

Board of Library Trustees

Pomona Public Library 625 South Garey Avenue

Pomona, CA 91769

COVER SHEET FOR POMONA POET LAUREATE

NOMINEE APPLICANT

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Joy Harjo, current U.S. poet laureate and first Native American to hold this honorable title, states, “Poetry is June Jordan, with her ‘Poetry for the People’.”* These words resonate deeply with me, not only because I’m honored to have been a student of June Jordan’s “Poetry for the People” class, but because I am *Odam* (O’odham) Native American, which means “The People”.

Becoming Pomona’s first poet laureate would be among my life’s greatest honors. I have been a Pomona resident and poet for the vast majority of my life. A mix of “Chican@-Latin@-Indigenous-Rainbow-American” poetry, my brand is uniquely Pomona Proud:

Before the grapevines and adobes... Before the citrus groves
Before San Jose rancheros, the sun shined on Fields of Gold
I travelled through Ganesha Hills. I walked along the stream...
I was a child in Pomona. A youngster with a dream!

As a child I excelled in the Pomona Unified School District until I began to get bullied. This led to great challenges as an adolescent. With the help of Pomona mentors, I rose from the depths of despair. PUSD and Mt. SAC combined with my career as a tutor and teacher’s aide at my “middle school alma mater”, Palomares. I was prepared for U.C. Berkeley’s Interdisciplinary Major of Social Justice. My goal was to become a poet, teacher and activist making the biggest impact possible in my hometown of Pomona. I began to do just that as I taught poetry workshops, English, citizenship and other classes. I was committed to empower amazing, yet challenged students. I helped spearhead local programs guiding youth to graduate and further their education.

In 2006, I was teaching adult school in Pomona, as many students ***stopped showing up for school***. Bill HR4437 threatened to make fellons out of undocumented students and teachers alike. I promised to do everything possible to help our students. For civics projects, adult students got involved in Pomona leadership and helped pass the dubbed “sanctuary” resolution in Pomona. Then, I went on to help the mega march movement in Los Angeles. I took what I thought would be a short break from teaching to pursue the right of all our students to learn without fear.

As an advocate for undocumented students, I taught volunteer English classes to day laborers, met with elected officials, represented organizations on television, and more. In an unexpected turn of events, as my activism was a labor of love (without pay), I began supporting myself financially in the Hollywood area with Telemundo--and then it happened:

Public at large all stopped to stare, blinded by the paparazzi
Television loves fake smiles while the whole world is watching.
Don’t buckle under pressure. You’ve got too much at stake.
Watch out when you’re at the pinnacle. If you’re not careful you might break.
Woke up to an omen. Gotta turn my fate around.
Thought I was invincible. My world came tumbling down.

Addiction is rooted in underlying issues, be they unresolved abuse, internalized homophobia--the list may go on indefinitely. As I considered myself an example in our communities, I never thought I'd deal personally with addiction. Very humbly, I learned that addiction does not discriminate. By the grace of God, I found help--again in Pomona:

I write this in Pomona, right where I started from.
Where Berkeley meets White Avenue, where I have lost and won.
I rebuild my foundation like the pyramids of old.
Unity, service, recovery. Our stories can be told.
Experience, strength and hope. I hear you testify.
We'll experience new freedom. Like that mighty hawk, we'll fly.

Symptoms of mental illness converge with addiction. Although my path to recovery was rocky, I thank several Pomona Valley organizations. I now offer my experience and insight to others as they seek recovery. I have been a volunteer with Tri City's Courageous Minds speaker's bureau addressing the painful and destructive issue of stigma around mental illness, which can unfortunately create seemingly insurmountable roadblocks for success.

I am grateful to say that I have entered into long-term recovery. I thank poet laureate Joy Harjo for having the courage to address the darkness of mental anguish. I thank Pomona and everyone creating this opportunity of Pomona poet laureate. You are being true to Pomona's mission by offering a way to "improve our quality of life." You are providing an opportunity for that **"second chance"** to be of maximum service to my most beloved community.

