

The Worlds We Live In

Winter 2022 educator's guide



✦ ASYMPTOTE



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Winter 2022 | THE WORLDS WE LIVE IN

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Winter 2022 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, and stories from "The Worlds We Live In," our Winter 2022 issue, which is available here: <http://asymptotejournal.com/jan-2022>

"A Dichotomy of Parrots," the first lesson in this guide, allows non-native speakers of English to reflect on characterizations, colonization, and the intersections of Africa, Brazil, and the Portuguese Empire. It culminates with the students writing their own characterizations. Our second lesson, "Poetry and Redemption," asks students to consider the many forms of redemption by close reading the poems of Csenger Kertai. "Home, Identity, and Belonging," our third lesson, has students consider these concepts alongside the role of localization in translation. The fourth lesson, "The Meaning of Place," has students meditate on the power of place in their own lives by considering the role of the Caspian Sea in an essay by Aida Moradi Ahani. "The Art of Words," our fifth and final lesson, asks students to reflect on the loss of words, languages, and dialects over time and to explore the consequences in their own creative writing exercises.

We realize that the age ranges and instructional contexts for each lesson vary, and 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 our formation for the 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 Dichotomy of Parrots

“A Tribute to the Green Parrot” by Jorge de Sena, translated by David J. Bailey

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/a-tribute-to-the-green-parrot-jorge-de-sena/>

This lesson is targeted towards non-native speakers of English. In this lesson, students will read extracts from the short story “A Tribute to the Green Parrot,” a largely autobiographical work covering the author’s lonely and traumatic childhood in Portugal during the Salazar regime in the 1930s and 40s. During this lesson, students learn how to pick out adjectives to describe the gray and green parrots, and to contrast them with each other. This culminates in a task where the students write a characterization of either the gray or the green parrot, whilst also commenting on what these parrots could represent against the story’s socio-historical background.

Learning Objectives

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

- Make ‘educated guesses’ about a text via word choice and register
- Use newly attained vocabulary in written work and class discussions
- Record vocabulary with descriptions in English
- Compare and contrast different characters in a text
- Relate characters to a story’s socio-historical background
- Write a characterization

Assessment

Class discussion

Pair/group work

Written assessment (200-400 words)

Approximate Grade Level

Middle school students

High school students

Materials Needed

“A Tribute to the Green Parrot” by Jorge de Sena, translated from the Portuguese by David J. Bailey

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/a-tribute-to-the-green-parrot-jorge-de-sena/>

Blank A4 paper

Venn diagram template:

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/FREEBIE-Venn-Diagram-wlines-908461>

Map of the Portuguese Empire:

<https://www.vividmaps.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Portugal.jpg>

How to write a characterization:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/198N3ZEGABjLG1Kj7dkdw0DENlu2oMFRs/view?usp=sharing>

Supplementary Materials

Smartboard (recommended but materials could also be printed)

Approximate Length

Lesson one (60 minutes)

Lesson One

Homework before the lesson: read the first three paragraphs of “A Tribute to the Green Parrot.” You might want to print it *without* any of the supplementary information, so that the students can get more from guessing during the introduction.

Introduction (5-10 Minutes)

Introductory questions for class discussion:

1. What is the story about?
2. What kind of feeling do you get of the narrator? Are they male or female, young or old, or both? How do you know this? (complex vocabulary and ‘asides’ in brackets, etc.)
3. When do you think this story was written?

You can now reveal the basic information about the story:

