The background of the cover is a close-up photograph of dark, rich soil. In the lower-left quadrant, a small, smooth, yellowish object, possibly a seed or a piece of debris, is visible. The soil is textured with small pebbles and organic matter. The overall lighting is natural, highlighting the textures of the earth.

←ASYMPTOTE

# Life Support

Summer 2024 educator's guide



## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### Summer 2024 | LIFE SUPPORT

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Summer 2024 issue of the *Asymptote* Educator's Guide!

Our latest guide contains four unique lesson plans to help you bring exciting and diverse world literature into all sorts of classrooms. Each lesson is paired with poems, fiction, and drama from "Life Support," our Summer 2024 issue, which is available here:

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

The first lesson in this guide "The Poetics of Displacement" allows students to explore the ways in which language and imagery create literary and political meaning.

"Translators in the Spotlight," the second lesson, provides students with an opportunity to explore the interrelationship between reading, writing, and translating. In "Rewriting as Translation" students will consider the transformation of prose into poetry as a form of translation. In the final lesson in this guide, "Poetry and Creative Writing," students will use poetry as a springboard for their own creative prose writing.

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 of 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](mailto:education@asymptotejournal.com).

# The Poetics of Displacement

## “My Grandmother Fatima’s Cough” by Jamal Saeed, translated by Catherine Cobham

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/my-grandmother-fatimas-cough-jamal-saeed/>

In this lesson, students will unpack and attempt to define the word ‘displacement’. They will examine *My Grandmother Fatima’s Cough* by Jamal Saeed, exploring the ways in which the story’s metaphors and language create a poetics of displacement. In the second lesson, students will use historical research to make connections between storytelling and politics, using the ideas of Saeed’s text to produce a piece of critical writing.

### Learning Objectives

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

- Define ‘displacement’
- Analyse a story for literary devices and linguistic features
- Make inferences about a story’s meaning
- Respond to Saeed’s piece critically

### Assessment

Independent Reading

Comprehension Questions

Essay Writing

### Approximate Grade Level

University Students

### Materials Needed

“My Grandmother Fatima’s Cough” by Jamal Saeed. Translated from the Arabic by Catherine Cobham

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/my-grandmother-fatimas-cough-jamal-saeed/>

Oxford English Dictionary definition of the word ‘displacement’

<https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=displacement&tl=true>

Jesse McCarthy’s definition of ‘displacement’ in psychology

<https://english.fas.harvard.edu/english-172ld-literature-displacement>

History of the Tantara Massacre

<https://stories.workingclasshistory.com/article/12770/tantara-massacre>

<https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/jps/tantara.html>

## Approximate Length

Lesson One (60 minutes)

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

## Lesson One

### Warm up (10 minutes)

Ask students to look up and note down the dictionary definition of the word 'displacement':  
OED defines 'displacement' (n) as *removal of a thing from its place; putting out of place; shifting; dislocation.*

Ask students how the definition changes if we replace 'thing' with 'people'. Do we need to change the pronoun 'its'? Why? Ask students to edit their definition accordingly. Note responses on the board.

Write the following on the board:

*In psychology, a displacement is the transference of a site of trauma from one person, scenario, or object to another.* (Source: Jesse McCarthy, Harvard University)

How does the addition of 'trauma' here change the definition of 'displacement'?

Students add to or amend their definition.

### Independent Reading and Analysis (35 minutes)

Students read the story independently.

Once they have read the story, they should answer the following questions.

Give the students a handout with the following questions:

- What is the symbolic significance of Fatima's cough? Why is this the title of the story?
- What is the furniture a metaphor for?
- What is the significance of the verbs 'named' and 'enumerated' in the opening paragraph?
- What is the effect of the personification of the house? Unpack the description 'naked, desecrated, violated.'
- How does the motif of haunting feature in the story?
- How does the writer create a tone of malaise with the description of 'the air, which seemed heavy with our sorrows'?
- Naming is significant in the story. The grandmother names the 'sandy dress because it was the color of sand'; the narrator's mother pleads with grandmother 'not to mention the word death'. How does language work in these instances?
- Do names, evocation, and labels have power? If so, what kind of power?
- How do the mother's tears act as a temporal metaphor?
- How does the writer create a juxtaposition with the grandmother's smile as a contrasting

temporal metaphor?

