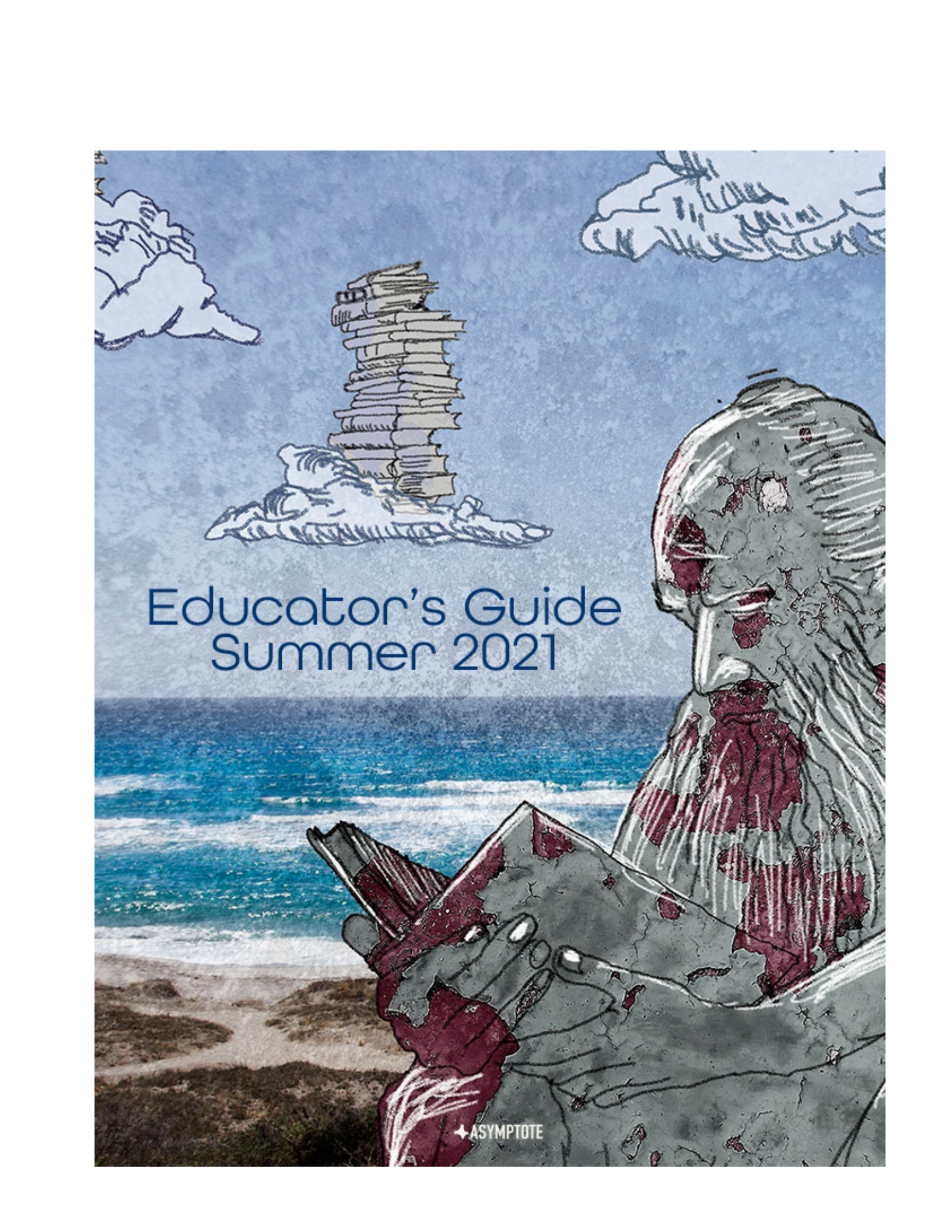




Educator's Guide Summer 2021



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Summer 2021 | AGE OF DIVISION

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Summer 2021 issue of the *Asymptote* Educator's Guide!

Our latest guide has five lesson plans to help you bring exciting translated literature into your classroom. Each lesson is paired with poems, essays, visual art, and stories from "Age of Division," our Summer 2021 issue, which is available here: <http://asymptotejournal.com/jul-2021>

Our first lesson, "A Catalogue of Poets," uses the poems of Lêdo Ivo to ask students to question the canon via close reading and creative rewriting. "Descriptions of the Horizon: Two Icelandic Poems in Translation" has students investigating the wonder of nature, the terror of the Anthropocene, and the process of translation through the poems of Kári Tulinius. "We Are All Islanders," our third lesson, uses an essay by Dora Kaprálová to encourage students to explore concepts of isolation and alienation in the context of Hungarian history and in their own lives. The fourth lesson, "Psychogeography: An Interrogation of Space and Place," takes Pedro Plaza Salvati's essay exploring the streets of contemporary Caracas as the impetus for students to become psychogeographers in their own right. Our final lesson, "Garbage and Cultural Identity," provides an opportunity for students to rethink the blurry boundaries between history and memory, as well as art and trash, by considering the installations of artist Zi Yi Wang.