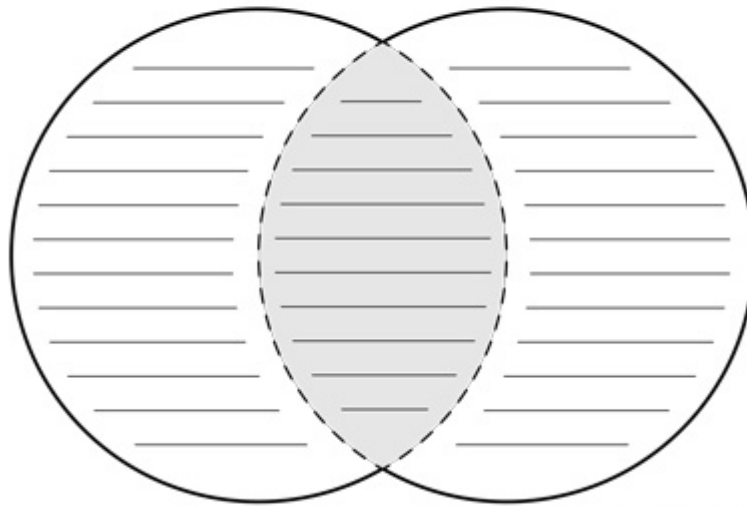
- Written by Jorge de Sena, a Portuguese writer
- Set in the 1930s and 40s
- First published in 1976
- Autobiographical piece
- de Sena is writing about his childhood, but from a largely adult perspective
- Set during Salazar’s conservative, nationalist dictatorship called Estado Novo, or ‘The New State’

Characterizing the parrots (15-20 minutes)

Ask the students to quickly re-read the first three paragraphs of the story. The students should then form into pairs or small groups and begin picking out adjectives and phrases used by the author to describe either bird, or both birds. Their results can be recorded in a Venn diagram such as this:

Name _____

Date _____



Copyright © Tim van de Valt

After around 10 minutes, the groups can share their findings with the rest of the class. Particularly useful adjectives could be recorded into the student's vocabulary books for future use, with a sentence or phrase in English to describe them. Here are some suggestions, but feel free to pick out your own:

Adjective	Description
vain	too interested in yourself or your own appearance
dull	boring or uninteresting
withdrawn	quiet or uninterested in talking
exuberant	particularly confident or full of energy
dedicated	loyal to someone or determined
hostile	unfriendly or against something or someone
menacing	threatening or dangerous behavior

Questions for class discussion:

1. Are there any adjectives used to describe the Gray or Green parrot that you don't understand at all? What methods could you use to find out what a word means before looking it up? (look at context first)

2. Do the parrots have absolutely anything in common?
3. Why do you think de Sena is so drawn towards the Green parrot?
4. Do the parrots' colors reflect their characters? What connotations do green and gray have? Why do you think we attach connotations to certain colors?

Africa and Brazil: The Parrots and Colonialism (15-20 min)

Show the students the map of the former Portuguese Empire, either as a print-out or on the smart board (but be careful you don't reveal too much information via the website if you are using a smartboard).

You could write the keywords on the board for the student to discuss or write into their vocabulary books as they arise over this section.

Keywords	Meaning
a. to colonize	to take over a land and control of its people
b. colonialism	the concept behind a)
c. colony	a country or area that has been colonized
d. empire	a group of countries ruled by a single state or monarch

The students now need to find out what the Gray and Green parrots have to do with Portuguese colonial history. Organize the class into pairs or small groups. Let them think, discuss, and take notes for a few minutes, and then ask some leading questions:

1. Where do the Gray and Green parrots come from in the story?
2. What do you think this map could represent? Think about where the author is from.
3. This is a map of the Portuguese colonial empire. Can you name any other countries who had colonies? (Britain, France, Spain, the Netherlands, etc.)
4. What does 'colonialism' actually mean? What did these empires have in common? Collect student's ideas on the board, which may include these ideas, but not in as many words:
 - A. oppression of local people
 - B. a forced change of government or head of state
 - C. forced conversion to Christianity, another religion, or no religion (e.g., the Ottoman empire and Islam or the USSR and atheism)
 - D. often connected with slavery
 - E. theft of national resources or artifacts
 - F. theft of land
 - G. imposition of a new language
5. So what do the parrots in the story 'really' represent? (Portugal's colonies)
6. Can we find any more parallels between the parrots and the Portuguese colonies? These may include, but are not limited to:

- A. the parrots are caged
- B. they are forced to speak the language of their 'owners'
- C. they had no choice in being taken to Portugal
- D. the Gray parrot reacts to his position with resignation, the Green parrot reacts with violence
- E. they are landless - they have lost their habitat

Homework Task: Writing a Characterization (10 min)

Now that the students have analyzed the characters and contrasts between the Gray and the Green parrots in the story, as well as what they represent, they have all the information they need to be able to write a characterization of either parrot for homework (200-400 words).

