

# The Writer's Corner

with translator **Lourdes Heuer**



**At the heart of translation is a love for language. If you are a writer or work with writers, here are some things you can do to nurture this love:**

- Keep a word journal. You can use the journal to keep track of new words you learn. I'd add "chicane" to my word journal: I only recently learned that one definition is a type of barricade or fence used to slow pedestrians down. Or you might keep a list of words whose sounds or shapes you like. I've always been partial to the two "l" sounds in "lovely" and the way "haphazard," once a two-word phrase, hap + hazard, comes together as one (a tricky "ph" construction in English that doesn't make an "f" sound!).

- Look up the etymology of words. Track down their roots and origin languages. Find out where words come from or who first used them, and when. You can also keep track of what new words are coined each year. Last year, Merriam-Webster added "cringe," "lewk," and "metaverse," among others, to the dictionary.

- Speaking of the dictionary: use one instead of a thesaurus to pick the best synonym for a word. "Abashed," "discomfited," and "inhibited" all come up in a thesaurus as synonyms for "embarrassed," but the synonym that comes closest, I think, is the dictionary's: "self-conscious."

**Something else at the core of translation is interpretation. Though the following suggestions will not yield translations, per se, they share some of the same spirit:**

- Create a new story using the characters from an established one. Fan fiction, writing that features characters from other stories, television shows, or movies, can be a great entry point into understanding the elements of fiction, such as plot or setting, while freeing a writer from the pressure of coming up with an original premise.
- Take a story you love and change some of the elements. You might change its setting: place a realistic story set on Earth on another planet or take a story that takes place in the past and set it in the future. Or change who narrates it. Take note of what must change to accommodate the characters' new living situation or what different conclusion a story comes to when it is told from another point of view.
- Play with forms and genres: rewrite a comedy as a tragedy; transform a short story into a graphic novel.

**Remember my favorite saying about translation: it is the closest form of reading. The best thing I can recommend is this—read!**