We realize that the age ranges and instructional contexts for each lesson vary, so we encourage educators to adjust these lessons to meet their needs and to record these modifications. Your classroom and teaching experiences are valuable to us, and hearing about them helps us improve the formation of our next guide. Please leave feedback and suggestions here: <http://tinyurl.com/asymptoteforedu>.

Finally, if you like what we do and want to get involved, we would love to hear more from you! We are currently seeking contributors willing to share thoughts and experiences about teaching world literature through the *Asymptote* blog, which can be found here: <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/>

We'd especially love to read and share anecdotes from the lessons you teach based on this guide or using other *Asymptote* content. Let your stories inspire others! *Asymptote for Educators* is interested in publishing student work as well. If your students have produced excellent responses to the assignments offered in this guide, other work to do with *Asymptote* content, or want to participate in the global conversation about translated literature as it relates to them, we are currently accepting submissions.

If you're interested in contributing, collaborating, or if you'd like to give us additional feedback, please contact us at education@asymptotejournal.com.

A Catalogue of Poets

“Identities” by Lêdo Ivo, translated by Andrew Gebhardt

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/ledo-ivo-three-poems/>

In these lessons, students will read a poem by Lêdo Ivo which functions as a catalogue of the poets he admired and respected across several nationalities and epochs. The students will then use the poem as a starting point for their own research into a particular poet. The final lesson will be a creative rewriting task.

Learning Objectives

By the end of these lessons, students should be able to:

- Define the concept of ‘free verse’ as well as its origin and uses
- Identify and analyze the poetic devices used by Ivo in “Identities”
- Produce a timeline with historical literary movements and figures
- Research and collect information on a range of poets
- Prepare and carry out a short presentation on a particular poet
- Creatively rewrite a poem of their choice

Assessment

Group discussion
Group research tasks
Individual research tasks
Individual presentations
Creative writing task

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

Materials Needed

Lesson One:

“Identities” by Lêdo Ivo, translated by Andrew Gebhardt

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/ledo-ivo-three-poems/>

Definition and explanation of free verse:

<https://literarydevices.net/free-verse/>

Lesson Two:

Large sheets of paper (ideally A2)

Access to the internet. Laptops would be useful for the group research task; however, mobile phones would also be sufficient.

The Poetry Foundation is a great source of poetry in the public domain:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>

You can direct students here for their homework task of researching a poet and then bringing a poem to class. This website also offers detailed and trustworthy biographies of writers, so it could be used during the group research task, too.

Supplementary Materials

“The Literary Canon Throughout the Years” by Emily Kinder. A great article critiquing the idea of the ‘literary canon’ is <https://theboar.org/2018/08/the-literary-canon-over-the-years/>. This could be read or referred to during the class discussion on the canonical poet, time permitting.

Approximate Length

195 minutes in total, in four single lessons or two double lessons:

Lesson One (45 minutes)

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

Lesson Three (45 minutes)

Lesson Four (45 minutes)

Lesson One (45 minutes)

10 minutes: Hand a copy of the poem to each student in the class and read it as a class, or read it aloud to the class.

10 minutes: Ask students to highlight all the names they see in a particular color. Ask leading questions:

- How many of the poets do they already know or have heard of?
- Have any of the students read much of the mentioned poets’ poetry before? Can the students name any poems?
- Do the students know which time period or movement any of these poets were active in?

Pool the information on the whiteboard.

5 minutes: What is the overall structure of the poem? Make a list.

- How does this poem suit the title ‘Identities’? What is Ivo saying here about the identities of each figure?

10 minutes: Write ‘free verse’ on the board. Tell the students that this poem is written in free verse and ask the students to come up with a definition. Maybe some of them already have a good idea, but having to concisely articulate that idea is always helpful.

Then, compare the student’s definition with that from the website (link in materials above).

- Why might a poet choose to write in free verse rather than any other style?
- How does Ivo use the free verse structure to his advantage? (use the one-word line ‘Europe’ as an example)

15 minutes: Analyze the stylistic/poetic devices in the poem and their effects on the reader:

- Colloquial language/low register (‘screwed his own sister’) contrasting with high register (‘his professional air and impeccable white shirts’)
- Metaphor/simile (‘Baudelaire saw in the mirror the abyss that he swallowed’, ‘Mallarmé hid himself like a faun in the woods of a blank page’)
- Personification (‘moon-white death awaited him’)

- Alliteration ('the song of the sirens', 'reached for a rose')
- Enjambment
- Mirroring/Caesura: notice how Ivo often repeats a poet's name at both the start and end of the line ('Paul Verlaine did not care whether he was or was not Paul Verlaine')

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

5 minutes: Before the lesson/at the start of the lesson, list all the poets mentioned in the poem on the board:

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| • Victor Hugo | • Jules LaForgue |
| • Arthur Rimbaud | • Paul Valéry |
| • Lord Byron | • T.S Eliot |
| • Walt Whitman | • Rainer Maria Rilke |
| • Baudelaire | • Mallarmé |
| • Paul Claudel | • Paul Verlaine |
| • Tristan Corbière | |

5 minutes: Organize the class into groups of 3-5. Hand each group a large blank white paper. Ask them to draw a straight line horizontally across the center of the page. This will become their timeline.