Depending on their proficiency or familiarity with writing characterizations, you may have to remind students of the basic structure and expectations of a characterization.

You could either print out the handout on writing a characterization above and read through it as a class, or you could use it as a reference sheet and collect ideas on the board about what you should include in the introduction, main part and conclusion and how to quote the source. Students tend to either quote far too much or completely forget to reference the source, so the use of short, highly relevant quotations is one important point to emphasize here.

Redemption and Poetry

“Two Poems” by Csenger Kertai, translated by Diana Senechal

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/two-poems-csenger-kertai/>

Students engage in the close reading of a poem, examine ideas around redemption, love, and faith, and consider how different translation choices can affect a poem.

Learning Objectives

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

- Close-read a poem
- Reflect critically on the concept of redemption
- Observe different registers of meaning (individual, symbolic, religious)
- Consider choices made by translators of poetry

Assessment

Group discussion

Writing assignment

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

Materials Needed

“Two Poems” by Csenger Kertai, translated by Diana Senechal

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/two-poems-csenger-kertai/>

Printed out copies of the first poem, “Redemption”

Chalkboard or white board to take notes

Approximate Length

Lesson One (50 minutes)

Lesson One

Introduction (10-20 minutes)

Give each student a copy of the first poem, “Redemption”. Ask them to read it quietly. Then, ask for a volunteer to read it out loud. Then, ask for another one (ideally, at least three different people will read it out loud—depending on the size of the class, you may wish to ask each student to read it out loud!). Be sure to tell them that they can read it however they like; that it does not have to sound like the previous person’s version—they can read at any tempo, pause where they choose, etc. Tell them that many of Kertai’s poems have been set to music, and invite anyone brave enough to try singing (or rapping) the poem! Ask them what they thought of the poem. Ask if hearing it read aloud by different people led them to notice something new about it, or hear it differently. Ask what stood out to them, which lines they liked most, why, etc.

Main Ideas (10 minutes)

Now, ask them what the poem is about, overall. Make a list of ideas on the board (redemption, love, loneliness). Ask them to try to rewrite the main idea of the poem as a single sentence, and to write that sentence on their copy of the poem. Give them a moment or two to think about it, then ask people to share their sentences. Write some of them on the board, if there is space. Note the differences between them, the different ideas they see the poem as conveying. Ask them: if you wanted to persuade someone that your sentence was the right one, how would you do it?

Close Reading (20-35 minutes)

Explain that the task you have before you today is to create a **close reading** of this poem. This means that you will answer two questions: What is this poem doing, and how does it do it? In other words, what is this poem trying to convey, and how does it try to accomplish that?

Go back to the poem together (if you can project it onto a wall, or onto the board, this may be helpful). Skip the first two lines, and look at the rest. What are they saying? What is being described? What images are used?

Focus on specific words: what is the difference between saying that apple trees “root into” the words, as opposed to “grow out of” them? What is an “erased crucifix”? Invite them to take notes on their copy of the poem, circling words that seem significant, annotating it, making notes in the margins, or writing down questions they have.

Now look at the first line, about redemption being the hardest thing to describe. Discuss, as a class, the meaning of the word “redemption”. Observe the way the first line seems to introduce or frame the rest of the poem.

- How does it connect with the rest?
- Who is being redeemed? Is it the speaker, or the “you”?
- Who is “you”?
- What if “you” is God, how does this change the meaning of the poem?

When they have made some progress, pull up the translator’s note and share it with them, particularly the second paragraph, that explains how the translator chose to render the first line. Invite them to experiment with trying to rewrite some of the lines in various ways, using different words but preserving the same meaning (or perhaps changing it slightly!), to see how it affects their sense of the poem.

When you are nearing the end of class, be sure to try to synthesize the discussion and offer a few different ways that the ideas you all have generated could be turned into a thesis about the poem.

