**Big Questions:**

1. What makes it possible for us to connect to others? What gets in the way?
2. How should we respond in crisis?
3. What assumptions for we make about others?
4. How do we respond to strangers?
5. What do we inherit from our ancestors?
6. How has my family or background shaped who I am?
7. What makes a community strong? What makes it weak?

**Opening Exercise/Activity**

First, ask for 2 volunteers to read the story out loud – each one taking one of the paragraphs.

Option 1 – if doing with members:

Individually, think about the first day of our program year or the first day at your site, whether this year or last. What happened that day? How did you feel? What, if anything, happened that helped move you out of whatever mode you were in?

Next, turn to a person next to you and share what you were thinking about.

Tell group we will come back to this question in a short while, but first we will discuss the reading itself.

Option 2 –

Think about a time when you were a stranger. What was happening? How did you feel?

What, if anything, happened that helped move you out of that “stranger” mode?

Next, turn to a person next to you and share what you were thinking about.

**Clarification Questions**

Following are a series of questions we can pick from to help digest the reading and get people talking more comfortably before the larger questions of significance and implication occur:

* What is going on in the poem? (Who is the speaker? Where is it? What’s happening? When did it happen?)
* Where does this story take place?
* What was initially happening in the story?
* Who in this story feels like a “stranger” or not in a place of comfort?
* In stanza 3, the flight service person asks, “What is her problem?” So what is the older lady’s perceived “problem”? What unexpected disruption happened and how did the older person interrupt it?
* What causes the change in the older lady?
* What happened on a 1-1 basis that caused a change to happen in the older lady?
* What happened on a community level that caused a change to happen in the airport?
* What traditions are mentioned in the story?
* In stanza 6, the older woman pulled out cookies and shared them with other women ‐ what do you make of this gesture?
* After sharing the cookie, they were “all covered with the same powdered sugar and smiling.” Is some kind of community established at this point?
* Near the end of the poem, the speaker commented that this is a “shared world.” How do you understand “the shared world”?
* The poem ends on “not everything is lost.” What is lost? What is not lost?

**Significance and Implication Questions**

Your Work

* Can you think about a time when you hesitated to help someone you were supposed to serve? What led to that hesitation? What did you do as a result?
* Who in the work you are doing this year is not necessarily helped automatically?
* What kind of barriers do the people you serve face that prevent them from being served?
* What prevents others from “helping” – seeing others as a human being?
* What will it take to get more people to reach out and help those who are homeless?
* In your work, are there certain groups of people who are homeless that others don’t feel safe with or are less likely to help?
* What kind of trauma or stress do you observe with the people you serve?

New Information/Place

* Going back to the original question I asked you to think about and discuss, how many of you felt like “strangers”? [What does it feel like to be a stranger?](http://www.civicreflection.org/online_tools/resource_library/advanced_search/?v=list&question_id=125)
* Who would be willing to share what came to mind with the original question?
* What, if anything, moved you from what you were feeling on that first day or longer to a better sense of self and place?
* At your sites, who else, if anyone, might feel like strangers or like they do not belong?

Change/Unexpected

* Have there been times in your year to date where you were thrown a curve or encountered something unexpected? If yes, how did you handle it?
* Are nonprofits and specifically places that work with people in poverty i.e homeless like airports where things happen all the time unexpectedly?
* When that happens, what do you do to move through it both individually and as a team?

Community

* What makes a community or shared world in your experience? Is it as easy as sharing and taking cookies?
* Do you see community in your program? In your team of members? At your sites?
  + If no, what could help you move to a greater sense of community?
* Is creating a community important to the end goal?
* What makes it possible for us to connect to others? Think specifically about those at your site, on your team, and within the AmeriCorps program? What gets in the way?

Fear/Safety

* [How do we respond to strangers?](http://www.civicreflection.org/online_tools/resource_library/advanced_search/?v=list&question_id=110)
* What assumptions do we make about others?
* [How do we overcome fear, as it relates to interacting and working towards change with others who may be different?](http://www.civicreflection.org/online_tools/resource_library/advanced_search/?v=list&question_id=254)
* [What conditions must exist in order for us to feel safe with each other?](http://www.civicreflection.org/online_tools/resource_library/advanced_search/?v=list&question_id=123)
* What makes it possible for us to connect to others? What gets in the way?
* What things contribute to people entering into a “comfort zone” with others who are different or perceived to be different?
* How should we respond to crisis?
* Does safety cross the line with stigma?

Our History

* What do we inherit from our ancestors? How has your family or background shaped who I am?
* How does language define our worldview?
* How do our experiences or lack of experiences define our worldview or how we interact with one another?
* How have your personal experience or lack of personal experiences effected how you interact in this world?
* How can you help yourself, your team, your clients to move to a place where you and they feel a part of something? A community?

Shared World

* Is all lost? What in our world is lost?
* When you think about the work you do with people who are homeless or near homeless. Do you sometimes feel like all is lost?
* Do the people you serve have a shared world? What are the benefits and challenges of that shared world?
* What impact does the shared world have on people who are homeless?

**Closing Reflection, Questions or Activity**

The below 2 options can be done 1) individually only; or 2) individually and then share in a pair, small group or large group:

Option 1

What is 1 thing you can do differently to make yourself, other members on your team, or your clients feel like they are a part of a caring and committed community?

Option 2

What is 1 thing you do in this year to bring your member team together?