

English Conversation Club – Saratoga Library

March 28, 2024

Metamorphosis

Today we will read a story about transforming old **smugglers'** boats into **fine instruments**. First, review the following vocabulary words.

1. to chip (chip)	A. a maker of stringed instruments such as violins
2. to coat (koht)	B. to carry, move, or ship items or living things from one place to another
3. to disassemble (dis-uh-sem-buhl)	C. a building for the confinement of people who are charged with a crime and are awaiting trial or are already found guilty of a crime; a jail
4. to drench (djrench)	D. to bring things or people in and out of a place secretly, against the law, especially without payment of legal duty or taxes
5. fine instrument (fyn in-struh-muhnt)	E. a person who is confined in prison or jail or kept in custody, especially as the result of a crime
6. luthier (loo-tee-er)	F. a person who moves to a new place to find work or new way of life
7. metamorphosis (met-uh-mor-fuh-sis)	G. a person who lives despite a situation where they might have died or continues to function in spite of opposition, hardship, or setbacks
8. migrant (mhy-gruhnt)	H. a handcrafted musical instrument with superior rich, complex sound
9. prison (priz-uhn)	I. to take apart
10. prisoner (priz-uhn-er)	J. to wet thoroughly; soak
11. to smuggle (smuhg-uhl)	K. to break off a small piece or piece(s)
12. to struggle (struhg-uhl)	L. to cover with a layer of something such as paint or varnish
13. survivor (ser-vy-ver)	M. a complete change of form, structure, or substance; a transformation
14. to transport (trans-pohrt)	N. to make forceful, strong efforts to achieve a goal or fight an enemy

ANSWERS: 1 -K; 2 - L; 3 - I; 4 - J; 5 -H; 6 - A; 7 - M; 8 - F; 9 - C; 10 -E; 11 - D; 12 - N; 13 --G; 14 -B

Dialogue One

Kim: I heard your uncle Tomás was a **luthier** in Italy and made **fine instruments** for musicians all over the world.

Cal: Yes, he made violins and would **transport** them personally to his customers. He just retired and moved here to live with me. He said he feels like a **prisoner** in his own home.

Kim: Really?? Is he **struggling** that much with how to pass the days?

Cal: He worked for 65 years and is in a new place. He's going through a **metamorphosis** into being a retiree.

Kim: May I suggest that he volunteer at the county **prison**? They have a program to teach inmates carpentry and woodworking.

Cal: Hmm, he might be interested in that. He would like to teach others what he knows.

Dialogue Two

Alex: Mr. Taylor is starting a new woodworking class using wood from **disassembled** barns and old houses.

Sandy: I'm taking the class now. I made a table from an old **chipped** barn door.

Alex: Nice! What did you do to it?

Sandy: It was quite a **metamorphosis**. I had to clean and sand it down thoroughly first.

Alex: I see. It must have been very dry wood. Did you **drench** it in mineral oil?

Sandy: Yes, that revived the wood beautifully. Then I stained it and **coated** it with varnish. I'm glad I could salvage that piece of wood. It's like a beautiful **survivor**.

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Prison Program Turns Smugglers' Boats into Violins

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News for You

Last month, the *Orchestra of the Sea* performed at the famous La Scala Theater in Milan, Italy. The violins and cellos did not look the same as most. They were not shiny and brown. They were **coated** with old, **chipped** paint. They sounded different too.

The reason for this is because they were not made from the usual hardwoods. The wood came from boats that carried **migrants** to Italy's shores. Prisoners then shaped the wood into instruments. The concert included 14 stringed instruments that were made in a **prison**. Two **prisoners** who helped make these instruments were at the concert.



Changing One's Tune

Ten years ago, the House of the Spirit and Arts Foundation started a program. The group started classes for making stringed instruments at four Italian prisons. One of those prisons was the Opera prison in Milan.

Opera is a small town about 10 kilometers southeast of Milan. Italy's largest prison is in this town. It is called "Carcere di Opera" and it has more than 1,400 prisoners.