For instance:

- “This is a poem about how love is redemptive, the speaker describing his/her love for a person that perseveres in spite of ill treatment, the imagery of the erased crucifix and deaf ears stand for unexpected ability or power.”
- “This is a poem about the failure of redemption, the speaker is unable to stop loving the other person, and feels useless; their only comfort is a perception of the other person’s flaws.”
- “This is a poem about a person’s relationship to God, and struggle with religious faith.”

Optional: Have them write this new sentence on a sheet of paper, along with the sentence they wrote at the beginning of class, and turn this in to you at the end of class

Homework: Essay

Ask the students to produce an interpretation of the second poem as homework.

Home, Identity, and Belonging

From *Where I Call Home* by Marc-Antoine Cyr, translated by Charis Ainslie

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/drama/where-i-call-home-marc-antoine-cyr/>

In this lesson, students consider the concepts of home, identity, and belonging in conjunction with reading from *Where I Call Home* by Marc-Antoine Cyr. Students read an excerpt from the play which primarily takes place in a classroom and examine these themes through interactions between teacher Kevin Kevin and student Martin Martin. In the second class, students read the translator's note about Charis Ainslie's two versions of the translation—"The Garlic" and "The Gravy"—and her decision whether to localize the play for a U.K. audience. Finally, students write their own localized version of the play.

Learning Objectives

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

- Read critically
- Examine the concepts of home, national identity, and belonging
- Discuss opinions on the topic of localization and translation
- Craft a writing assignment

Assessment

Class discussion (pair and group)

Writing assignment

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

University students

Materials Needed

From "*Where I Call Home*" by Marc-Antoine Cyr, translated by Charis Ainslie

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/drama/where-i-call-home-marc-antoine-cyr/>

Suggested resources on Arthur Rimbaud:

- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arthur-Rimbaud>
- <https://poets.org/poet/arthur-rimbaud>
- <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/france/paris/articles/rebel-yell-arthur-rimbaud-the-enfant-terrible-of-poetry/>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (60 minutes)

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

Lesson One

Warm up (5 minutes)

Ask students, what does "your country" mean to you? What symbolizes "your country"? Brainstorm and list answers on the board.

Introduce the text. The play opens with an exchange between a teacher and a student on the topic of “What does France mean to you”?

Getting to Know You / Bring Down the Moon (25 minutes)

Read the first section of the play one time silently. Read aloud with a partner the second time. For the third reading, ask one pair to read aloud in front of the class.

During the repeated readings, ask students to consider how the characters Kevin Kevin and Martin Martin identify themselves and how they perceive each other. Underline the lines that support your idea.

Discuss these ideas with a partner, comparing chosen lines. Then discuss the following questions:

- How are the list you brainstormed about your country and the list about France in the play similar or different? Do you think the list is stereotypical or does it provide some insight into the country?
- Martin Martin says to Kevin Kevin, “What do you want? Proof? Isn’t it enough that I’m here?” and “Why do you want to know where we’re from, Sir? You know this is home for us.” What do you think Martin Martin wants Kevin Kevin to understand?
- What signifies national identity? What does it mean to belong? Is there a difference between defining a country on the national and personal level?

Liar By Night / Getting to Know You / Bring Down the Moon (25 minutes)

Read the remainder of the play one time silently. Read aloud with a partner the second time. Ask one pair to read in front of the class.

Again, during the repeated readings, ask students to consider how the characters identify themselves and how they perceive each other. Underline the lines that support your idea.

Discuss these ideas with a partner, comparing chosen lines. Then discuss the following questions:

- What is the “Big Project”? How does it relate to the theme of identity in the play?
- What can be inferred from the objects brought by the students (Alyssa, Jordany, Fabio, Fatmanur) and Kevin Kevin’s comments? Why do you think Martin Martin doesn’t bring anything?
- What is the significance of names in the play? Is there a relationship between naming and belonging?

Assign Homework (5 minutes)

Martin Martin brings up French poet and writer, Arthur Rimbaud, and two quotations from his work:

- “I is another.”
- “The wolf howled beneath the leaves. Like him I consume myself.”