Pomona's first poet laureate title will come with great responsibility, as I will represent our city's mission, vision and resilience. I'm a mix of many ethnicities, and I'm inspired by poetry and languages from around the world (including words of our local Indigenous tribes). This will help bring to life Pomona's vision of promoting "harmonious diversity":

I say I AM HUMAN. Blood of *mestizo*. My blood bleeds red.
We sing "*De Colores*". ***Call me the Rainbow.*** Just Go Ahead!

A true poet's job *not* to shine alone. I'll begin a project inspired by the only Latino U.S. poet laureate, Juan Felipe Herrera. Fellow California Chicano, he began a creative public forum called *La Casa de Colores*, his poet laureate project. Like Herrera, I'll share the "stage". It'll be a project for "The People", showcasing the diverse voices and brilliance Pomona has to offer.

When I speak, I'll represent Pomona. But when I *live* the essence of this title, I'll help lift Pomona up. *We will shine together, as Pomona has Everything it Takes to Brighten up the World.*

***I will make Pomona proud with courage that's surprising.
We'll show the world what's possible, like a giant phoenix rising.
I finally found a purpose--the reason for my birth.
From Pomona to the world, we'll bring Heaven Back to Earth.***

Gustavo R. Ramirez

Enthusiastic poet committed to helping manifest the vision of Pomona while making a lasting, positive impact in the community.

Skills & Assets

Utilizes & teaches creative writing to empower others. Motivated to fulfill duties with excellence. Exemplifies servant-leadership. Team player, friendly, creative, bilingual.

Experience

1995-1999; 2008 - present

Freelance Poet. Pomona, CA - *Creative Writer, Teacher,*

- Writes & teaches others. Opens/performs poetry for public figures.
- Produced, narrated, & performed film.

2009 - 2016

Uniting Peace With Actions Respect & Dignity (UPWARD). Montclair, CA - *Chairman*

- Organized events promoting peace, unity and dignity in Pomona Valley.
- Designed presentations & workshops empowering disenfranchised community members.

2000 - 2008

Access to Power. Los Angeles, CA - *Founder/Presenter*

- Designed presentations & implemented methods empowering individuals and organizations to achieve success.

1997 - 2006

Pomona Unified School District, Pomona, CA - *Educator*

- Educated and empowered students at various levels. Supervised aides & tutors.
- Encouraged respect & dignity while instilling the joy of learning.

1995 - 1997

California AIDS Ride, Los Angeles, CA - *Media Spokesperson/Fundraiser*

- Raised funds; promoted HIV/AIDS education & prevention. Bicycled across California.

Education

U.C. Berkeley, Berkeley, CA - *B.A. Interdisciplinary Major of Social Justice.* 1995

Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut, CA - *A.A. Liberal Studies.* 1992

Certificates,

Awards & Publications

The Write Time Is Now: Poetry Collection, Self-Published. Pomona. September, 2019

Dolores Huerta Day Poetry Performance & Award. Assembly. Eloise Reyes- Rialto. April, 2019

Poetry to Change the World. Book Signing, Performance & Awards- Rancho C. April, 2016

Prophecy. Poetry Collection. Self-Published. Pomona. March, 2016.

UPWARD Poetry Presentation & Award. Assembly. Freddie Rodriguez- Pomona April 2015

Phoenix Rising Poetry Performance Award. Garey High School- Pomona. October 11, 2014

War. Documentary. Writer, Producer, Poet/Performer. Berkeley; Telemundo Tucson 1995

"Poetry in A Season of Love" *Poetry for the People Series*. Edited by June Jordan- Berkeley 1994
"Las Luces de Pomona" *Nineteen Going on Insanity*. Edited by Ishmael Reed- Berkeley, 1994
Short video on gprpeace.wixsite.com/website

Poem #1

They say - Dicen

A poem in 3 versions

Bilingual:

