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What If We Could Make America Great Again?

Erin M. Casey

As an American citizen, I am astounded and worried that others who live in the United States will suffer because of what appears as hatefulness towards diversity. I am concerned about harsh decisions made towards immigrants, minorities, children, women, the poor, and others. With a nation as wealthy and successful as the United States, there is no reason for people to be in want and suffering. Equity and education should be among the highest priorities in this *Land of the Free*.

During the 2016 election period, I had to take a moment to release my wandering thoughts to help ease my worries by writing a poem. I chose the format of the “What if?” poem (Rich, 2003) because of the opportunities it holds for questioning and presenting both negative and positive possibilities. By questioning “what if,” the writer is able to embed both issues of loss and social action while presenting obstacles and fears alongside visions of change and possibility. Influential American poet Adrienne Rich (2003) explained and encouraged the use of poetry to help us mourn, but also remain vocal about public and cultural issues so that inequity and inhumanity cannot become “normalized and acceptable” (p. 235). In my teaching, I have used the “What if?” format with all ages of writers because of the uncomplicated opportunity it offers to express fears, wonder, and creativity. Continually asking “What if” gives the poem unifying repetition in a rhymed or unrhymed pattern and allows for organization and strength of writing and topic. Past students’ poems have questioned “what if Goldilocks had brown skin” to explore whether the three bears might have called the police on their intruder under different circumstances and “what if everyone was the same” to highlight a friends’ cultural differences.

Over a year has passed since the 2016 election, and if I wrote the poem today,

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I would certainly change some of the lines by adding to them to reflect the past year's events. I believe this version holds worth because I am reminded on my feelings when it was written. I hope one day in the future I can read it with joy and amusement because I want to believe America will continue to be great and grow even greater because of the opportunities it has fostered and created for all people. My great America represents love and care for everyone.

What if We Could Make America "Great" Again?

What if I don't understand what you mean by great?

I'm scared that your version includes some kind of hate.

What if I my beliefs about what is great don't match with yours?

I believe we should open, not close the doors.

What if I think diversity and culture are what *has* made America great?

If you want us all to be the same, I'm afraid you're too late.

What if I believe that women are equal to men?

We need equity and respect for peace to begin.

What if I think that we should prevent problems from the beginning instead of fixing them at the end?

Each dollar invested in education saves seven in the future to spend.

What if all children went through school with the food, shelter, and clothing they need?

Then they would have their minds ready to learn and succeed.

What if students knew they could have any education they wanted?

In just a couple of generations, America's success could be flaunted.

What if we spent just as much money on education as we do on war?

Then teachers' jobs would be a much happier and envied chore.

What if the tax rate for everyone was the same?

Then the "what if's" I'm asking wouldn't seem so insane.

What if our future leader says education will be the first thing to cut?

(Seriously, he said that. Is this guy a nut?)

What if that leader feels perfectly comfortable making fun of the disabled?

If he has his way, we'll all be prejudged by a label.

What if we build a wall to keep people out?

"What about the poor, tired, and huddled masses," I will surely shout.

What if we force people, thousands of people, to go?

How hard is it to become Canadian, I'll be wanting to know.

What if this "great" America sounds crazy to me?

It doesn't sound like the land of the proud and the free.

What if I feel a little sick right now?
Surely, these are things we just can't allow.
What if I feel a little bit scared?
Of the hateful "what ifs", I pray we are spared.

Reference

Rich, A. (2003). *What is found there: Notebooks on poetry and politics*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.