Conduct some research into Rimbaud and his work. (See the list of suggested resources below.) Be ready to share your answers to the following questions at the beginning of the next class.

- What did you learn about Arthur Rimbaud, his life, and his poetry?
- Why do you think Marc-Antoine Cyr chose to refer to Rimbaud’s work in the play?
- How do the quotations from Rimbaud’s work relate to the themes of identity and belonging?
- How has reading about Rimbaud informed your understanding of Martin Martin’s character and the play?

Suggested resources on Arthur Rimbaud:

- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arthur-Rimbaud>
- <https://poets.org/poet/arthur-rimbaud>
- <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/france/paris/articles/rebel-yell-arthur-rimbaud-the-enfant-terrible-of-poetry/>

Lesson Two

Review (25 minutes)

Discuss the homework. Students share the information they found about Rimbaud with the class and discuss the homework questions.

Translator's Note (25 minutes)

Localization is the process of adapting a translation to a certain country or region. Ask students if they can give an example of localization, which might be more familiar to them in the areas of manga, gaming, or advertising. (See this article for some specific examples <https://www.smartling.com/resources/101/examples-of-localization/>)

Read the translator's note and then answer the following questions.

- The translator discusses the possibility of localizing the play for a U.K. audience. If the play were localized to your area, could it be adapted to fit the current situation there? What changes could be made to the list at the end of the first part, for example? (Refer to the warmup activity from Lesson One.)
- In your opinion, should a translator localize texts? Does the process of localization reinforce national identity? What are the advantages and disadvantages of localization?

Assign Homework (10 minutes)

Choose to complete one of the following writing assignments. Be ready to share your work in an upcoming class.

1. Imagine that you have been asked to localize the play for audiences in your geographical area or region. Rewrite the first part of the play, making substitutions that reflect its symbols, culture, and politics. Then write an analysis of your scene to explain the choices that you made.
2. Listen to a discussion between the author and translator from the Foreign Affairs Theater Company. (<http://www.foreignaffairs.org.uk/podcast-5-questions-episode-1/>). Write a one-page reflection on the following:
 - a. Which questions and answers were the most interesting for you? Why?
 - b. If you could ask additional questions to the playwright and translator, what would you ask? Why? You may want to think about topics related to the scenes from the play, the writing or translating process, the audience, cultural differences, national identity, and so on.
3. In your opinion, what factors are important for national identity? Examine "Views about national identity becoming more inclusive in U.S., Western Europe" from the Pew Research Center. (<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/05/05/1-national-identity/>) Write a one-page reflection on the following:
 - a. How do your views compare to those of people in the U.S. or Western Europe?
 - b. Which of these factors are included (or not included) in the excerpt from the play, and do they correlate with the statistics about France given in the article?

c. Is theater an effective medium for examining this topic?

The Meaning of Place

“Karamazov” by Aida Moradi Ahani, translated by Siavash Saadlou

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/karamazov-aida-moradi-ahani/>

Aida Moradi Ahani reflects on memory, grief, broken dreams, and the Caspian Sea in her essay “Karamazov.” In this lesson, students will do the same, examining first “Karamazov” and then composing short essays reflecting on their own places.

Learning Objectives

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

- Reflect on the power of place in the personal essay
- Compose a short essay of their own meditating on place

Assessment

Comprehension questions

Class discussion

Essays

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

University students

Materials Needed

“Karamazov” by Aida Moradi Ahani, translated by Siavash Saadlou

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/karamazov-aida-moradi-ahani/>

Supplementary Materials

The Brothers Karamazov discussed on the podcast *Writ Large*, a conversation between Zachary Davis and Yuri Corrigan

<https://www.writlarge.fm/episodes/the-brothers-karamazov>

Monika Greenleaf on Dostoevsky and *The Brothers Karamazov* in conversation with Robert Harrison on *Entitled Opinions*

<https://entitledopinions.stanford.edu/monika-greenleaf-dostoevsky-and-brothers-karamazov>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (50 minutes)

Lesson One (50 minutes)

Reading Comprehension

Before class, have students read “Karamazov” on their own and prepare short answers/notes to the following questions about the piece.