- How is the shared bedroom a reparative act and an antidote to displacement?
- What is the hidden bundle a metaphor for? Connect this with the definition of displacement from the starter activity.
- What does the key symbolize?

### **Class Analysis (10 minutes)**

Students share their notes as part of a whole-class analysis. Capture their ideas on the board.

### **Plenary (5 minutes)**

Students use the whole-class analysis to answer the following question:

*How would you define 'displacement'?*

Ask students to share their ideas and agree on a working definition as a class.

### **Homework**

Students can complete the handout for homework if they did not manage to finish in class.

Trigger Warning: Students may find the homework task upsetting.

Ask students to research the Tantura massacre in Palestine. They will use their notes in the next lesson's writing task.

## **Lesson Two**

### **Warm up (10 minutes)**

Recap the learning from the previous lesson. Write the students' working definition of 'displacement' on the board.

Ask students to share what they've learned from their homework task about the Tantura massacre in Palestine.

If they found the task upsetting, create a safe space to discuss their thoughts and feelings.

### **Class Discussion (10 minutes)**

Recap answers from last lesson's question:

- What is the symbolic significance of Fatima's cough? Why is this the title of the story?

Possible answers include: *Fatima's cough is a type of haunting and psychological trauma. It is also a witness and testimony to the horrors Fatima has seen (Tantura massacre). It is connected to the importance of oral history and only in telling her story to other displaced people at the end does the cough transform into a death rattle.*

### **Independent Writing Task (35 minutes)**

Display the following extracts from the story on the board:

- 1) “I was young,” she said. “I stopped myself coughing as I ran along beside my mother towards the village of Fureidis at the foot of Mount Carmel. I saw how they put men in barrels, men I knew.” She sighs and looks towards the window as if her eyes were drilling through the glass and the weight of accumulated time. “That day the hot weather had begun and the wheat was ready for harvesting. No more than a few weeks after the founding of Israel, the newborn Israeli army shelled our village and attacked it with firearms. People called these soldiers the Alexandroni Brigade. They forced the men to climb into the barrels and opened fire on them. I heard the voices of the trapped men and saw blood flowing from the holes left by the bullets in the bodies of the barrels that summer. They say they forced our people to dig trenches, and then buried them there. My son Zahdi says they levelled the ground over the dead men and turned it into a parking lot.”
  
- 2) “In Tantura,” she said, “the soldiers put my father into one of those barrels. His smothered voice still haunts me. He was one of the dead men inside the barrels, but my ears picked up his death rattle and that’s when the cough started. Doctors don’t know the cure for it. I’ll recover the day I return to our home there in Tantura, and then I’ll get rid of it at once.”

“We Palestinians don’t die from stray bullets. We die from intended bullets.”

Using the extracts above and the research from their homework task, students will answer the following question:

How can storytelling and oral history act as resistance to different types of displacement?

### **Plenary (5 minutes)**

Ask a student to read their answer aloud to the class.

### **Post-lesson Feedback and Evaluation**

The ideas explored in these lessons are complex and emotive. You could ask students to note down their reflections and thoughts as a homework exercise.

In the following lesson, use the students’ writing to generate discussion on the importance of storytelling and resistance.

# Translators in the Spotlight

from “Three Translators” by Krzysztof Umiński, translated from the Polish by Soren Gauger

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/krzysztof-uminski-three-translators/>

This lesson plan introduces students to “Three Translators” by Krzysztof Umiński and translated from the Polish by Soren Gauger. The piece spotlights Joanna Guze, who translated many of Albert Camus’ works for readers in Poland. Students read the nonfiction text, creating a timeline of events and discussing their impact on Guze’s work. Throughout the lesson, students are encouraged to explore the issue of censorship, as well as the interrelationship of reading, writing, and translating.