5 minutes: Assign (or ask students to self-assign) 1-2 members of each group to research each poet, and 1-2 students from each group to draw up the timeline. Laptops would be ideal for this lesson, but as the information necessary is very basic and can mostly be gathered from a quick look at Wikipedia, smartphones would also suffice.

30 minutes: The timelines should be colorful and should include the following basic information on each poet:

- Date of birth/death (this could be represented by a line with an arrow at either end)
- Nationality/languages spoken/written in
- Artistic/literary movement (Romantic etc.), when applicable

Follow-up questions:

- Was any of the information surprising?
- Which literary movement and time period is most represented here?
- Is there an 'odd one out'?
- Can you think of any poets who should have been included in this list? Is there anyone 'missing'?

15-25 minutes: Class discussion on the 'canonical' poet

Ask the students if they know what 'canonical' means. Are the poets listed here considered canonical? In which canon?

What are the similarities between all these poets?

- White, European, male

You could bring in the article from the Boar on the literary canon here, time-permitting (link in materials above). It offers a great, short background into the canon and attempts to shift it towards global literature.

- Why do you think the poetic canon taught in most schools and universities, and revered by a lot of poets today, is still so white, male, and European?
- Is it surprising that a Brazilian poet wrote a poem listing (almost) exclusively European poets?

Ask the class if they could name any poets who don't fit these categories. They could add them to their timelines, either in class or as part of the homework activity.

Homework activity: Ask the students to research either one of the poets from the list or a poet of their choice. Ask them to prepare a very short presentation on their chosen poet, including information such as:

- A short biography
- Most famous works
- Connections to other artists or poets
- Legacy: has this poet directly inspired other writers or works of art?

Ask them to bring **one** poem from their chosen poet to read to the class. Direct the students to the **Poetry Foundation** website—most of the *listed* poet's works will be in the public domain and therefore easily accessible. Less well-known or local poets may have blogs, or their work may be available in the local library.

Lesson Three (45 minutes)

40 minutes: Individual presentations. Ask the students to give their brief presentations on their chosen poets and read aloud their chosen poems. If the students have chosen a particularly long poem, one or two stanzas will do.

If several students have chosen the same poet, you could ask the next student just to present any information they gathered which the previous student hasn't already covered.

Ask the students why they chose their poet/poem. What did they find appealing? What do they admire?

5 minutes: Plenary questions

- What makes a good presentation?
- Were you particularly impressed by someone else's presentation? Why?

Lesson Four (45 minutes)

30 minutes: Creative rewriting. The students will now rewrite their chosen poem creatively, or write a new poem inspired by their chosen poem. There are many different options for this. You could write some on the board, and then ask students if they have any other suggestions:

- Invert the adjectives/verbs to their opposites
- Change the setting/time period

- Rewrite the poem in a different ‘voice’:
 - higher/lower register
 - different dialect
 - different cultural perspective (draw on the student’s own cultural backgrounds)
 - a feminist rewriting
- Rewrite the poem in a literary genre or genre of poem (the possibilities include):
 - Play script
 - Prose poem
 - Prose
 - Sonnet
 - Haiku

Students who finish early could do two or three different rewritings.

Students could volunteer to perform their creative rewritings to the class before the plenary, time permitting.

10-15 minutes: Plenary questions

- What did you choose to change and why?
- How original do you think your poem is? Has it become your own work?
- Is any poem original, or is it always based on a multitude of sources?
- Do you see Ivo’s poem as a kind of bibliography (listing his sources)?

Descriptions of the Horizon: Two Icelandic Poems in Translation

“Glacier Line” by Kári Tulinius, translated by Larissa Kyzer

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/kari-tulinius-glacier-line/>

In the first lesson, students will read two poems from “Glacier Line” by Kári Tulinius which includes images of Iceland’s famous Snæfellsjökull Glacier. In the second lesson, students will explore the relationship between author, translator, and reader by learning more about Larissa Kyzer’s translation process. They will then discuss their experiences as readers.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Read and analyze the poems for main ideas and themes
- Examine the relationship between writer, translator, and reader
- Reflect on their experiences reading literature in translation
- Communicate effectively in writing and discussion

Assessment

Written reflection assignment

Group discussion

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

University students

Materials Needed

“Glacier Line” by Kári Tulinius, translated by Larissa Kyzer

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/kari-tulinius-glacier-line/>

“Staging Translation: An Interview with Larissa Kyzer” by Sarah Timmer Harvey

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/2020/03/05/gifting-the-unfamiliar-or-staging-translation-an-interview-with-larissa-kyzer/>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (60 minutes)

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

Lesson One (60 minutes)

Warm up (10 minutes)

Begin by asking students if they know anything about Iceland or Icelandic culture. Introduce the title and author—“Vanishings of Snæfellsjökull Glacier” by Icelandic writer Kári Tulinius. Ask students: What do you think the poem will be about?

