

Teaching Guide

Fingerprints of a Hunger Strike

By Tony Robles

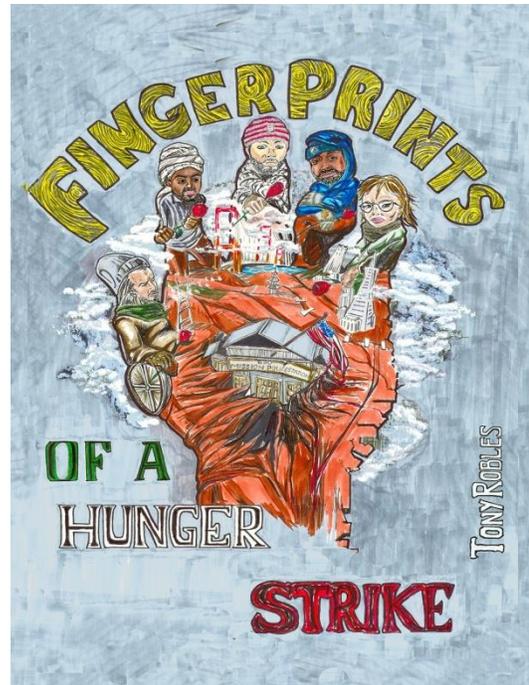
By Tony Robles

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About the Author

Tony Robles is a poet born and raised in San Francisco. His poetry is informed by the San Francisco community in which he grew up. He is of Filipino, African-American and Irish heritage. He is the author of two poetry/short story collections, "Fingerprints of a Hunger Strike" and "Cool Don't Live Here No More—A letter to San Francisco", published by Ithuriel's Spear Press. He is also the author of two children's books, "Lakas and the Manilatown Fish" and "Lakas and the Makibaka Hotel"—based on his real life son Lakas. Robles was a short list nominee for San Francisco Poet Laureate and currently works as a tenant organizer in San Francisco.

About the Book

"You are our soundtrack to the struggle"

Equipto—Member Frisco Five

The poems and short stories in "Fingerprints of a Hunger Strike" were inspired by the people, streets and sounds of San Francisco. It is a search for grace in a city that is slowly losing its soul. It was also inspired by the Frisco Five Hunger Strikers, 5 individuals who went on hunger strike to protest the police shootings of people of

color. The strike lasted 17 days and the resulting pressure and publicity brought about the eventual resignation of the city's chief of police.

Praise for Fingerprints of a Hunger Strike

"Tony Robles gives voice to the invisible born-and-raised-in as we look down to find that we are obsolete in this place whose thumb holes and hidden thoughts we dreamed as toddlers. Robles does the work on the streets and on the pages as his clear eye cuts through the affected and altered seeming of San Francisco to the union bones, the worker's hands and some of the personal stories that have made this place a solid core of creativity and social theory in the past, and perhaps the future. Tony speaks of the city as a relative with a life threatening illness, with love and anger."

--Kim Shuck

Author of 'Sidewalk Ndn' and 7th Poet Laureate of San Francisco

"Tony Robles, San Francisco born and bred, raised on pig's feet, fishheads and fishbellies, hamburgers and milkshakes tells of the stories of the inner city USA through the poetic lens of Frisco, his hometown. Images and voices of lament amidst the ludicrous financial gains of a few at the expense of the many reverberate throughout his poems, but not without the celebration of life and the dignity of human struggle for justice fueled by his Filipino American heritage. It's a wounded city he sings of whose only cure is community, bayanihan, the only respite is continuous vigilance...through his poetry."

-Oscar Penaranda

Author of "Full Deck, Jokers Playing" and "Seasons by the Bay"

Study Guide Format

Recommended Classes

- Poetry
- Creative Writing
- Sociology
- Ethnic Studies
- African American literature
- Asian American Literature

Fingerprints of a Hunger Strike Discussion Questions, Creative Writing exercises and teaching tips

General Discussion Questions:

1. How is empathy articulated in the book? How can one empower by way of empathy and how can we create empathy within communities through writing and art?
2. The poet Al Robles said, "Our poetry is the best part of our struggle and our struggle is the best part of our poetry". What does struggle mean to you? What struggles have you experienced, what injustices have you faced? Have you experienced racial profiling, police harassment? How does one create poetry that speaks to the struggle of people while giving voice to those in the struggle?
3. Some elements of poetry are magic, memory and metaphor. Discuss the importance of memory in the book. How does the author use memory to create a sense of grace? What is grace? How is it illustrated in the poetry of the book?
4. In the poem, "My father's Music", discuss the metaphors and the rhythm of the poem. What do we learn about the poet's father through the poem? Does his father remind you of people you know, relatives etc.?
5. The idea of justice is addressed in the book. Discuss what is learned about The Frisco Five. What was their hunger, what did it look like, what color was it, what did their hunger sound like? Through reading the poems, do you get a sense of what *Frisco* is, as opposed to *San Francisco*? If so, what are the differences between Frisco and San Francisco?
6. In the poem "Painted Ladies", what are the lessons learned. How do the past and present converge and how do the women in the poem reach a place of grace?

Writing Prompts

1. Do a free write (5 min) on what it means to be hungry. It can be physical or emotional hunger, a hunger for justice etc.
2. Read the prose poem "A symphony of snores", then write a poem or prose piece about sleeping while standing up.
3. In the poem "Frisco Body, Frisco Soul", replace the words "Frisco Body, Frisco Soul" with words of your choosing. How do your words alter the poem, its meaning or essence?
4. The Poem for Iris was written for 99 year old eviction fighter Iris Canada, who lost her home to eviction when she turned 100 years old. Assume the position of a 100 year old elder who is facing an eviction. Do a free write on the sights, sounds, voices and smells of her home upon receiving her eviction notice.

The author is available to speak to your class or via skype, etc.

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