

REVITALIZING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

TRANSLATING POETRY

Don't Bother the Earth Spirit

BY JOY HARJO (Muscogee)

Don't bother the earth spirit who lives here. She is working on a story. It is the oldest story in the world and it is delicate, changing. If she sees you watching she will invite you in for coffee, give you warm bread, and you will be obligated to stay and listen. But this is no ordinary story. You will have to endure earthquakes, lightning, the deaths of all those you love, the most blinding beauty. It's a story so compelling you may never want to leave; this is how she traps you. See that stone finger over there? That is the only one who ever escaped.

Source: *Secrets from the Center of the World*
(University of Arizona Press, 1989)

If there are fluent speakers in your community, invite them over to the library! Interacting and talking is the best way to learn a new language.

Prepare for this activity by pulling a few poetry books from your collection or online resources. Ask participants to select a poem and recite it to the group. Short and straightforward poems are best. Take the time to translate the poem line by line.

For extra fun, type the translated poem and send an email a copy to the poet! I'm sure they'll appreciate the gesture.