## Learning Objectives

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

- Make predictions about the text
- Create a timeline using information from a nonfiction text
- Explore the issue of censorship
- Conduct independent research on a topic

## Assessment

- Class participation
- Creating and using a timeline of the text
- Sharing independent research with classmates

## Approximate Grade Level

- University students

## Materials Needed

from ‘Three Translators’ by Krzysztof Umiński, translated from the Polish by Soren Gauger

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/krzysztof-uminski-three-translators/>

Is life meaningless? And other absurd questions – Nina Medvinskaya (TED-Ed Video)

<https://youtu.be/vPtzpjC7TF4?si=21brIBGPHNso8lTn>

## Additional Materials

Interviews from the Asymptote Blog

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

PEN’s global community condemns book bans around the world

<https://www.pen-international.org/news/pens-global-community-condemns-book-ban-around-the-world>



## Approximate Length

Lesson One (50 minutes)

Lesson Two (50 minutes)

## Lesson One (50 minutes)

### Pre-lesson homework

If students are unfamiliar with Albert Camus, they should watch the following video and take notes about what they learn.

Is life meaningless? And other absurd questions – Nina Medvinskaya (TED-Ed)

<https://youtu.be/vPtzpjC7TF4?si=21brlBGPHNso8lTn>

### Introduction to the text (15 minutes)

Students discuss the pre-lesson homework and make predictions about the text:

- What did you learn from the video about Albert Camus, his work, and his philosophy?
- As of 2016, Camus' novel *The Stranger* had been translated into 60 languages. What specific challenges do you think translators of his novels, plays, and essays may have faced?

Introduce the piece, 'Three Translators,' using information from the Translator's Note.

### Reading (15 minutes)

Read the text once and answer the following question while reading:

- According to the text, what difficulties did translator Joanna Guze face? Were these difficulties similar or different to the ones you predicted?  
(e.g., gender discrimination, war, surveillance, closed borders, censorship, banned books)

### Create & discuss the timeline of events (20 minutes)

Reread the text and start making a timeline of the events relevant to Joanna Guze's life, noting the date, place, event, and its relevance. If unfinished during class, students complete for homework.

- Example: 1941: Lviv, Poland. Tadeusz Boy Țeleński was killed. He was a prolific translator of French literature into Polish, and Guze would later follow in his footsteps.

Note: To make the timeline, students could make individual timelines as they read. Alternatively, they could collaborate in the classroom (affixing post-it notes to a large paper timeline) or online (using a tool such as [Miro](#)). Depending on the aims of the class, students could also be assigned to provide additional information about unfamiliar names, places, and ideas they encounter in the text.

## Lesson Two (50 minutes)

### Review & discuss the timeline (15 minutes)

Students discuss their timelines in groups. Have a few groups share their answers to the following questions with the class.

- Summarize the text, using the timeline as a reference.
- Which event(s) do you think were most significant? Why?
- Which event(s) had the biggest impact on Guze's life and her translation work? Why?

### Discussion Questions (30 minutes)

Discuss in small groups. Have groups share their answers with the class.

- *“If reading and translation—the latter being an extreme version of the former—means relinquishing one's own voice and opening oneself up to another's, translating a journal would be the ultimate and most radical form of this surrender.”*  
To what degree do you agree that translating is an extreme form of reading? That a translator gives up their own voice to bring readers an author's voice?
- Why do you think Guze was so drawn to the work of Camus? How did censorship affect her work as a translator?
- Would you rather be the person who “[...] spends their life recording their daily exploits, thoughts, and emotions” or the person who “[...] spends their life translating them”? Why?
- Did you find any other thought-provoking passages in the piece? Why did they catch your attention?

### Assign homework (5 minutes)

- Research a literary translator. Prepare a short presentation about the translator, the significance of their work, and any challenges they may have faced in bringing an author's work to a wider audience. (If time is short, students could share information online, using a tool such as [Padlet](#).) Many of the interviews on the Asymptote blog are with translators and could be used as a source of information: <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/interviews/>
- Research a current or historical example of a banned book. Prepare a short presentation about the book, why it was banned, and the general situation of banned books in the country. (If time is short, students could share information online, using a tool such as [Padlet](#).) One introductory article on the topic is from PEN <https://www.pen-international.org/news/pens-global-community-condemns-book-ban-around-the-world>

### Note

For another Asymptote for Educators lesson plan related to Albert Camus, see “A Rendezvous with 20<sup>th</sup> Century French Theatre” based on *The Ghosts of Alloué* by Rémi De Vos, available at <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/assets/educational/asymptote-guide-for-educators-2022-fall.pdf>