Next, read the note that appears at the beginning of the poem. Again, ask students: based on this information, what do you think will be included in the poem? Have your ideas changed since your initial guess?

Reading (15 minutes)

Read the poem “Vanishings of Snæfellsjökull Glacier,” Ask students to take turns reading the stanzas aloud. Then give students time to review and reread the poem silently.

After reading, ask the class:

- What caught your attention while you were reading the poem?
- Compare your guesses about the poem with your reading of the poem, did anything surprise you?

Sketching, freewriting, and discussing the poem (30 minutes)

Sketching: Ask students to choose their favorite stanza of the poem or assign stanzas. Students quickly sketch an image that comes to mind when reading it.

Freewriting: After finishing their sketches, ask students to freewrite their reflections or questions about the stanza of the poem that they have chosen. Students may choose to focus on expressing the stanza in their own words or by looking at discrete points, such as landscape, emotion, language, structure, shapes, or colors.

Discussing: Have students share their sketches and freewriting with each other in pairs or small groups. To wrap up the activity, start with the first stanza and progress through the poem, asking at least one student to share from their sketch or freewriting. During this process, pick up on interesting ideas or questions that students have for further discussion. Wrap up by sharing several pictures of the Snæfellsjökull Glacier in Iceland from the internet.

Assign Homework (5 minutes)

Introduce the next piece, “Upon seeing Snæfellsjökull Glacier from an idling bus,” another poem about the glacier by the same author. Students should read the poem for homework.

Writing: After reading “Upon seeing Snæfellsjökull Glacier from an idling bus” and “Vanishings of Snæfellsjökull Glacier,” students should write a reflection of one to two paragraphs in length. Students can choose what to write about, but here are some suggestions:

- What do you think are the themes of the poems?
- Is there a connection between landscape and emotion in the poems?
- How do the poems address nature or the environment?
- How are shapes, figures, or colors used in the poems? What effect do they have on the reader?
- What do you think are the best phrases or lines of the poems? Why?

Lesson Two

Review (10 minutes)

Review the homework on “Upon seeing Snæfellsjökull Glacier from an idling bus” by having students share their work with a partner. The teacher should wrap up the activity by addressing any remaining questions students have about the poems.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Regroup students to small groups and have them discuss the following questions.

1. What aspects of the poems were you most interested in? What similarities or differences do you find between the two poems? (e.g., landscape, emotion, language, structure, shapes, colors)
2. According to scientists, the Snæfellsjökull Glacier will disappear by 2050. How would the local area change without the glacier? Do you think that writing about nature can help save the environment?
3. What themes do you think are addressed in the poems? Which one do you think is most important? What lines from the poems can you use to support your interpretation?
4. The poems are based on the author Kári Tulinius' experiences viewing the Snæfellsjökull Glacier which has inspired Icelandic and international writers alike, such as Halldór Laxness (Icelandic writer and Nobel Prize winner who wrote "Under the Glacier and Independent People") and Jules Verne (French novelist who wrote *Journey to the Center of the Earth*). What landscapes in your country or region have stimulated a sense of wonder among residents, visitors, or writers?

Focus on the author, translator, and reader

Reading (10-15 minutes)

Books by Icelandic authors reach many readers around the world through translation. According to the Iceland Monitor, as of 2019, Icelandic books have been translated into about [50 languages](#). In the next activity, while reading the Translator's Note and the interview excerpt (keeping in mind that this is just one point of view) students should think about the following questions:

- What does it mean to translate a literary work?
- What choices do translators make as they translate prose and poetry?

Translator's Note

Read the Translator's Note about Larissa Kyzer's experience translating the poems by Kári Tulinius.

Interview Excerpt

Read the following excerpt from a 2020 interview with Kyzer by Sarah Timmer Harvey from the Asymptote Blog. It is about her translation of the book "A Fist or a Heart" by Kristín Eiríksdóttir, and in the excerpt below, Kyzer talks about using a range of elements from the Icelandic language in her English translations.

STH: Are there any elements of the Icelandic language that you like to see reflected in your English-language translations?

