

## PROGRAMME MATERIALS:

### THE LEARNING AND TEACHING OF POETRY

### IN THE LITERATURE IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Aim of PDP: not to provide “model answers” to examinable texts;  
not a session on reading poetry/literature;  
a sharing session on learning and teaching of poetry (with practical implications for the classroom)

### INTRODUCTION: TEXTUAL VS CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF POETRY

Guiding Questions: i) What sort of knowledge/insights can we obtain from poetry?  
ii) How does a poem convey knowledge/insights?

“Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation; for so Aristotle termeth it in the word ... that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight.” (From Philip Sidney’s *An Apologie For Poetrie*)

Teaching (around) set texts; e.g. historical background to Romantic and Modern Poetry

#### Romantic Movement

- ⇒ aesthetic, intellectual, political movement in Europe
- ⇒ reaction against Industrial Revolution: rationality, alienation
- ⇒ city: urban, man-made, place of alienation, not “natural”, corruption
- ⇒ nature: natural, made by God, innocence, simplicity, purity, spirituality
- ⇒ primacy of emotion, individual motivations
- ⇒ romantic nationalism
- ⇒ artist/poet as solitary, unique genius: singular inner experience

#### Modern Poetry

- ⇒ distinctions/overlaps between “modern”, “modernism”, “modernity”
- ⇒ city as a place of spiritual/social alienation
- ⇒ pace of life, fragmented experiences, incomplete meaning/understanding
- ⇒ finding meaning in mundane/fleeting moments
- ⇒ role of language/poetry in modern times
- ⇒ aesthetic innovation (Ezra Pound: “Make it new”)

Understanding key distinctions between Romantic and Modern Poetry via visual texts;  
understanding poetry and literature as part of a larger aesthetic/intellectual culture

- Image of Romantic Painting: Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, 1818

From William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"

Five years have past; five summers, with the length  
Of five long winters! and again I hear  
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs  
With a sweet inland murmur.—Once again  
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,  
Which on a wild secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

- Photographs as examples of modern aesthetic:
  - Henri Cartier-Bresson's "Last Days of the Kuomintang, 1948"
  - Martin Parr's "New Brighton, 1983"
  - Saul Leiter's "New York, 1960"
  - Saul Leiter's "Reflection, 1958"
  - Daido Moriyama's "Stray Dog, 1971"

Ezra Pound: "In the Station of the Metro"

William Carlos Williams: "The Red Wheelbarrow"

From T. S. Eliot: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

## **STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE ANALYSIS AND APPRECIATION OF POETRY**

"A poem is a small (or large) machine made out of words." (William Carlos Williams)

Note: Obviously, the various elements of poetry work together and are dealt with discretely only as a way of identifying poetic features.

HOW A THEME/MEANING EMERGES FROM A POEM: IMAGERY, LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

William Blake: "The Sick Rose"

Other EGs: Blake's "Ah, Sunflower", Allen Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra", Robert Frost's "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening"

POETRY AS A FORM OF ARGUMENT: FORM AND PERSUASION

Shakespeare: "Sonnet 18"

Shakespeare: "Sonnet 130:"

HOW VOICE SHAPES A POEM: LANGUAGE AND TONE

Aphra Behn: "Love Armed"

Other EGs: Sylvia Plath's "Daddy", "Lady Lazarus"

Note:

- i) Students must be able to identify and discuss the various elements of poetry.
- ii) In essays, it's important for the students to be able to discuss the meaning of poems in relation to the elements (of voice, language, imagery, form, etc).

## **HANDS-ON POETRY WRITING ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE POETRY APPRECIATION**

### **EXERCISE 1: FREE ASSOCIATION**

1. Consider the following words. What does each word remind you of?

ice	poem	blue	shiny
book	bottle	school	happy
lightning	cake	friend	sleep
cockroach	pink	arm	noodle

2. Write a poem using one of the words in each line.

### **EXERCISE 2: LIMITED ASSOCIATIONS**

1. Look at the words in the two columns.
2. Write a poem – each line of your poem must use one word from Column A and one word from Column B.
3. Example: “childhood” and “grass”:  
Childhood is like grass, because we are growing and growing although no one can see us growing.

