

Introduction to Essay on Gary Soto (in the form of an introduction to an essay)

Field Work: Gary Soto's Songs of the Central Valley

"The tremendous productivity of the landscape meant that people had to work the soil. Farm laborers who would work for low wages were lured from foreign countries, worked under conditions of near slavery, and then disposed of when their presence no longer suited the purposes of those who had imported them. The irony was that the Mexicans, who established this practice in California with the Indians, would themselves be victims of it."

-Phillip Fradkin, *The Seven States of California*

Ever since the first Hispanics moved up from Mexico into Alta California in the middle of the eighteenth century into the ancestral home of the Yokut Indians, the San Joaquin Valley was recognized as a productive agricultural environment. From the early livestock ranches in 1800 to the wheat fields in 1865, and from the irrigated crops in 1900 to the monoculture farms of 2000, the productivity of the landscape has been a central feature of California's natural and cultural history.

As Phillip Fradkin notes, the productivity of the landscape led land owners to seek out the cheapest available farm labor. As the current President of the United Farm Workers, Arturo S. Rodríguez, recently commented in *The Huffington Post*, "For the last five decades I've seen the farm labor system in this country chew up and spit out farm workers, denying them the most basic protections afforded nearly all other American workers. That is wrong." Indeed, from the first convention of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) convened by Cesar Chavez in an abandoned movie theater in Fresno in September of 1962, advocating for the human rights and health of farm workers has been a significant part of California's cultural history.

The poems of Gary Soto offer a beautiful and challenging explanation of the experience of living in California's Great Valley—as a young Chicano boy coming of age in a community of farm workers, as a member of family whose lives were shaped by the economic model of industrial agriculture, and as the voice of a human community working to strengthen itself in spite of the economic stratification and prejudice. By the summer of 1973, Soto writes in the "Introduction" to his *Selected Poems*, "I knew my pulse was timed to the heart of this valley. Within a two-week period I wrote 'The Elements of San Joaquin' and also the poems for my father, dead many years" (2).

Works Cited

Fradkin, Phillip L. *The Seven States of California: A Natural and Human History*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.

Rodríguez, Arturo S. "Questions Farm Workers Have for Bernie Sanders" February 16, 2016. huffingtonpost.com/arturo-s-rodriguez/questions-farm-workers-ha_b_9259846.html.

United Farm Workers. ufw.org/.

KSC User 2/23/2016 12:50 PM

Comment [1]: Title is an attempt to both suggest and describe.

KSC User 2/23/2016 12:51 PM

Comment [2]: A quotation at the top of the page is called an epigraph. In this case, the epigraph is *suggesting* a place to begin or to delimit the line of inquiry or to raise the question the essay will attempt to answer

KSC User 2/23/2016 12:53 PM

Comment [3]: Using secondary source to frame" a brief overview of origins of move from Alta California to state of California, noting the Yokut peoples and the phases of agricultural development.

KSC User 2/23/2016 12:55 PM

Comment [4]: Secondary source locating farm workers. Connection to the ways "field work" is suggesting two things here. Connection to continuity of farm labor and use/abuse (exploitation) of farm labor

Should first and second paragraph be one paragraph?

KSC User 2/23/2016 1:02 PM

Comment [5]: Statement of purpose that makes clear what the paper is doing and makes a promise about what is coming.

Poetry

The experience of living

The experience of a Chicano living (coming of age, farm work, family) and the challenges of living in an economic system that devalues work and identity of workers)

What follows?

KSC User 2/23/2016 12:36 PM

Comment [6]: A URL defined where material is located. The URL is not fully reliable as they change and can therefore become rapidly obsolete. The URL <http://www.ufw.org/> can be listed on the works cited as ufw.org/.

The "http:" indicates the type of protocol necessary to view this item. The protocol is the way in which two systems communicate. (Examples of other protocols are ftp or telnet.) The "www" stands for World Wide Web. This is the name of the "host" computer where the web page is stored and is a common name given to computers connected to the web. However, it's not necessary for web addresses to begin with "www." The web page m[...] [1]

Guidelines for The Essay

This essay is designed to move you from your earlier work using mostly secondary sources to the use of primary source material—in this case, the poems of Gary Soto. Your California projects will be mostly based on primary materials and so this stage of your writing process is important.

The general purpose of your essay on the poems of Gary Soto is to explain California—in this case, the experience of California in the voice of a Chicano poet—by making use of the language of poems.

Your essay will focus primarily on primary texts

- a poem or a sequence of poems
- quotations from the poems (primary texts) in every paragraph of your essay

You may also use secondary texts, but only insofar as you use this material to frame and/or elaborate on the language of the poems themselves:

- Include any relevant context about Soto’s books, and poems, from a reliable secondary source: volume 82 of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Gary Soto (12 April 1952-) by Héctor Avalos Torres. *Chicano Writers: First Series*. Vol. 82 (1989), available through the Mason Library Databases or in hard copy in the Reference Section of the library
- Include context using primary texts (other writing by Soto) and/or secondary texts (such as Fradkin, The United Farm Workers web site and archive, or professional literary criticism of Soto’s contributions to the art of poetry)

Guidelines for In-Text Citations

Many poems in the book *The Elements of San Joaquin* use memory to tell the story of the speaker’s life as Chicano boy and his emotional bonds to his father and his home. In “Braly Street,” for example, Soto writes, “Every summer I come / To this street” (24-5). The five-part poem recalls what once was but is no longer:

It’s sixteen years
Since our house
Was bulldozed and my father
Stunned into a coma . . .
Where it was,
An oasis of chickweed
And foptails.
Where the almond tree stood
There are wine bottles
Whose history
Is a liver. (25)

In the sixteen years since the house was razed, and the father’s life was irrevocably changed, the loss of what once was on Braly Street has become fragments of memory. The loss expands in the poem—to other houses, as well as families, “The Molinas, Morenos,” and “The Japanese families / are gone, the Okies gone / who moved out at night / under a canopy of / moving stars” (26).

KSC User 2/23/2016 1:04 PM

Comment [7]: First sentence does what? Identifies book, memory as thematic in book, and specific memory of father and home. Then an example. Note well how to cite poetry, indicating line break with a /. Then a block quotation (more than three lines of poetry)

KSC User 2/23/2016 1:06 PM

Comment [8]: This is the place where the description and the analysis takes place: following the quotation. This is the place in the essay (after the quotation) when the writer uses the evidence to think *with* the poem and *about* its subject