

**CONNECTIONS LITERARY SERIES**  
**Spring 2008**  
**STUDY GUIDE**

**Teeth, by Aracelis Girmay**

1. In the preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman wrote:

*The attitude of great poets is to cheer up slaves and horrify despots. The turn of their necks, the sound of their feet, the motions of their wrists, are full of hazard to the one and hope to the other.*

The “Ars Poetica” is a form in which poets write about the nature of poetry-- a kind of manifesto. In 1974, the poet Roque Dalton wrote:

*Poetry  
pardon me for having helped you to understand  
you are not made of words alone*

In *Arroz Poetica*, Girmay writes her own version of an Ars Poetica--her own manifesto.

What do you think the job of poetry is? Write your own manifesto or Ars Poetica. You might look to Nikky Finney's artistic statement & Gwendolyn Brooks' *Second Sermon on the Warpland*, too.

2. In the context of Whitman's & Dalton's lives/eras, compare the affects of poetry on social change.

3. In Girmay's *Ode to the Watermelon*, she writes about the imaginative, creative resistance of Palestinians who are banned from waving their flag & so, in its stead, wave watermelon halves in the air (to represent their national colors).

Please write a short paper on the role of the arts in resistance & healing. Here are some movements that might be helpful to you as you narrow down the context within which you'll do your work:

- Black Arts Movement
- The art of Emory Douglass/Black Panthers Movement
- Casagrande underground literary movement, Chile, 2000 (the “bombing” of Chile with 100,000 poems)

3. In Girmay's *Cyclops Mary* poems, she alludes to the politics of beauty, power, gender, & race. Please articulate how you think these elements are working in these two poems. Compare these dynamics to those in the title poem, *Teeth*.

Some questions you might consider in this work:

- Who possesses power? Who does not?
- Do alliances exist within the poems? How so? How not so?
- What, do you think, was the poet's intent?
- What are the conflicts? What are the resolutions (hoped for &/or realized)?