Dicen que estos ojos son ojos Indios. Dicen pora'i
Dicen que este cabello es pelo negro, como el cuervo. Dicen pora'i
Me dicen que soy moreno, que soy el negro de Yucatan.
Y dicen que mi nariz es nariz de Azteca y que en mi frente esta'l nopal
I am, yo soy Ramirez de los Arroyos de Tepehuan
Yo soy rey de los Reyes, servant of servants, the king of kings. Sirviente soy
You've looked high and low for treasure. Soy tu tesoro. Aqui estoy
Hist'ry that's been erased. We shall bring it forward. Earth starts to tremble
Together we form a circle. The Kizh, Ohlone... The stars remember
Niña, Pinta, Santa Maria-- God and Gold in all its Splendor
They say we crossed the border. "Que no cruzamos" Abuelo says:
"Venimos desde el norte before Pueblo de Los Angeles"
They say I'm piel morena with skin of bronze. From borderlands
Yo vengo de Pomona, from California. From Sacred Land
Where there were mighty Oak trees are concrete jungles instead of streams
Boulevard of Cahuenga. Where there were willows are broken dreams
Sierra de Durango. Huracán de Culiacán.
San Luis, Rio Colorado. Morongo. Yuhaviatam
We are-- We are The People. Somos Odami from Odham land
Pueblo sera Unido. Jamas Vencido. Pueblo Odam
Tiahui, Parientes Nahuatl. Go onward in Dignity
Hopi Wise One Prays like the Dying, Giving Birth to Prophecy
Yo digo soy ser humano sangre mestiza. My blood bleeds red
Colores del arco iris. Call me the Rainbow. Just Go Ahead
Fronteras que no cruzamos. Between the cultures. Am I alone?
Dicen "Go back to your land." Mi Tata dice:

This is my Home

English:

They say these eyes are *Indios*. Eyes of the Indian. That's what they say
They tell me that my hair is black. Black like the crow that flies by day
They tell me I'm the darker one, that I'm el negro of Cumbia sounds
They say my nose is an Aztec one, and that on my forehead is El Nopal
I am, I am Ramirez from the Arroyos of Tepehuan
I am king of the Reyes, servant of servants. The king of kings. Servant, I am
Hist'ry that's been erased. We shall bring it forward. Earth starts to tremble

Together we form a circle. The Kizh, Ohlone... The stars remember
 Niña, Pinta, Santa Maria god and Gold in all its Splendor
 They say we crossed the border that crossed our people Grandfather says
 We came from the north before the Pueblo of Los Angeles
 They say I'm piel morena with skin of bronze. From borderlands
I come to you from Pomona, from California. From Sacred Land
 Where there were mighty Oak trees are concrete jungles instead of streams
 Boulevard of Cahuenga. Instead of willows are broken dreams
 Sierra of Durango. Hurricane of Culiacán.
 San Luis, Rio Colorado. Morongo. Yuhaviatam
 We are-- We are The People. We are Odami from O'dam land
 Pueblo sera Unido. Never defeated.. Unite the People, pueblo Odam
 Tiahui, Aho,' our Nahuatl. Go on. Go onward with Dignity
 Hopi Wise One Prays like the Dying Giving Birth to Prophecy
 I say "I am human" Blood of mestizo. My blood bleeds red
 We sing "De Colores". Call me the Rainbow. Just Go Ahead
 Borders that doubled-crossed us. Between the cultures. Am I alone?
 They say "Go back to your land"
 My Grandpa tells me

This is my Home

Español:

Dicen que estos ojos son ojos Indios. Dicen pora'i
 Dicen que este cabello es pelo negro como el cuervo dicen pora'i
 Me dicen que soy moreno. Soy el negrito en el verano
 Y dicen que mi nariz es nariz de Azteca y que mi frente es Mexicano
 Yo soy, yo soy Ramirez de Rios y Arroyos de Tepehuan
 Unidos en Toibingna con las estrellas, a recordar
 Yo soy rey de los Reyes, rey de sirvientes. El servidor
 Historia que destruyeron es recordado. Empieza el temblor
 La Niña, la Pinta, Santa Maria. Dios y Oro y Resplendor
 Dicen que cruzamos fronteras. Dice mi Abuelo que no cruzamos
 Venimos antes, desde el norte. Indigenas Americanos
 Dicen soy piel morena, mi piel de bronze de las fronteras
Yo vengo de Pomona, de California. Sagradas tierras
 Donde crecía el encino; hoy, selvas de concreto-- rios se acabaron
 Bulevar de Cahuenga; el sauz se fué-- sueños quebraron
 Sierra de Durango. Huracán de Culiacán.
 San Luis, Rio Colorado. Morongo. Yuhaviatam
 Somos, Somos La Gente. Unete Pueblo. Pueblo Odam
 Cuando el Pueblo sea Unido. Tu corazón encontrarás
 Tiahui, Parientes Nahuatl. Hacía adelante con dignidad
 Hopi da luz a profecía. Como el que se está muriendo hay que rezar

