

TELL ME
HOW IT
ENDS

AN ESSAY IN
FORTY
QUESTIONS

VALERIA
LUISELLI

1. Lost In Translation, Charles Ellenbogen, charles.ellenbogen@clevelandmetroschools.org
2. Language & Literature, English, English Language Arts, Theory of Knowledge
3. Grades 9-12, 2 55-minute periods
4. [Ohio's Learning Standards - English Language Arts](#)

RL.11-12.4 Determine the connotative, denotative, and figurative meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text; analyze the impact of author's diction, including multiple-meaning words or language that is particularly evocative to the tone and mood of the text.

W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

- a. Establish a clear and thorough thesis to present and explain information.
- c. Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
- d. Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.
- e. Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.
- f. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- g. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

5. Core Theme: Knowledge & the Knower

Connection between Core Theme and Optional Theme:

Perspective: Do people from different linguistic or cultural backgrounds live, in some sense, in different worlds?

Optional Theme: Knowledge & Language

Scope: Are there differences in how knowledge itself is conceived of, or presented, in different languages?

Perspective: How do our values and assumptions influence the language in which we express our ideas?

Methods and tools: In what ways can language be used to influence, persuade or manipulate people's emotions?

Ethics: Do professional interpreters and translators have any special ethical obligations?

Questions are taken from *Theory of knowledge guide: First assessment 2022, pp. 19-20.*

6.

Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions - Valeria Luiselli

They Call Me Guero: A Border Kid's Poems - David Bowles

Two articles from different sources about the same issue, preferably one related to issues raised by Luiselli in her essay and preferably related to your local context. For example -

<https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/561431-ohio-governor-deploys-nearly-200-national-guard-members-to-us-mexico?rl=1>

<https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/politics/2021/07/02/ohio-send-185-national-guard-members-southern-u-s-border/7846953002/>

7. Students will have completed *Tell Me How It Ends*.

8. Day 1 - Instructional and Lesson Activities:

Pull out these quotations:

"I have to transform them into written words, succinct stories, and barren terms" (7).

"I find myself not knowing where translation ends and interpretation starts" (62).

"I reworded, translated, interpreted" (65).

"[B]efore anything can be understood, it has to be narrated many times, in many different words and from many different angles, by many different minds" (97).

Journal (5 min.) and Discuss (10 min.): Though Luiselli and her niece are not professional translators, do they have any special ethical obligations?

Distribute copies of "Uncle Joe's History Lessons" by David Bowles. Read & discuss with a focus on the third stanza (10 min.). Give students time, in pairs or small groups, to attempt to translate the third stanza. Have them reflect on the challenges of being a translator. (20 min.)

Put both headlines on the board. Review terms (diction, denotation, connotation, tone). Compare two headlines (10 min.).

Day 2 - Extend & Elaborate:

Distribute assignment.

"Until the Lion tells his side of the story, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the Hunter."

--- Zimbabwean Proverb

As we've seen in *Tell Me How It Ends*, the story that is told can depend on who is doing the telling and who is doing the translating, and there is always a risk that some things will be lost in translation. The person who controls the narrative has the power, and that narrative depends on word choice. Is the child 'scared' or 'terrified'? Does the child feel 'safe'?

Find 10 words or phrases in *Tell Me How It Ends* that you think are essential to a child's narrative. For each word,

- a. provide the denotation (citation required)**
- b. provide the connotation**
- c. provide an illustration or a cited image that illuminates the connotation**

Then, type one double-spaced page (minimum) explaining how the vocabulary you chose could either help or harm the child's case.

Brainstorm a list of possible words and phrases.

Model one.

10. Evaluate: Assessment and Feedback

	Limited	Adequate	Competent	Sophisticated
denotations	denotations are incomplete or incorrect; citations are not present	denotations are present; citations are attempted	denotations are present and in student-friendly language; citations are consistently present	denotations are present and in student-friendly language; citations are in a consistent format; the formatting for each word or phrase is consistent and easy to follow
connotations	not distinguished from the denotation; limited to examples introduced in class	features one connotation per word/phrase	some examples feature one example; others go into more depth	all connotations are explored in-depth
images	images are cursory; show little thought/effort; citations, if needed, are not attempted	images are basic - the equivalent of stick figures; citations, if needed, are generally attempted	images are inconsistent; some show thought/effort, others are basic; citations are consistently attempted	images illuminate the connotations; citations are in a consistent format
writing	writing shows only some understanding of how diction shapes narrative; examples are not present or are explained insufficiently; writing may read like a list	writing shows basic understanding of how diction shapes narrative; writing may feature words like 'positive' and 'negative'; examples are insufficient or not well-linked to the argument; writing is organized in a 'block' manner, perhaps based on the idea of positive and negative diction	writing shows good conceptual understanding of how diction shapes narrative; examples may not be sufficient or consistently well-chosen; writing is organized in a logical manner, perhaps chronologically, but organization does not add to the purpose of the writing	writing shows strong conceptual understanding of how diction shapes narrative; examples are sufficient and well-chosen; writing is organized in a purposeful manner

Comments:

11. Accommodations and Modifications - Certainly, the number of expected words can be reduced from 10. Students who have trouble moving beyond the literal can have the rubric adjusted for connotations. A graphic organizer for each 'dictionary entry' will be available for all students. Sentence starters will be available for those who need modifications for the written portion. Students can also work in pairs.

12. College & Career Readiness - N/A

13. Additional Resources - N/A

14.

Bowles, David. *They Call Me Guero: A Border Kid's Poems*. Cinco Puntos Press, 2018.

Luiselli, Valeria. *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions*. Coffee House Press, 2017.

15. My school uses the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, and this lesson is designed for the Theory of Knowledge class. Some of the language from the rubric and all of the language of the guiding questions comes from IB's materials. I think this lesson could be used in an English classroom as well.