#### Column A

sad  
pain  
wild  
joy  
Hong Kong  
study  
words  
childhood  
adult  
change  
good  
bored  
teach  
thin

#### Column B

water  
grass  
cold  
clock  
building  
flower  
table  
tiger  
rabbit  
siew mai  
nose  
door  
silver  
sofa

### **EXERCISE 3: ONE MOMENT**

1. Look around and observe the things and people around you.
2. Describe 3 objects as if they are animals. What are they doing?
3. Describe 3 persons around you: associate them with a colour and an animal.
4. Describe yourself as if you are an animal.

Example:

I am sitting on the floor.  
A book is yawning  
on the table like a cat.

My schoolbag  
is on the floor,  
quiet as a rabbit.

The shoes I'm wearing  
are puppies licking my feet.

Johnny is blue.  
He is squirming like a dolphin.

Jim is silver. He is looking  
at everyone like an eagle.

Jenny is green.  
She is blinking her eyes  
like an owl.

I am a tiger staring and staring  
at every single one and every single thing.

To increase students' appreciation of i) imagery, and ii) relationship between literal and figurative meanings.

The students may write the poems in groups. After having written the poems, students are asked to explain their poems to the class, and explain what the images mean. They would also explain the meaning associated with the images.

**Exercise 4: Writing Between the Lines** [adapted from Behn and Twichell p. 155]

1. Write in the spaces between the lines of the following poem.
2. Your writing must make sense in relation to the printed words.
3. Remove the original poem, leaving only your own words.
4. Revise your poem into a coherent poem that makes sense on its own.

**Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening (by Robert Frost)**

Whose woods these are I think I know.

His house is in the village though;

He will not see me stopping here

To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer

To stop without a farmhouse near

Between the woods and frozen lake

The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake

To ask if there is some mistake.

The only other sound's the sweep

Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

To increase students' appreciation of i) natural imagery, ii) rhyme scheme and iii) voice.

Explain what their own poems mean, with emphasis on how the meaning is related to the rhyme scheme as well as voice (tone/language).

## **ADDITIONAL MATERIALS**

### **Reference books on poetry**

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*

Behn, Robin and Chase Twichell, eds. *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises From Poets Who Teach*.

Hirsch, Edward. *Responsive Reading*.

Hirsch, Edward. *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry*.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*.

Sidney, Philip. *An Apology for Poetry / The Defence of Poesy*.

### **Poetry books by poets from Singapore and Hong Kong**

#### **Singapore**

Boey, Kim Cheng. *Another Place*.

Pang, Alvin. *City of Rain*.

Tan, Paul. *Curious Roads*.

#### **Hong Kong**

Fan, Kit. *Paper Scissors Stone*.

Ho, Louise. *Incense Tree*.

Ho, Tammy Lai-ming. *Hula Hooping*.

McKirdy, David and Peter Gordon, eds. *Eight Hong Kong Poets*.

McKirdy, David. *Accidental Oriental*.

Rapatahana, Vaughan, Kate Rogers and Madeleine Slavick, eds. *Outloud Too*.

Rogers, Kate. *Foreign Skin*.

Wong, Jennifer. *Goldfish*.

Wong, Nicholas. *Crevasse*.

### **Online resources**

*Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*. [[www.asiancha.com](http://www.asiancha.com)]

*Poetry Foundation*. [[www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)]

*Poetry.Sg* [[www.poetry.sg](http://www.poetry.sg)]

*Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*. [[www.qlrs.com](http://www.qlrs.com)]

### **List of regular poetry events in Hong Kong**

Kubrick Poetry. [<http://kubrickpoems.blogspot.hk/>]

Peel Street Poetry. [<http://peelstreetpoetry.com/>]

Poetry Outloud Hong Kong. [<https://www.facebook.com/PoetryOutLoudHK/>]