Yo digo soy ser humano. Sangre mestiza. Rojo, yo sangro
Colores del arco iris. Soy otro Tú. Dime tu hermano
Fronteras que no cruzamos. Entre culturas-- la soledad
Me dicen que me regrese.

Dice Abuelito:

Es Nuestro Hogar.

Gustavo R Ramirez 2019

Poem #2

The Stars Above Pomona

When I was young, my Mama taught me that to be good is to forgive.
When you have love deep in your heart, this love is yours to give.
I was taught about a savior who practiced love and peace.
They led me by example. Told me, "Love contains the keys."
Now I'm older and I'm wiser. I still search for peace within.
I must admit I can get angry with strangers as with kin.
I sit here at this Gathering, searching for Solutions.
Trying to teach about forgiveness as we hear vengeance and retribution.
Though I'm trying to practice love, I admit I've been a preacher.
When it comes down to forgiveness, I'd like to be student and teacher.
I met a man the other day. Azim Khamisa is his name.
I met him in **Pomona**, and I'm so glad he came.

He travelled from across the seas searching for a better life.
He set sail for America, to leave violence and strife.
He married Almas. Had a child. Tariq, their only son.
But at the tender age of 20, he was the victim of a gun.
The family's heart was broken. Justice seemed just right.
Lock the killer up for life. Prison all day and night.
The killer was a mere 14 years old. News traveled 'round the nation.
Azim prayed to God and God is great. Tony's also God's creation.
Azim met the family of Tony Hicks, the killer of his son.
Who's gonna stop this violent cycle? Azim said "I'll be the one."
It's children killing children. The gangs of the USA.
It's gonna take more than preaching. It's not enough to pray.
Prayer must be met with action to create a better way.
Tariq Khamisa lives today. His legacy will shine.
For his father lived a simple rule: to forgive is divine.
We've seen violence from the start of time-- since Abel was killed by Cain.
But if we break this cycle, Tariq's death won't be in vain.
And now there's a foundation that bears the name Tariq.
It gives hope to the hopeless. Gives the Earth to the meek.
I write this in Pomona, where we're not immune to violence.
Let our actions speak louder than our words. Let's break all of the silence.
See, Pomona's Reawakening! There's so much work to do.
Creating Compassionate Communities. With compassion we'll start anew.
Tariq's legacy of love lives on, from Pomona to afar.
They say he died in San Diego, but Tariq's now a shining star.
Above the desert is the Morning Star. *La Estrella del Amanecer.*
Like the *Stars above Pomona.* Just like Mama said.
Time to gather all the people, For Tariq has touched our hearts.
We thought we saw the end of a life, but what we see is
the Very Start

Poem #3

La Campeona

One day in the early morn I heard an angel sing
It was a March on Washington led by Martin Luther King

I'd heard of Rosa Parks--they taught me about Montgomery
I even heard of "Si Se Puede," but I was shocked at a discovery

You can't erase us from history, so we have to tell the story
About a social justice warrior. Time has come to shine in glory

April 10 is sacred. The day Zapata died
But April 10 1930, there was a rainbow in the sky

We all have a genesis, our stories have their birth
This little girl grew to woman who dares to change this earth

See, I'm **Pomona**, California raised. My skin darkens in the sun
I'm from the Inland Empire, but I thought I was the only one

They told me those with skin of bronze couldn't make it to the top
They told not to dream so big. Tried to make our vision stop

They said that girls should stay behind. The back seat of the bus, just take it
They even said that boys like me were too nice. I'd never make it

I wanted to be like superman. I had dreams of going far
But I thought I was alone, so I looked for a shining star

Searching high and searching low, I asked for God to send
God send me a superhero, or just send me a friend

See the nights were cold and lonely, and I was small and meek
I looked for someone who looked like me, was this so much to seek?