# Rewriting as Translation: Poetry and Prose

“The Poet” by Adelheid Duvanel (translated from the German by Tyler Schroeder)

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/the-poet-adelheid-duvanel/>

In this lesson, students will consider the transformation of prose into poetry as a form of translation or ekphrasis. Initially, they will identify the main themes of Duvanel’s prose and speculate as to the identity of the narrator. Then they will read Schroeder’s translator’s note, discussing the connections he makes between poetry and prose. In order to work towards a poetic rewriting of the piece, students will collect characteristics of each literary form, noting characteristics both forms share. The second lesson starts with a consideration of ekphrasis as a literary form, which will then be contrasted with the rewriting of prose as poetry as a possible further form of ekphrasis. Finally, the students will write their own version of “The Poet” as poetry and present this to the class in the following lesson.

## Learning Objectives

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

- Discuss the narrator as an entity in the text
- Identify the main themes of a piece of prose
- Evaluate the effect of themes and motifs
- Interpret Schroeder’s translator’s note
- Compare the characteristics of poetry and prose
- Relate ekphrasis to writing prose as poetry
- Rewrite prose as original poetry

## Assessment

Independent reading

Partner discussion

Class discussion

Presentation of own research

Independent writing assignment

## Approximate Grade Level

University students

## Materials Needed

“The Poet” by Adelheid Duvanel, translated from the German by Tyler Schroeder.

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/the-poet-adelheid-duvanel/>

Definition of literary “motif” on the Poetry Foundation website.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/motif#:~:text=Glossary%20of%20Poetic%20Terms&text=Unlike%20themes%2C%20which%20are%20messages,work%20and%20across%20longer%20collections.>

The J.Paul Getty Museum's description of ekphrastic poetry.

[https://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/curricula/poetry\\_and\\_art/downloads/ekphrasis.pdf](https://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/poetry_and_art/downloads/ekphrasis.pdf)

### **Approximate Length**

Lesson One (60 minutes)

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

## **Lesson One**

### **Preparation**

Students read the piece "The Poet" before the lesson.

### **Warm up (10 minutes)**

In the translator's note, Schroeder mentions how the gender of the narrator is only hinted at instead of directly given, by using the male form 'Dichter' instead of the female form 'Dichterin,' and that this clue is lost in translation by the neutral English 'poet'. Before you show the students the translator's note, ask the students whether they have the feeling that the narrator is female or male, and whether they can pinpoint why they feel that way. Have them first talk to a partner, and then share with the class.

In the second half of the warm-up, have them each come to the board and write what they think is a main theme or motif of the prose on the board. If students are unclear on the differences between these terms, use the definition of motif given on the Poetry Foundation website in the materials section (which also contrasts the definition with that of a theme).

Themes should be recorded on the board in one color, motifs in a different color. Tell the students that they can't use the same word twice.

Review the board as a whole and discuss the general impressions and feelings that the words on the board create.

### **Reading the Translator's Note (20 minutes)**

Have the students read Schroeder's translator's note independently (university students should take around 5-10 minutes).

Then discuss the following questions as a class:

1. Why did Schroeder choose to translate the term *Dichter* as 'poet' rather than 'writer'?
2. How does Schroeder describe 'becoming literary'? Would you agree?
3. What did Schroeder claim he had no intention of doing in his translation?
  - a. Why did he attempt to avoid this?
  - b. Do you think writers should attempt to avoid this?
  - c. How successful do you think he was?
4. What is the last paragraph about? Would you say that Schroeder has achieved what he aimed to in translating?

**Drawing a 'bright line' between poetry and prose** (10 minutes)

Ask the students to look back through Duvanel's text and highlight aspects which strike them as particularly 'poetic'.

Have them share their results with a partner and explain why these devices or phrases strike them as poetic.