- What does Ahani mean by “moments of sweet bewilderment”? Have you experienced this feeling before? How and when?
- What does Ahani mean by “the same distortions to which no history is immune”? How does this

relate to the Esther Greenwood quote that precedes it? Do you have any landscapes that have felt these sorts of distortions?

- Throughout the essay Ahani states her opinion directly, almost in short aphorisms. For example:
 - “It is for our dim glow that we are terrified of ‘bewilderment’ but still go after that which we have lost; similarly, humankind dreads the unknown but travels to new places all the same.”
 - “We always count on the ‘is’.”
 - “Some have called it ‘realization’, or ‘actualization’ even, but there is more to it than meets the eye. You believe you’ve found the answer—an intellectual discovery of sorts about the self, or even about the other. But the further you go—if you go—the more the answers will lose their shape, becoming mutilated and mind-boggling, yet leading us to new answers that can be even more painful, albeit more refreshing.”

Choose one of these examples, or find another in the text, and write a short response to it. Do you agree with Ahani? Can you provide an illustrative example from your own life?

- The Caspian Sea is a powerful presence in Ahani’s life. What roles does it play? How does Ahani’s understanding of its importance in her life evolve?
- What does Ahani mean by “a journey within a journey”?
- Why is the piece titled “Karamazov”? How does it relate to Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*? At what points does Ahani allude to the text? (You can incorporate a brief overview of *The Brothers Karamazov* here, perhaps using a clip from the podcasts referred to in the Supplementary Materials above. Or you can ask the students to conduct research and bring in their own summaries).
- What does Ahani mean by “I discovered that all things were bifurcated into water and dry land”?

Small Group Work (15 minutes)

Have students discuss their answers and more general reactions to “Karamazov” in small groups.

Class Discussion (15 minutes)

Reconvene as a class and have each group report on their discussions. Ask the students to discuss points of agreement and areas where their opinions diverged.

Free Write (15 minutes)

Just as Ahani used the role of the Caspian Sea in her life and her family’s history, students will examine a significant place in their life and what it means to them.

For ten minutes, ask students to free write about three places they have lived or visited and that have a special resonance in their lives. Perhaps they encountered these places in moments of “sweet bewilderment” or at turning points in their lives. Perhaps they experienced moments of epiphany or self-actualization there. Or maybe these were places where conflicts in their lives came to a head.

Ask students to focus on specific sensory details to make these places alive to their readers.

For five minutes, ask students to share the results of the free write in class. Have students ask follow-up questions to help their peers brainstorm on possible ways to expand their writing into a longer essay.

Assign Homework (5 minutes)

For homework, have students choose one of these places to expand on in a short essay, approximately 500 words. Students should both describe the place and reflect on what it means to them. Students will then share these in the next class.

The Art of Words

“from *My Dear You*” by Jasna Jasna Žmak, translated by Samantha Farmer

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/my-dear-you-jasna-jasna-zmak/>

In this lesson, students reflect on the loss of languages, dialects, and specific words, first in the excerpt from Jasna Jasna Žmak’s *My Dear You* and then both globally and in their own cultures. They then explore these ideas in a range of creative writing exercises.

Learning Objectives

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

- Analyze a text
- Engage in group discussions
- Write creative pieces with relevant vocabulary
- Discuss the process of language evolution
- Reflect on the loss of languages and dialects across the world

Assessment

Participation in group discussions

Creative writing assignments

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

Materials Needed

“from *My Dear You*” by Jasna Jasna Žmak, translated by Samantha Farmer

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/my-dear-you-jasna-jasna-zmak/>

How Languages Evolve – Ted Talk

[How Languages Evolve - Ted Talk](#)

Where did English Come from? – Ted Talk

[Where did English come from?](#)

Supplementary Materials

[Why does the West use Roman numerals?](#)

[Where do new words come from?](#)

[Roland Barthes anecdote on word loss and Australian tribes](#)

