A House Called Tomorrow

Alberto Ríos (1952)

You are not fifteen, or twelve, or seventeen—
You are a hundred wild centuries

And fifteen, bringing with you
In every breath and in every step

Everyone who has come before you,
All the yous that you have been,

The mothers of your mother,
The fathers of your father.

If someone in your family tree was trouble,
A hundred were not:

The bad do not win—not finally,
No matter how loud they are.

We simply would not be here
If that were so.

You are made, fundamentally, from the good.
With this knowledge, you never march alone.

You are the breaking news of the century.
You are the good who has come forward

Through it all, even if so many days
Feel otherwise. But think:

When you as a child learned to speak,
It's not that you didn't know words—

It's that, from the centuries, you knew so many,
And it's hard to choose the words that will be your own.

From those centuries we human beings bring with us
The simple solutions and songs,

The river bridges and star charts and song harmonies
All in service to a simple idea:

That we can make a house called tomorrow.
What we bring, finally, into the new day, every day,

Is ourselves. And that's all we need
To start. That's everything we require to keep going.

Look back only for as long as you must,
Then go forward into the history you will make.

Be good, then better. Write books. Cure disease.
Make us proud. Make yourself proud.

And those who came before you? When you hear thunder,
Hear it as their applause.

Classroom Activities

The following activities and questions are designed to help your students use their noticing skills to move through the poem and develop their thinking about its meaning with confidence, using what they've noticed as evidence for their interpretations.

Homework: Ask your parents or guardians to tell you what they know about their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. (If you can only learn about one or two generations, that's fine.) Write down what they tell you and bring it into school.
You will use this information in class.

1. **Warm-up** *(pair share)*: Tell your partner about the history of your family. What did you learn? What more do you wish you knew? Did you discover any surprises?
2. **Reading the Poem**: Read the poem silently, then write down the words, phrases, and structures that jump out at you.
3. **Listening to the Poem** *(enlist two volunteers to read the poem aloud)*: Listen as the poem is read aloud and write down any additional words and phrases that jump out at you.
4. **Small-group Discussion**: What does the speaker in the poem say about past generations? How does this speaker think these generations relate to you? Why do you think the poet chose to write the poem in couplets? Cite evidence in the poem.
5. **Whole-class Discussion**: What do you think the poet means when he says, "we can make a house called tomorrow"? With what does the poet say we should build this house? How should we do it?
6. **Extension for Grades 7-10**: What are your New Year's resolutions? How will you build a "house called tomorrow" based on what you have learned from your ancestors? Share your resolutions and what you will do to build this "house" as part of a class book for the new year.

7. **Extension for Grades 11-12**: It has been a divisive year in the history of this country. Give a presentation to your class about how you will contribute to building “a house called tomorrow” that is more equitable for its residents and less divided. How will you rely on values transmitted by your ancestors as you contribute to a positive future?