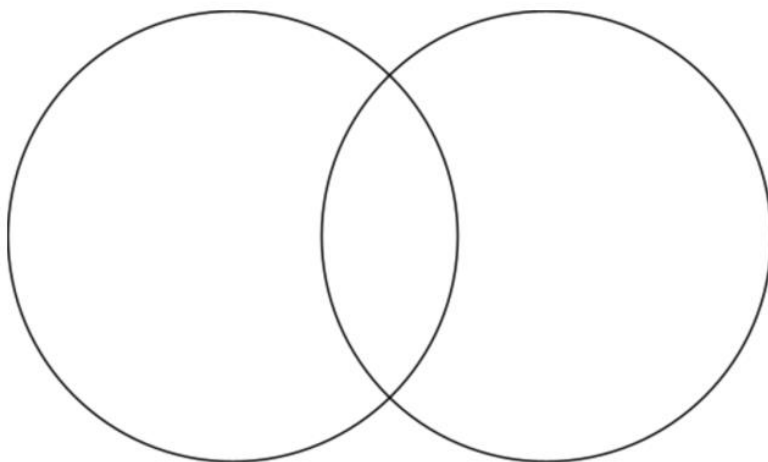
**Comparing poetry and prose** (20 minutes)

Where is the line between poetry and prose? In working towards a poetry rewriting of this piece, students must first be able to distinguish between aspects that poetry and prose can share, and aspects that are almost always unique to either writing style.

To organize their notes, have them draw a Venn diagram like so:

Poetry can go on the left, prose on the right, and shared aspects in the middle.

Students first brainstorm aspects on their own and write them into their Venn diagrams. Aspects fairly



unique to poetry could include a stanza form, rhyme and meter, and aspects fairly unique to prose could be character development, direct speech etc., although the students will come up with many different ideas.

Then draw a large Venn diagram to the board and have them come and write at least one aspect on the board each, paying attention not to write the same thing twice. Review, compare and contrast the terms on the board. Are they all in the right place?

Discussion questions to round off this phase: *Is there really a clear difference between poetry and prose? Is there a dividing line between where poetry ends and prose begins?*

## **Homework**

Set the following homework for lesson two: Research the phrase 'ekphrasis'. Bring a definition and one example of an ekphrastic translation to class.

## **Lesson 2 (45 minutes)**

### **Introduction: Homework Review (15 minutes)**

Have a student volunteer to write the definition of ekphrastic translation that they found on the board. It should be something like this:

*the use of detailed description of a work of visual art as a literary device.* (Oxford languages)

Students compare and contrast their own definitions to the one on the board. Are there any other definitions that were found?

Ask a volunteer to pin their found example on the board and read out the poem or piece of prose to go along with it. Afterwards, ask them why they chose this piece.

### **Ekphrasis, Poetry and Prose (5-10 minutes)**

Discuss the following question as a class:

*Ekphrasis is usually writing poetry from visual art. However, could rewriting prose as poetry be seen as a form of ekphrasis?*

(In a way, yes, because it's a change of artistic format. Ekphrasis in the Ancient Greek sense also included an "exploration of how the speaker is impacted by their experience with the work",

as described in the resource from the J.Paul Getty museum defining ekphrasis in the materials section. This sense is certainly captured by a poetic rewriting.)

Note: There is apparently no definition online of a word for rewriting prose as poetry. The students could possibly create a word themselves as an optional extension exercise after the writing exercise.

### **Rewriting “The Poet” as poetry: preparation/planning (20 minutes)**

The next task the class will be working towards is an individual rewriting of Duvanel’s “The Poet” as poetry.

Ask the students to look back through the text and to list aspects they would keep or focus on when writing the poem. Poetry is usually a lot more condensed than prose, so it would be difficult to preserve every theme or event.

Students then choose a title for their new poems. They don’t have to keep the original!

Class discussion: Have the students share their proposed titles and explain why they chose them.

Then, as a class, look back at the Venn diagrams from the last lesson and recap the characteristics of poetry that they may want to consider when writing their poems.

### **Homework**

Students rewrite “The Poet” as poetry. Each response will be completely individual. Less confident students could stick more to the wording and structure of the prose, while more confident students may only use the piece as a creative starting point.

In the next lesson, have volunteers read their poems out to a partner or to the class.

As a class, reflect on the diversity of the poetic responses throughout the class. You could use this as a starting point for a discussion about the subjectivity of reading.

# Poetry and Creative Writing

“Three Poems” by Ana Elisa Ribeiro, translated by Anita Di Marco

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/three-poems-ana-elisa-ribeiro/>

In this lesson, students will use poetry as a springboard for their own creative writing. They will examine three poems by Ana Elisa Ribeiro, reading between the lines to make conjectures about the poems and their backstory. They will then attempt to pare down their stories to emulate the poetic style of Riberio.