Approximate Length

Lesson One: 60 minutes

Lesson Two: 60 minutes

Lesson Three: 60 – 90 minutes

Lesson One (60 minutes)

In-class Discussions and Exercises

Ask students to read the “from *My Dear You*” by Jasna Jasna Žmak

- Ask them to underline any sentences that stood out to them
- What do they think of the idea of a word disappearing every time a person dies? Ask them to write down potential pros and cons of a language changing and losing certain words

Žmak imagines humans as ‘walking dictionaries’

- Ask students to think of this concept of a walking dictionary. Ask them to use their imagination: it could be anything - person, a wall, a tree, a building, an owl
- Ask them to jot down some points about this walking dictionary that they have conjured in their minds – who/what is the walking dictionary? Why is it the walking dictionary? How old is it? What is the breadth of its knowledge?

“If we knew that every word represented an entire life, then maybe we’d think twice before we said it, before we wrote it.” Ask students:

- What words are sacred or special or important to you?
- Why are they special? Is it the word itself? Is it the memory associated with it? Is it the way you discovered the word? Is it because of a linguistic property?
- What specific words conjure specific emotions? Write down a few examples (at least 5)

Following the last question, ask student to read this line at the end of the essay again:

“I think its good if all the words I don’t like continue to exist, because if anything will save us from calamity, its’ words”

- Ask students to voice their opinions about that sentence.
- What do students think of the phrase “the power of words”? Is there such a thing and why?

Ask students to jot down a few points for these questions:

- What languages do you speak?
- Imagine living in a world where like in the text, a word is assigned to you and disappears with you after you die. Which word would you choose and why?
- Choose 4 other people in your life. Pick a word for them and explain why this word would be assigned to them

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

Group Discussion

How are words influenced by different cultures and time periods?

Break students into small groups. Ask them to discuss the following questions:

Now think about the older generations that you have encountered in your life.

Have you noticed any differences in the vocabulary or choice of words used between generations?

What kind of differences have you noticed? Write a few examples for each generation. (For example, my grandparents used to say words/phrases like the world-over (which is not used as often now) and ‘I

say' – a phrase to depict they're about to say something, a phrase that was carried over from British English during colonization. What do you think has influenced these changes in the use of vocabulary?

Think about the language/languages you speak. Do these languages have any influences from other languages? The text mentions Serbo-Croatian for example. Do you know words or phrases that have been borrowed or integrated from another language? (For example, Nepali is based off of Sanskrit, and Sinhalese have words from Portuguese, Dutch, and English because of colonization and from Tamil because it's the second most spoken language in Sri Lanka)

If there are influences, how might that affect what words are chosen for people? Might national or cultural identities be attached to certain words?

Watch the Two Short Videos

How Languages Evolve – Ted Talk
[How Languages Evolve - Ted Talk](#)

Where did English Come from? – Ted Talk
[Where did English come from?](#)

If a word disappeared with every person, how do you think that might affect the evolution of language? How would it affect literature? How would it affect historical documents? How would it affect cross-cultural experiences?

Can you recall any literature you have read where the vocabulary was different to what is written/spoken now? How did you navigate this difference in language? (The ever so famous Shakespeare might be an easy example)

Thinking about the evolution of words

- Why and how do you think languages evolve?
- What might a language or culture lose by letting words disappear?
- What are some words that you think would be a pity to disappear? Why?

Lesson Three (60 – 90 minutes)

Take Home Creative Writing Exercises

For these writing exercises, ask students to incorporate words from their non-English languages if that's something they do when speaking at home. They can also be encouraged to experiment with register and dialects, mixing archaic terms and contemporary slang. They can experiment with multiple voices including that of a parent or grandparent.

1. Ask students to take out their notes on their version of a walking dictionary. Use these notes to write a story about your walking dictionary.
2. Ask students to think about a world where a series of words disappears with each generation. Write a few short paragraphs (amounting to a total of 500 words) about this

world.

3. Choose 350 words from a language that you speak, and compose a poem using only those words.

FEEDBACK

Thanks for taking the time to read our Winter 2022 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/asymptote4edu>. We look forward to hearing from you!

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