

Poetry of the World

Week 2

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East Asian Poetry

African Poetry

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Irish Poetry

Caribbean Poetry

Sufi Poetry

Warm Up Exercise

- Think of a favourite story of yours. This could be a story you grew up with (say a fairy tale like snow white or folk tale like the tortoise and the hare) or a story from more recent, say a good book you've read or film you've seen.
- Adapt that story into a short poem. You can do a simple retelling of that story in a poetic way, you can tell the story from the perspective of one of the characters, or you change the story itself to correct a flaw you found in the original telling.
- You have **5 minutes**.

East Asian Poetry - China

- China has had a interesting and close relationship with poetry. In Chinese history, poetry as a form of personal expression was a more private activity, where as poetry used for entertainment, religious purposes, and service to the Emperor or Empress was more public.
- There have been many forms of Chinese poetry throughout millennia, each different school named after the current dynasty of the country at that time – poetry under the Ming dynasty was called ‘Ming Poetry’.
- Chinese poetry exists with a close relationship to other forms of art. A Chinese poem would normally be accompanied by chanting, dance, or, surprisingly commonly, painting.

‘On The Stork Tower’ by Wang Zhihuan

“The Sun Along The Mountain Bows;
The Yellow River Seawards flows
You Will Enjoy A Greater Sight
If You Climb To Greater Height”



Understanding Chinese Poetry in English can be difficult as part of the form of Chinese Poetry is how many characters would be on a line.

This changed from dynasty to dynasty. With the Tang dynasty (from when 'On The Stork Tower' was written) the custom was five characters on each line.

Modern Chinese poetry has broken away from this and embraced a more western 'free style' of poetry, however it is debated in China today as to whether this free form of poetry counts as authentic Chinese poetry.

East Asian Poetry - Japan

- Japanese poetry did not actually exist until the Chinese people introduced poetry to them, and because of this the two share striking similarities.
- However, Japanese poetry is much more experimental. The emphasis in Japanese poetry is on how many syllables a line has, not characters. The focus is on how the poem sounds, not how it is written. The most famous version of this is the Haiku, a poem which starts with a line of 5 syllables, then a line of 7, then another line of 5, and so on.
- The 'Collaborative verse' is another form of Japanese poetry, where a 'honoured guest' would begin a poem with a stanza, followed by a stanza from the host, and then following stanzas would be composed one by one by each guest in attendance.

Writing with syllables

- We're going to try an exercise. You are going to write a poem in the style of a Japanese Tanka poem.
- A Tanka poem is a style that follows this order:
 - line 1 – 5 syllables
 - line 2 – 7 syllables
 - line 3 – 5 syllables
 - line 4 – 7 syllables
 - line 5 – 7 syllables

You can even extend this to create a poem in a Waka style, which simply adds one more line of 7 syllables at the end of your Tanka poem.

This poem can be about anything you want, but if you're stuck for ideas these forms usually work best when telling fictional stories, so like we did in the warm-up, choose a favourite story of yours and adapt it to this method.

You have **10 minutes**.

African Poetry

- Similarly to Native American poetry, African poetry is closely linked to African culture. Serving as an oral tradition, poetry in Africa was more centred around word of mouth as opposed to typical literary based arts.
- African Poetry can best be described as a form of story telling. African poems put the focus on narrative, and incorporate performance qualities like song, rhythm and dance.
- Poetry is used in Africa to impart morals and life lessons, such as respect and gratitude.

“Sometimes When It Rains” – Gcina Mhlophe

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNTksUjElRw&ab_channel=CherieMason

Gcina Mhlophe is a African poet and actress. Her philosophy is that the arts inspire a sense of self that she calls ‘magic’. Her style incorporates music and characterisation in a way that brings the words to life, and is an excellent example of African poetry.

- In a post-colonial era, poetry exists as a strong form of black expression. Modern African poetry strides to heal the damages done to African communities and cultures by bringing indigenous art forms back to the people after being lost for so long in the days of slavery and colonialism.
- Over seas, such as in the western world, African poetry has taken much more of a root in the idea of change. Spoken word pieces such as 'When a Black Man Walks' by Neiel Israel put emphasis on the unfair treatment of people in colour in society, and in many ways poetry like this exists as a form of rebellion.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsC0Li4S6LQ&ab_channel=ButtonPoetry

What can we learn from the poets of Africa?

- We're going to try an exercise, you have two options:
 - 1) Write a poem that incorporates another medium, be that song, music, or characterisation. Think about how this medium serves the poem you are writing, is it more engaging?
 - 2) Write a protest piece. Think about something in the world you want to change, that you consider unjust. Write a poem in response to this – how this issues affects the world at large, a group of people, or you specifically.

You have **10 minutes** to do **ONE** of these exercises.