LK: *I'll admit that I do have a weakness for periodically sneaking untranslated Icelandic words into my translations, which I do for a handful of reasons. For one, I love the look of them, and I think there's some (mild) value in exposing American readers to unfamiliar words and making them grapple with the tiniest bit of discomfort in the name of basic cultural awareness. (Here I'm thinking of the American tendency to not even try to pronounce names or foreign words that you're unsure about.) There are also a lot of readers for whom having just the faintest dash of the original language in the text feels like a pleasant bit of armchair traveling. Another reason I'll sometimes leave Icelandic in the English translation is that there are some words that feel so uniquely Icelandic—so séríslensk, if I allow myself to be a bit twee here—that it's hard to let go of them and use a more cobbled together phrase in their place. Filler expressions tend to fall under this category, or words for things that feel somehow culturally*

rooted. Kjammi, half a boiled sheep's head that is famously served up at the drive-through window of the BSÍ bus station in Reykjavík, is an example of a word I kept untranslated in a text, and I've also been known to use family words like mamma (mom), pabbi (dad), amma (grandma), and afi (grandpa), particularly in kids' books, as these are easily understandable, emotionally resonant, and kids are also pretty flexible when it comes to encountering the unfamiliar in writing.

To the extent that it's possible, I also sometimes try to retain Icelandic syntactical structures or phrasings, usually as a way of retaining a particular rhythm or aspect of an author's writing style. ... In such cases, the 'Icelandic-ness' is maybe less readily visible to the reader, but still hopefully comes across in a subtler way.

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/2020/03/05/gifting-the-unfamiliar-or-staging-translation-an-interview-with-larissa-kyzer/>

Discussion (20-25 minutes)

Based on their experiences as a reader and the information presented in the Translator's Note and the interview excerpt, students discuss the following questions in pairs or small groups.

1. What experience do you have reading literature in translation? What did you learn about the translator's process or choices through reading the Translator's Note and the excerpt from the interview? Were any of the concepts, such as subjectivity, collaboration, or precision new to you?
2. Why do you think Kyzer chose to include the "Note" at the beginning of "Vanishings of Snæfellsjökull Glacier" to explain the glacier's location and the author's process of writing the poem? What effect does this have on the reader's experience?
3. What advantages of including words in the original language does Kyzer mention in the interview? Do you think there are any disadvantages? How do you feel when you encounter an unfamiliar word from another language in your reading? What will you do (e.g., guess the meaning from context, search the internet, ignore it)?
4. Did the feeling Kyzer refers to as 'Icelandic-ness' come across when you read Kari Tulinius' poems? If yes, what words, structures, or images conveyed a sense of Icelandic-ness to you as a reader? When reading a translation, how important is it for you to feel a sense of the place and original language?

Groups should share their answers with the rest of the class.

Extension Activities

Option One: To explore other translators' views and experiences, choose another interview with a translator that you are interested in from the *Asymptote* blog. Share what they have learned with their classmates in a short, informal presentation in the next class.

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/interviews/>

Option Two: Create a notebook of observations, like the author's, about a natural object (e.g., a mountain, river, or tree) that you see regularly. Observe it every day for five days, and each day, do five minutes of freewriting. Supplement your written observations with drawings or smartphone photos and observe how the natural object changes over the five-day period. Do these changes in any way connect to other aspects of your life, such as your mood? Be ready to share your notebook with your classmates in a group discussion in an upcoming class.

Additional Resources

A Wide Range of Voices: A Glimpse into the Current Icelandic Poetry Scene

<https://grapevine.is/mag/feature/2018/08/24/a-wide-range-of-voices-a-glimpse-into-the-current-icelandic-poetry-scene/>

Snæfellsjökull Glacier Gone by 2050?

https://icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/news/2019/04/26/snaefellsjokull_glacier_gone_by_2050/

We Are All Islanders

"Island of Circumscribed Hope" by Dora Kaprálová, translated by Julia and Peter Sherwood

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/the-island-of-circumscribed-hope-dora-kapralova/>

Students explore a main metaphor—everyone is stranded on an island of their own—by reading and commenting upon “Island of Circumscribed Hope” by Dora Kaprálová and translated by Julia and Peter Sherwood. After researching and learning about Hungary and Central Europe before and after WWII, students will reflect on their own ‘islands’ and form ideas about the translation process.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Practice close reading
- Demonstrate an understanding of an historical period
- Research and articulate ideas about the author’s definition of ‘island’
- Discuss their own relation to their ‘homes within themselves’ and their ‘islands’
- Become comfortable with group analysis and critique
- Express ideas about the translation process

Assessment

Participation in group discussion

Comprehension questions

Forum post

Writing assignment

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

Materials Needed

“Island of Circumscribed Hope” by Dora Kaprálová, translated by Julia and Peter Sherwood:

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/the-island-of-circumscribed-hope-dora-kapralova/> and the translator’s note

Appropriate learning platform with a discussion feature

Supplementary Materials

Interview of Julia and Peter Sherwood for *Talking Translation*:

<https://talkingtranslation.org/2021/05/07/two-way-translation-with-julia-and-peter-sherwood/>

Approximate Length

Lesson One: 120 minutes

Lesson One (120 minutes)

Activity 1: Warm-Up

Share the title of the text with the students. Ask them to read it, and to reflect on the relation between the words 'island,' 'circumscribed,' and 'hope.' What do these words mean to together? Have they ever felt like they were on an 'island'? Depending on your teaching setting, this could be done orally as a group or shared in a forum post. You should share the third paragraph of the translator's note if the students can't express ideas about what will be the text's central metaphor.