The House of the Spirit and Arts program is called **Metamorphosis**. That word means to make big change from one thing to another. The program's goal is to change things that might be thrown away into things of worth. The program turns old wood into **fine instruments**. It turns prisoners into **luthiers**, or makers of those instruments. The prisoners find purpose. They learn new skills which helps them to feel good about themselves.

Migrants' Song

Since 2014, almost 23,000 **migrants** have died or gone missing trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea from northern Africa to Europe. Many crossed in old, overcrowded **smugglers'** boats. Some of those boats are brought to the prison yard. The boats arrive with migrants' things still inside them, such as purses, baby shoes, and food.

From **disassembling** the boats to the finished product, each instrument takes 400 hours to create. Prisoners like Claudio Lamponi and Andrea Volonghi pull apart the wood. They send the best wood to



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the instrument-making class in the prison. A classic violin made in the famous workshops of Cremona, an hour's drive from Milan, will use fir and maple. In contrast, the instruments made from the sea boats are **assembled** from a softer African fir. The sun and sea-**drenched** hues of blue, orange, and red are left as a reminder of the wood's past life.

"We don't know what happened to [the passengers], but we hope they **survived**," Volonghi said. He and Lamponi are serving life sentences in prison. Another class member came from overseas. He understands **migrants' struggles**. "As I am working on these pieces, I think of the **migrants** that this wood **transported**," he said. "I think ... what this piece of wood has lived." The painted wood makes its own one-of-a-kind sound.

Sound of the Sea



"These instruments, which have crossed the sea, have a sweetness that you could not imagine," said cellist Mario Brunello, a member of the Orchestra of the Sea. They don't have a story to tell. They have hope, a future."

The House of the Spirit and Arts Foundation, which runs the workshops, hopes the concert at La Scala will be the start of many performances by Orchestra of the Sea all across Europe.

"The beauty is that music overcomes all divisions, all beliefs, and goes to the heart and soul of people, and one hopes that it makes people think," said foundation president Arnolfo Mosca Mondadori. "Politicians need to think of this drama."

SOURCE: THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Notes:

- **La Scala Theater** is officially called, **Teatro alla Scala**, in Italian. It is named after Beatrice Regina della Scala, the Lady of Milan in the 1300s. It is a historic opera house in [Milan](#). The theatre opened on August 3, 1778.
- Here is the website for the Spirit and Arts Foundation in Milan: <https://casaspiritoarti.it/en/projects/lutherie-workshop-in-the-opera-prison>



Discussion questions:

1. What kind of metamorphosis do the prisoners in the "**luthier**" program of Italy's prison system undergo?
2. Do the boats that are salvaged also undergo a metamorphosis?
3. What do you think of this metamorphosis program? Do you believe people can be transformed in very significant ways? What do you think it takes to get a person to change for the better?

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4. Do you agree with the statement by the president of the House of the Spirit and Arts Foundation that music overcomes all divisions and beliefs of people? If you agree, please explain how music might unite people.
5. Do you believe music goes to the heart and soul of people? Do you believe programs like *Metamorphosis* can make politicians take certain problems more seriously?
6. Have you ever gone through a metamorphosis of some kind? Describe it.
7. Do you think change is difficult? What have been some of the most significant transformations society has undergone in the last 100 years?
8. Is this *Metamorphosis* program the same thing as recycling or is it different? How so?
9. Do you believe there will be major transformations in our way of life in the next 50 years? If you do, give an example.
10. What is the difference between reform and transform? Do you agree with these definitions:
 - To reform a system is to change its behavior without changing its structure or its functions. It continues to do the kinds of things it has always done but does some of them differently.
 - To transform a system is to change its structure and the way it functions.

References

The story in today's materials is based on these articles:

- <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/55189/violins-made-from-shipwrecked-migrant-boats>
- <https://apnews.com/article/migrants-orchestra-music-smugglers-boats-inmates-rehabilitation-bc283799b4965ffceddc2bd8a2a93696>
- <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/02/14/violins-made-from-battered-migrant-boats-feature-at-milans-la-scala-theatre>