, phrases, or lines that you will all read.)
- How should we distribute the other words, phrases, or lines in this stanza among our group members? (Use other annotations like margin notes, underlines, squiggly lines, dotted lines, or boxes to explain who will read the other lines.)
- Practice. Revise. Practice. Have fun!

Credit Line for the Poem:

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