Following that reading, ask them to share/write down (depending on your learning setting) in a knowledge dump what they expect to read about in this text. How do they think it will be rendered in the text? The knowledge dump aims to get ideas and mental clutter on a document visible to everyone to promote discussion and conversation.

Activity 2: Close Reading and Research

Let the students know that they are now going to read the text twice. They should read the questions beforehand so they can start highlighting, underlining and/or taking notes during the first read.

The second read and the following work will be conducted in small groups. Depending on your teaching setting, they could do this work in class, and that would lead to a class discussion. Or, their answers could be posted on the appropriate platform, and the members of each group would be asked to react to at least one other group's answers. In this section, the students will both answer comprehension questions and conduct research on places, dates, and events mentioned in the text. For the research questions, ask the students to write concise paragraphs about each item (maximum 5 sentences).

	Questions	Research
Paragraphs 1-5	-Using your answers to the first activity, elaborate on the definition of 'island' rendered in the beginning of the text. What does the author refer to? Is it an actual geographical place? Or is this a word used to represent an inward process? -Paragraph 4. Do you sometimes experience the same thoughts?	
Paragraphs 6-9	-These paragraphs refer to the author's fake/dreamed island. Do you have one? Which places does your mind go when you dream or daydream? Which places do you imagine? Give a brief description.	-Emperor Franz Josef -Joseph Roth -Franz Josef Land (island) -1918, end of the monarchy

Paragraphs 10-25	-Through what lens are the places in these paragraphs presented? (history, literature, landscapes, a specific person or character...)	-the Island of Szentendre -communism in Hungary in the 1920s -Bolsheviks -a kibbutz -János Kádár -1956 uprising
Paragraphs 26-end	-After learning about the history of this island on an island, we learn what it means to one of its inhabitants—Elsa. What does this island mean to her? Referring to the distinction made by the author, and from the reader's point of view, is it a 'real' island or a 'fake' island?	

Activity 3: Exploring the Translation Process

After reading the translator's note, the interview with Julia and Peter Sherwood for *Talking Translation* in the **Supplementary Materials**, and "Island of Circumscribed Hope," the students will try to form thoughts on what they think the translation process looked like for this piece. The following questions can be used to start a discussion:

- This piece appears in the nonfiction category on *Asymptote's* website. Can you try to explain this decision? Do you agree with it? Why? Why not?
- The first person in the translator's note seems to be Julia Sherwood. How did she know she wanted to translate this piece? How does her personal history relate to this piece? Do you think all translators need a personal connection to a text to be able to translate it?
- Though you are given the translated version, what translation challenges do you think pertained to this piece?
- If the point of literary translation is to expose people to different perspectives and cultures, how do you think the translators of this piece can render the original voice without losing the English-speaking readers? What may differ between the original and the translation?
- When you read a text in English, do you often wonder if it's a translation? And when it is, do you read the translation asking yourself if this is really what the author of the original text wanted to convey?

Homework

The students will answer this essay prompt (minimum of 1.5 pages/750 words single spaced) and email it to their instructor before the next class.

In "Island of Circumscribed Hope," fake, dreamed, and real islands are all mentioned and depicted. Additionally, the first-person plural 'we' is used in association with the word 'islanders.' How is the text's main metaphor—everyone is stranded on an island of their own—using specific images or concepts to state this abstract truth? You can look for vehicles used to convey themes, recurrent themes, multiple

occurrences of certain words, the role of the narrator. From your personal experience, do you agree with the author—are we all living on an autopilot mode that keeps us from connecting with other islanders? You could offer a comparison between your life now and your life before the pandemic. Like in “Island of Circumscribed Hope,” you could also use real events, people, and places to build this comparison.

Creative Writing Assignment

For this final assignment, you will write a prose piece or create a visual piece using the medium of your choice to present an inward and/or definite spatial island you once had to find shelter in. For the visual piece, the students could create a collage in the shape of their islands using pictures, photographs, pieces of paper that would belong to their islands. This island you will present can be a paradise (like Elsa’s) or one where you were a constant castaway (metaphor of the text).

For the writing portion, limit yourself to one page or 500 words. Feel free to use a quote from Kaprálová’s text to start your piece (paragraph 1, last sentence of paragraph 4, first sentence of paragraph 10). You can decide to present this island through your past/present experience, a character’s point of view, or a historical period. For the visual portion, you will have to present your visual piece to the group and explain how you connected it to the assignment prompt.