## Learning Objectives

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

- Make inferences about a poem’s meaning
- Write a short story
- Evaluate the effects of structural choices

## Assessment

Close Reading

Creative Writing

## Approximate Grade Level

High School Students

## Materials Needed

“Three Poems” by Ana Elisa Ribeiro, translated by Anita Di Marco

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/three-poems-ana-elisa-ribeiro/>

## Approximate Length

Lesson One (60 minutes)

## Lesson One

### Warm up (5 minutes)

Introduce the poems by reading the first paragraph of the translator’s note to the class. Emphasise the sentence ‘Thanks to her usual economy of language, sensitivity and conciseness her poems are tricky, but always leave room for readers’ interpretations.’

Ask students how important reader interpretation is compared to the intention of the author. Collect their answers on the board.



### **Close Reading (10 minutes)**

Students read the poems individually.

Once they have read the poems, students answer the following questions:

- Who is the 'she' referred to in 'Pregnancy'?
- What do you think the plot of the poem is? What is missing from the poem?
- Who are the 'people' in 'Square'? Where do they imagine the poem is set?
- What is the relationship between the 'I' and 'she' in 'On absence'?

### **Creative Writing (35 minutes)**

Students select a poem to write a short story 'fleshing out' the plot of the poem.

They will make inferences about the poem, reading between the lines to create their characters and plotline. They will keep the same title as their chosen poem. Stories should be no longer than a single page.

Once the students have completed their short story, they will compare stories with students who have chosen the same origin poem.

They will then take a scalpel to their text and whittle it down to the following:

'Pregnancy' = 16 words

'Square' = 54 words

'On Absence' = 56 words

(This mirrors the wordcount of the original poems)

Before they make the cuts, refer students to the translator's note where Di Marco refers to the challenge of "vocabulary, pronouns, use of lowercase letters in several lines, and lack of traditional punctuation." Ask students to consider and make use of these in their own edits.

### **Plenary (10 minutes)**

Ask students to reflect on the difficulties they faced with these structural constraints. Was it difficult to retain the meaning of the story with the wordcount restriction? Students who chose the same initial poems to work from swap their edited stories with one another. They should read them and share their interpretations with one another.

Did the meaning of the story change with the absences?

Do they think it makes the stories more effective? Can they still be considered stories?

Why do they think Ribeiro chose to leave so much out of her poems?

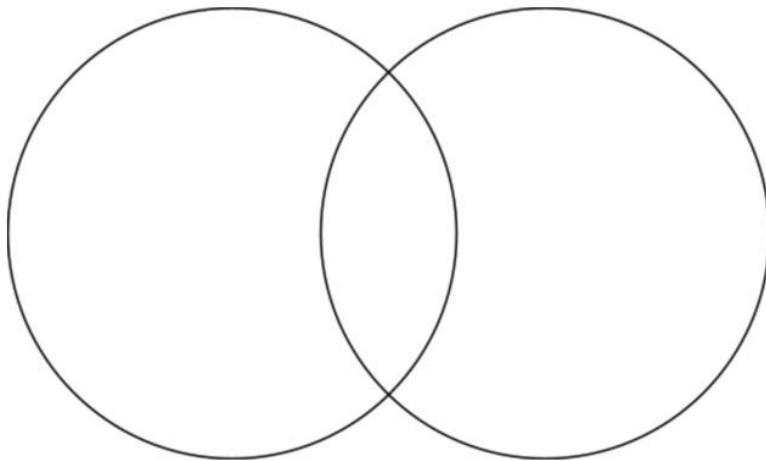
Capture their responses on the board.

### **Homework:**

## Comparing Poetry and Prose

Where is the line between poetry and prose? From a prose rewriting of these poems, students should now be able to distinguish between aspects that poetry and prose can share, and aspects that are almost always unique to either writing style.

To organize their notes, have them draw a Venn diagram like so:



Poetry can go on the left, prose on the right, and shared aspects in the middle.

## **FEEDBACK**

Thanks for taking the time to read our Summer 2024 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!

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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