



The Dance of the Scissors

Pre-Texts as a tool to unravel challenging texts and stories

"They're loose leaves of steel. The dansak' hooks his fingers through their eyes and makes them clash. With that instrument in his hands, each dancer can produce a slight music, as of small water, even fire; it depends on the rhythm, on the other musicians, and on the 'spirit' protecting the dansak'." ~ José María Arguedas (1961)



The Pre-Texts workshop on November 2nd, 2018, was testament to how literature, art, myths, theater, and critical thinking can be combined to form a powerful learning tool. Among the participants were guests of honor, Darla Anderson (Producer of the Pixar hit *Coco*) and Salvador del Solar (former Minister of Culture, Peru), academics, artists, and students. We gathered at the Center for Government and International Studies at Harvard University on a rainy Friday morning to read and play with **"The Agony of Rasu-Ñiti"** by **José María Arguedas**. After a brief introduction by Doris Sommer,

the creator of Pre-Texts, we began the workshop by making our own books out of old magazines and cardboard, while listening as Salvador del Solar read the first half of the story. Creatively engaging with our own projects while listening to the story inspired deep listening into the text itself.



Each of us then asked a question of the text and shared them with the rest of the group, prompting an in-depth exploration of the text. This discussion led us to form additional questions and insights that we then wrote on pieces of paper to hang on a clothesline, showing the culmination of the discussion.



We then broke into groups and picked a rhetorical device from the text from which to create a "human portrait" that represented the figure. One group, for example, designed a portrait around the metaphor, "a heart warns", utilizing a balancing man with his shadow behind him pounding his heart while holding a pair of scissors in the air, a central motif in the text. The rest of the participants then had to guess which line they were referring to. The ended when everyone reflected on "What did we do?", the creative process

