

## Reading

# “Rehearsal for the New World” Transcript<sup>1</sup>

**Directions:** After listening to **Part 1: Introduction**, review the text and add the following annotations:

- **Place a star (☆ ) alongside an idea that resonates with you.** It might connect to who you are or your experiences, teach you something about yourself or the world, or strike you as beautiful or thought-provoking.
- **Underline a phrase or sentence that connects to something you have learned or discussed in recent lessons.** This might be something about values, fitting in, the importance of belonging, or group membership.
- **Reread the third paragraph.** How do you think Ada Limón would answer the question she poses: “How can we thrive if we do not know where we belong?” How do you answer this question? **Jot down your response in the box that follows the introduction.**

## Part 1: Introduction

I’m Ada Limón and this is *The Slowdown*.

I grew up in an English-speaking household, but when we would visit my paternal grandparents, I used to love hearing my grandfather speak Spanish. Truth be told, he believed in sticking to English. Still, I remember him singing in Spanish and how animated he’d become when his original tongue was let loose in his mouth. His singing always reminded me of what freedom must feel like. All of his original music moving through him.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Slowdown* (podcast), [episode 508: “Rehearsal for the New World” with Ada Limón](#) (September 23, 2021; encore November 23, 2022). Transcript and sound recording of Episode 508 from *The Slowdown*®, a production from Minnesota Public Radio® (p) (c) 2021 Minnesota Public Radio®. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Regardless of what language you speak, when you do not find yourself in books or movies, you begin to wonder where you belong. If you do not belong to the place your parents or grandparents are from, it can seem as if you do not belong anywhere. There is always someone asking, “Where are you from?” over and over until you may even begin to doubt where you are from. I used to make a list of famous people who had a Mexican background: Linda Carter (who played Wonder Woman). Or Joan Baez (Oh, her long hair and her even longer notes). I thought maybe I could be like them. People who thrived in the in between.

So many people know what it is like to feel the danger of being an outsider. To be the other. And yet, when it’s happening to us, the weight of it can feel overwhelming and crushing. How can we thrive if we do not know where we belong?

Oddly, the space of complex belonging is where poetry thrives. In today’s poem, I love the image of a child mouthing words at the television and trying on a language, a culture, until it feels familiar. And still, the poem points out, even when we \*think\* we have **assimilated**,<sup>2</sup> there is a mystery that surrounds us. Other worlds that move through us. It is not that we try on the essential American culture simply to fit in, but it is also about safety. The more we blend, the more we don’t cause a scene, the more we quietly stay out of the way, the safer we might be.

Today’s poem straddles two worlds, the world of working to find an identity and the world of remaining silent for the sake of safety.

**Reread the third paragraph.** How do you think Ada Limón would answer the question she poses: “How can we thrive if we do not know where we belong?” How do you answer this question?

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<sup>2</sup> **assimilated:** adapted or blended in to the culture of a country or group

## Part 2: “Rehearsal for the New World” by Hazem Fahmy

Hours before the TV, my mouth  
agape, repeating after every American cartoon  
endlessly. Call it a meditation;

was I not emptying my mind  
of language? Mouthing every syllable,  
like prayer—*God, make me a true*

*American,  
i.e. invisible, yet  
ever-present.*

What a rush it was  
to speak **empire**<sup>3</sup>  
at such a young age. Later,

I am asked: *how did you get  
this accent?* Once, I feared  
the other end of that question. Once

across the world, I learned  
the danger of carrying a country  
in your throat, so I did not speak

until I made sure  
I could not be heard.

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<sup>3</sup> **empire**: a large and powerful kingdom or state that controls many territories and peoples, usually created by conquest

# Connection Questions

**Directions:** As you discuss the following questions, annotate words, phrases, and lines from the poem that support your ideas. You can also add questions and notes in the margins.

1. **Review the first four stanzas of the poem.** Circle words and phrases that help you answer the question: *How do you think the speaker feels as they teach themselves how to speak English? How do you know?*
2. **Starting with “Later” in the fourth stanza, review the second half of the poem.** Circle words and phrases that help you answer the question: *How do you think the speaker feels at the end of the poem? What makes you say that?*
3. When reflecting on the challenge of “thriving in the in-between,” Ada Limón explains: “It is not that we try on the essential American culture simply to fit in, but it is also about safety. The more we blend, the more we don’t cause a scene, the more we quietly stay out of the way, the safer we might be.”
  - a. What are the potential dangers of being outside the boundaries of a group? How do Ada Limón’s reflections and Hazem Fahmy’s poem help you answer this question?
  - b. What can happen when we sacrifice our values or change aspects of who we are in order to fit in? In what situations might it be beneficial or even necessary? How do Ada Limón and Hazem Fahmy’s poem help you answer these questions?
  - c. How do other texts you’ve read recently, such as “Chameleon,” “The Importance of Belonging,” or Julio Noboa Polanco’s poem “Identity,” help you answer these questions?
4. In the introduction to the podcast episode, Ada Limón asks: “How can we thrive if we do not know where we belong?”
  - a. How do you think Limón and the speaker of the poem would answer this question? Do you agree or disagree with their perspectives?
  - b. How do you answer this question?