Story of Self: "Afro-Latina"
by Elizabeth Acevedo

What is this? A spoken-word poem written and performed by Elizabeth Acevedo (2015)

Text:

Afro-Latina,
Camina conmigo.
Salsa swagger
anywhere she go
como
'¡la negra tiene tumbao!
¡Azúcar!'
Dance to the rhythm.
Beat the drums of my skin.
Afrodescendant,
the rhythms within.
The first language
I spoke was Spanish.
Learned from lullabies
whispered in my ear.
My parents' tongue
was a gift
which I quickly forgot
after realizing
my peers did not understand it.
They did not understand me.
So I rejected
habichuela y mangú,
much preferring Happy Meals
and Big Macs.
Straightening my hair
in imitation of Barbie.
I was embarrassed
by my grandmother's
colorful skirts

and my mother's
eh brokee inglee
which cracked my pride
when she spoke.
So, shit, I would poke fun
at her myself,
hoping to lessen
the humiliation.
Proud to call myself
American,
a citizen
of this nation,
I hated
Caramel-color skin.
Cursed God
I'd been born
the color of cinnamon.
How quickly we forget
where we come from.
So remind me,
remind me
that I come from
the Taínos of the río
the Aztec,
the Mayan,
Los Incas,
los Españoles
con sus fincas
buscando oro,
and the Yoruba Africanos
que con sus manos
built a mundo
nunca imaginado.
I know I come
from stolen gold.
From cocoa,
from sugarcane,
the children

of slaves
and slave masters.
A beautifully tragic mixture,
a sancocho
of a race history.
And my memory
can't seem to escape
the thought
of lost lives
and indigenous rape.
Of bittersweet bitterness,
of feeling innate,
the soul of a people,
past, present and fate,
our stories cannot
be checked into boxes.
They are in the forgotten.
The undocumented,
the passed-down spoonfuls
of arroz con dulce
a la abuela's knee.
They're the way our hips
skip
to the beat of cumbia,
merengue
y salsa.
They're in the bending
and blending
of backbones.
We are deformed
and reformed
beings.
It's in the sway
of our song,
the landscapes
of our skirts,
the azúcar
beneath our tongues.

We are
the unforeseen children.
We're not a cultural wedlock,
hair too kinky for Spain,
too wavy for dreadlocks.
So our palms
tell the cuentos
of many tierras.
Read our lifeline,
birth of intertwine,
moonbeams
and starshine.
We are every
ocean crossed.
North Star navigates
our waters.
Our bodies
have been bridges.
We are the sons
and daughters,
el destino de mi gente,
black
brown
beautiful.
Viviremos para siempre
Afro-Latinos
hasta la muerte.

Part 1: Analysis

Read through the story of self above and then answer the questions below.

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1. What aspect of **selfhood** is this writer focusing on?

2. What are the **moments** or **events** they focus on in relation to that aspect of selfhood?

3. What is the **tone** of this piece? Or, how does this writer **feel** about the aspect of selfhood they are writing about?

4. What **details** and **images** they use to communicate that tone/feeling?

5. What are **three words** you would use to describe this writer, based on this piece of writing? What can you tell about their personality, values, or passions?

Part 2: Write-alike

A write-alike is an exercise in which you take inspiration from the format, structure, and themes of a piece of writing, but replace the original content with your own.

The Original:

Afro-Latina is a spoken-word, free-verse poem about how the speaker has evolved from being ashamed of her cultural heritage to proud of it.

Questions To Think About For Your Write-alike:

- What is a part of myself that I used to try to hide or reject that I now embrace?

- What parts of my history and identity do I take the most pride in?

- What are particular moments in my life in which I've felt that shame, and now that pride, most strongly?

Starters For Your Write-alike:

One way to start your write-alike could be by borrowing these lines from Acevedo's poem:

> How quickly we forget
> where we come from
> So remind me
> Remind me.

You could start with these lines, then continue with your own story.

Your Turn:

Set a timer for 15 minutes and go!