Psychogeography: An Interrogation of Space and Place

“Submission and Mass in the Street” by Pedro Plaza Salvati, translated by Brendan Riley

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/submission-and-mass-in-the-street-pedro-plaza-salvati/>

Pedro Plaza Salvati’s essay “Submission and Mass in the Street” uses psychogeography to examine the political and historical tensions in Venezuela in the midst of a global pandemic. In this lesson, emulating Salvati, students will use psychogeography to write essays interrogating their own locales, examining the politics and histories of the places and spaces they call home.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Define the terms ‘flaneur’ and ‘psychogeography’
- Interrogate the political, historical, and environmental histories of their locales
- Compose a nonfiction work of psychogeography about their own locales

Assessment

Comprehension questions

Group discussion

Writing assignment

Group workshop

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

University students

Materials Needed

“Submission and Mass in the Street” by Pedro Plaza Salvati, translated by Brendan Riley

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/submission-and-mass-in-the-street-pedro-plaza-salvati/>

Definition of psychogeography

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/psychogeography>

“Psychogeography: a way to delve into the soul of a city” by Siobhan Lyons

<https://theconversation.com/psychogeography-a-way-to-delve-into-the-soul-of-a-city-78032>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (90 minutes)

Lesson Two (2-4 hours)

Lesson Three (60-90 minutes)

Lesson One (90 minutes)

Reading Comprehension

To introduce students to the concept and practice of psychogeography, have them read the definition of Psychogeography from the Tate Modern and “Psychogeography: a way to delve into the soul of a city” by Siobhan Lyons.

In group discussion, ask the students the following:

- What is ‘psychogeography’? When and how did it develop?
- What is a ‘flaneur’? What is a ‘palimpsest’?
- How is psychogeography being used today?

Next, have students read “Submission and Mass in the Street” by Pedro Plaza Salvati, translated by Brendan Riley.

Ask them to consider all or some of the following questions as they read. Alternatively, depending on class size, divide the students into groups and assign 3-5 questions per group:

- What is the atmosphere Salvati creates in his introductory paragraph? Why does he mention the warning and vehicles with black tinted windows?
- What is a ‘majunche’? How did Chávez use the term? How does Salvati interpret it?
- What is the effect of the graffiti on Salvati? Of the police presence?
- How does Salvati use memories and digressions to reflect on the places he is walking through? For example, what is the history of Miraflores Palace?
- Who is Rafael Arévalo González? How does his life appear to Salvati as he moves through contemporary Caracas?
- What does Salvati mean by “submission is one of the stigmas of having to live in political systems like Venezuela’s”?
- What do the “stories in the trash” signify?
- What do the people Salvati sees and report on say about his feelings toward contemporary Venezuela? The homeless woman? The family eating mangoes?
- What does the role of the mass Salvati witnesses serve in his essay? Is it one of hope? Catharsis? Despair?
- How does the interaction in the bakery reflect some of the tensions in Venezuela today?
- How is the pandemic present in the essay?
- Having now read the entire essay, what does the title convey?
- Thinking of Lyon’s article on psychogeography, do you think “Submission and Mass in the Street” qualifies as a work of psychogeography? Why or why not? Support your opinion with examples from the essay.

After they have read the essay and taken notes, ask them to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Come together as a class afterwards and have the groups report their discussions.

Lesson Two (2-4 hours)

Writing Assignment

For this assignment, have students write their own work of psychogeography. They can write about their own city, town, village etc. and a route they often take. Taking Salvati as a model, ask them to use what they see on their walk to report and reflect on the state of their neighborhood, town, city, or

country today. What political strife or divisions are on display? What history is embedded in the landscape? How is the pandemic affecting it?

Students can also be encouraged to include photos, as Salvati does, if they wish.

Salvati's essay is approximately 2,700 words. Students should aim for 1,000 to 1,500.

Writing Prompt to give to students:

According to Siobhan Lyons, "Psychogeography thrives as an interrogation of space and history; it compels us to abandon – at least temporarily – our ordinary conceptions of the face value of a location, so that we may question its mercurial history." Keeping this in mind, compose a short essay centered on a walk (or, if you prefer, bike ride, bus trip; or, for those unable to leave their homes, consider using Google Maps to explore the area online) through your neighborhood, town, or city. Use Salvati as a model. Show readers both what you see as you move through your locale and provide insights into the history, politics, or environment while doing so, thus using psychogeography to interrogate a setting that you might usually pass through absent-mindedly. Take the assignment as an opportunity to learn more about your own locale and to introduce your readers, and classmates, to it.

Aim for 1,000-1,500 words. Including photos is optional.

Lesson Three (60-90 minutes)

Group Workshop

In pairs or small groups, ask students to exchange their essays. They should take 10 to 20 minutes to read each one then discuss with their partner(s). This is an effective way to share their work and to build camaraderie in the class allowing students to learn more about where they live, where they're from and so on.

Some guiding questions to consider as they read and discuss:

- What sensory details does the writer use to help the reader 'see' the setting?
- What historical or political insight is shared?
- What atmosphere does the place have, given the tone the writer uses?
- What other aspects of psychogeography does the writer employ?
- Is the writer interrogating the politics and history of the space they are moving through?
- Are there any moments where you think the writer can delve more deeply into the history or politics of the place? What more would you like to know?