This morning I listened to the sound. *Zenzontle*, the mocking bird
When the caged bird sings of freedom Songs of Freedom must be heard

El son del movimiento the song of De Colores
Today we sing that song The Story of Dolores

She's the worker saying Wake Up in a world that seems so cruel
Before I was even born she fought for our rights so we wouldn't be made fools

Tiahui is the word the Mexica often say
Go Onward sons and daughters in that great warrior way

There's Dolores Huerta in all of us. She inspires us all to action
When the changemaker is in one soul it starts a chain reaction

*The great mark of a leader is not to condescend
She teaches all that we are the heroes that we asked for God to send*

I'd asked God for a knight in shining armor. Please send a hero true
Dolores Huerta tells us all that the Hero lies in You

Let's all be peaceful warriors, as these are sacred times
Marching, writing, uniting through work, through song, through rhymes

With a message for the world like King and Rosa Parks
Going forward until freedom rings like a lamp set in the dark

Let's be the transformation saying farewell to addiction
Let's give of our heart and soul to all who've struggled with this affliction

We can be Quetzalpapalotle, the Quetzal Butterfly
Spreading magic all throughout the world. And flying through the sky

Can you hear the Hopi Eagle waiting for the return
Of our Mexica sisters brothers. Let's offer sage to burn

Let's become the Union Firebird flying high and standing tall
We Rise Like the Eagle Phoenix Del Serpiente y el Nopal

See now I've been to the mountaintop but the nights were cold and lonely
'Cause racism in America meant Black and White
What about the Red, the Yellow. And the Brown

See when I was in high school they skipped over Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta
I could not pronounce "James Baldwin". Names I never heard them say

Wear it Loud Wear it Proud Its Dolores Huerta Day!

El Movimiento Vive! The Civil Rights Movement, and your rights
Give thanks to La Campeona, as these movements unite

And give Thanks to Larry Itliong. And give thanks to Black Civil Rights
Give thanks for the ones who paved the way, as these movements unite

I give thanks to Rosa Parks. Thanks Sojourner Truth
I give thanks to Helen Chavez and Jesse de la Cruz

To the Black Civil Rights Movement we must give thanks and praise
On the blood and the backs of "Indians" on the blood and the backs of slaves

I am aztec slave and african prisoner and together we're breaking free

Up from the death
Up from the sleep

And Now, we have the Power
Cause you didn't think we'd make it .
Guess what-- we made it and now we're stronger than ever before
See it's our turn now

and what we gonna do
will they come for you?

This what we're gonna do
We're gonna dance!

The Salsa Merengue the Reggaeton
The Jazz the Rythmo The Electric Slide

I wanna waltz with you I wanna walk with you
I wanna rock with I wanna roll with you
I wanna dance with you
I wanna sing
I wanna heal your heart
I wanna quench your thirst
I wanna dance

So we can walk together we can march together

Your Aztec dancer
Your Latin lover
The Asian Sun

A blend of Europe and Native
And a whole lotta soul
African drums flow through our blood
It's in the rhythm

From the Congo to Cuba rythmo tropical
From Africa to Haiti to Yucatan
We are Tejano, Chicana, Cubano sounds

Yo soy el rythmo del Indio
Mulato Mestizo
A brother a sister
And I bring you a gift of peace

I am the sound, the rhythm of De Colores
of Nuestra Gran Dolores
Of Cesar Chavez of Dr King

Piel Morena a Gypsy a Jew
The stare of Frida Kahlo the smile of Celia Cruz
And God is Great I am Muslim too
For I bring you a gift of Peace

I have made you smile
I will dance with you, and I will sing
I may be the darker brother
*But With **You** We Are The Rainbow*

And This Rainbow Makes

AMERICA!

*By Gustavo Ramirez, written to Inaugurate California Dolores Huerta Day, April 2019
with Assemblywoman Eloise G. Reyes and Dolores Huerta at
Dolores Huerta Academy*



