

Story of Self: “La facultad” by Gloria Anzaldúa



What is this? An excerpt from Anzaldúa’s mixed-genre book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)

Text:

La facultad is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world.

Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (when not brutalized into insensitivity). Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest--the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign.

When we’re up against the wall, when we have all sorts of oppressions coming at us, we are forced to develop this faculty so that we’ll know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away. We’ll sense the rapist when he’s five blocks down the street. Pain makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it, so we hone that radar. It’s a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us.

I walk into a house and I know whether it is empty or occupied. I feel the lingering charge in the air of a recent fight or lovemaking or depression. I sense the emotions someone near is emitting--whether friendly or threatening. Hate and fear--the more intense the emotion, the greater my reception of it. I feel a tingling on my skin when someone is staring at me or thinking about me. I can tell how others feel by the way they smell, where others are by the air pressure on my skin. I can spot the love or greed or generosity lodged in the tissues of another. Often I sense the direction of and my distance from people or objects--in the dark, or with my eyes closed, without looking. It must be a vestige of a proximity sense, a sixth sense that’s lain dormant from long-ago times.

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:

“La facultad” is a prose essay in first-person that defines a special ability the writer has developed as a result of being “pounced on” for being different.

Questions To Think About For Your Write-alike:

- What is a way in which you are different from others?
- What is a special ability you have as a result of being different in this way?
- What are some specific situations you can think of in which this special ability comes out or comes in handy?

Starters For Your Write-alike:

One way to start your write-alike might be to take inspiration from Anzaldúa’s line, “Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized,” in which she draws a link between a shared experience (being pushed out of the tribe) and an effect of that experience (becoming more sensitized).

You could start by writing, “Those who are _____ are likely to become _____,” replacing Anzaldúa’s experience and effect with your own.

Then continue your story.

Examples:

To find examples for this exercise, visit www.storiesofselfworkshop.com/writing_samples.html

- Faiza’s “La facultad” write-alike
- Maria’s “La facultad” write-alike

Your turn:

Set a timer for 15 minutes and go!



A large rectangular area containing 25 horizontal lines for writing, enclosed by a thin gray border.