Reconvene as a class to discuss individual examples of students' work and/or workshop one or two student pieces together, in their entirety.

Garbage and Cultural Identity

“Trash History” by Zi Yi Wang

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/visual/trash-history-zi-yi-wang/>

In this lesson, students engage with Zi Yi Wang’s idea of “trash history” and analyze her artworks as a way of exploring ideas related to history, memory, cultural identity, and trash.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Examine and analyze art works
- Read critically and discuss an artist’s account of their work
- Reflect on ideas of garbage, history, identity, cultural difference
- Create their own artwork or trash history

Assessment

Class discussion

Art or history project

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

Materials Needed

Zi Yi Wang’s “Trash History”

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/visual/trash-history-zi-yi-wang/>

Supplementary Materials

“The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” by Walter Benjamin, translated by Harry Zohn

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

Approximate Length

50 minutes, divided over two class sessions

Warm-up (20 minutes)

Show the students the slideshow of images of Zi Yi Wang’s work. Discuss them as a group. Some guiding questions to help frame the discussion:

- Do you like them? What do they remind you of, or make you think of?
- What are they made of?
- What do you think the artist is trying to convey?
- Tell the students that the artist describes her practice as ‘trash history’, ask them what they think this means. What is the relationship between trash, history, and art?

For homework, they should read Sophia Park’s interview with Zi Yi Wang, highlighting anything that stood out to them or made them think. Let them know that the artist will refer to Walter Benjamin’s idea of ‘aura’—explain that this means the uniqueness of a specific object or artwork. A simple explanation—that it’s the difference between looking at the actual painting of the *Mona Lisa*, as

opposed to one of the millions of reproductions. See Supplementary Materials above for a link to Benjamin's essay.

Lesson (30 minutes)

Begin class by asking about their impressions of the interview. What quotes or moments stood out? What did they find thought-provoking? Did the interview make them see the artworks differently?

Suggested quotes for discussion:

- “For me, a general definition of “trash” is something that is no longer important and is supposed to be thrown out.”—do you agree with this definition of trash? Why or why not? When you think of trash, what do you think of? What is trash like? Do these artworks look like trash?
- “Memories can be trashed as well.” Can memories be ‘trash’? What does this mean? What is the difference between trashing a memory and forgetting it? Have you ever thrown away an object to rid yourself of the memory associated with it?
- “History, too, can be erased, and there are limitations in ultimately defining what is ‘useful.’” How (and why) are histories erased? What does it mean for history to be useful? What kinds of history are *not* useful?
- “At the moment of picking up an item of trash, there’s nearly always an aura to the object, which is different than when I discover it again in my ‘trash collection.’” Recalling that an aura refers to an object’s uniqueness: what kind of aura does an item of trash have? Some might say that trash is something that does *not* have an aura; that is an indistinguishable part of a mass of trash. How do Zi Yi Wang’s artworks capture, or convey, the aura of the objects?
- “I identify with the object or material, add another layer to it, and build trash history. I am sculpting and manifesting into these objects a silhouette or an outer shape influenced by the actions of trashing and collecting.” What does this suggest about what trash history is? How do you see these ideas reflected in the artworks?
- “I think the first part of this language is understanding the environment of an object or the relationship between materials and the intangible, as we are in this flux of identities, information, systems, cultures, and language. We all position ourselves within a library of our own memories, theories, and fundamental values.” How does this connect to the idea of trash? Is trash part of our identity as well, or our environment?
- “Collecting as a way of documenting is not bound by time; it is a process that is infinite. Nostalgia is a constant reflection on the past that I try to preserve.” What is the relationship between history and nostalgia?
- “I want to transcribe or translate the ever-changing environment’s authenticity.” Why is trash an effective way to record an environment’s authenticity? What other ways to do so can you imagine? Is trash different from one place to another?
- “I started working with Chinatown 99-cent store objects, which I felt most connected to being in New York.” Zi Yi Wang mentions this at the end of the section where she talks about feeling pulled between China and the US. It is notable that she connects these objects—presumably produced in China and sold in Chinatown—to being in New York. How does this complicate a sense of Chinese or American identity?

Homework:

Option a. Ask the students to create their own artwork out of trash they find in their household or neighborhood. This may be a sculpture, as in Zi Yi Wang's work, or they may choose to work in a different medium and either represent or incorporate the object(s) somehow.

Optional follow-up:

Have each student share their project and discuss with the class.

OR

Have each student bring their artwork to class and assign another student to describe and analyze the artwork.

Option b. Ask the students to write their own trash history out of trash they find in the household or neighborhood, explaining how the garbage illuminates the history or cultural identity of their community.

FEEDBACK

Thanks for taking the time to read our Summer 2021 Educator's Guide. We hope you found it useful and engaging.

Have questions, comments, critiques, or testimonials?

Please leave your feedback at <http://tinyurl.com/asymptoteforedu>. We look forward to hearing from you!

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