



*Winter 2025
educator's guide*

✦ASYMPTOTE



EDUCATOR’S GUIDE

Winter 2025 | NEW FORMS

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Winter 2025 issue of the *Asymptote* Educator's Guide!

Our latest guide contains five 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 non-fiction from "New Forms," our Winter 2025 issue, which is available here:

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/jan-2025/>.

The first lesson in this guide "Language and Gender Performance" allows students to explore the ways in which language both constructs and mirrors gender performance. "Humor and Hyperbole," the second lesson, provides students with an opportunity to explore satire as a literary tool for social critique. In "Image, Intent, and Erasure" students will examine visual imagery and motifs in erasure poetry. "The Language of the Ghazal" allows students to explore the rich tradition of the ghazal through annotation and discussion. In the final lesson in this guide, "Finding your Wasteland," students will use literary fiction to help them invert traditionally negative literary signifiers.

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.

Language and Gender Performance

“The Irreproachable Woman” by Alfonsina Storni, translated by Anna Evelyn White and Alina Lazar

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/alfonsina-storni-nosotras-y-la-piel/>

In these lessons, students will explore the connections between language and gender performativity. They will examine ‘The Irreproachable Woman’ from “We and Our Flesh” by Alfonsina Storni, exploring the ways in which the text’s language satirizes both advertising-speak and gender performance. They will then create their own piece of satirical writing.

Learning Objectives

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

- Make inferences about a text
- Analyse a text for literary devices and linguistic features
- Apply ideas from literary theory to a text
- Create their own piece of creative non-fiction

Assessment

Independent Reading

Comprehension Questions

Creative Writing

Approximate Grade Level

High School Students

University Students

Materials Needed

“The Irreproachable Woman” by Alfonsina Storni, Translated from the Spanish by Anna Evelyn White and Alina Lazar

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/alfonsina-storni-nosotras-y-la-piel/>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (45 minutes)

Lesson Two (45 minutes)

Lesson One

Warm up (10 minutes)

Display this quotation from “The Second Sex” by Simone de Beauvoir on the board:

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”

Ask students what they think de Beauvoir means by this. What are the different ways you can ‘become’ a woman? Note their answers on the board.

Now ask students to write a definition of the word ‘woman’ in their books.

NB: For university students, also show the following quotation from Judith Butler’s “Gender Trouble”:

“gender proves to be performance- that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed”

Ask students what they think the performance of gender entails. Note answers on the board.

Independent Reading and Analysis (25 minutes)

Introduce the text by reading Storni’s bio.

Students read the text independently.

Once students have read the text, give them a handout with the following questions:

- How do the phrases “irreproachably put together” and “all made up” relate to de Beauvoir / Butler’s idea about gender performance?
- How does Storni use adjectives in paragraphs 1 and 10 to emulate the language of advertising? Why does she do this?
- What is the effect of the adverbs “obviously”, “forcefully” and “surely” used in paragraphs 4 and 5? What tone do they create?
- How does the juxtaposition of nature and artificial beauty in paragraph 5 contribute to the satirical tone?
- How does the extended metaphor of hydration in paragraph 6 play with hyperbole?
- What is the effect of the third-person pronoun ‘her’ in paragraph 9?
- In paragraph 9, the writer itemises the woman’s facial features: how does this relate to gender performativity? How does the sentence structure contribute to the idea of gender performativity?
- What is the effect of enumerating the “movements required to maintain irreproachability”?
- How is the adjective ‘irreproachable’ in the title ironic?

Class Analysis (10 minutes)

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

Possible answers include: *Storni uses adjectives, hyperbole, adverbs, and advertising-speak in order to satirise the performance of gender woman are expected to undertake. She creates a satirical / ironic tone in order to present the absurdity of gender performance for women. She creates a juxtaposition between nature and feminine artifice in order to showcase the frivolity of gender performance. The scientific quantification of women's movements further ironizes the art of female seduction.*

Lesson Two

Warm up (5 minutes)

Remind students of key ideas from the previous lesson.

Ask them to revisit their definition of a 'woman' from last lesson's plenary. Allow them time to amend the definition if they choose to do so.

Creative Writing (30 minutes)

As a class, agree on an ironic adjective to ascribe to men. For instance, *The Debonair Man*.

Ask students to work in pairs to draft a definition of a 'man'.

Now students will work individually to produce a creative piece of writing satirizing masculinity in the vein of Storni. They will use the title agreed upon as a class. They should use the features they identified in the textual analysis in their own writing.

Plenary (10 minutes)

Students share their writing with the class.

Students revisit their definition of a 'woman' and make any final changes. Ask students to share their definitions with the class. Point out any similarities and differences in the definitions.

Homework

Reflection task:

What did you learn about gender performance when you were writing your piece?

What is the relationship between language and gender?

How does gendered language impact us in the real world?

Humor and Hyperbole: Analyzing Satire, Symbolism, and Social Critique

"Pickled" by Johanna Sebauer Translated from the German by Lillian M. Banks and Aaron Sayne

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/pickled-johanna-sebauer/>

This two-part lesson introduces students to the satirical short story "Pickled", guiding them through analysis of its humor, tone, and critique of societal norms. Students will explore satire as a literary tool and its ability to highlight absurdities in human behavior and media sensationalism. The lessons culminate in a creative writing activity where students mimic the story's tone to craft their own satirical piece.

Learning Objectives

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

- Analyze the use of satire, humor, and hyperbole in literature
- Evaluate themes of perspective, tradition, and conflict in *Pickled*
- Identify and discuss tone, point of view, and characterization as literary devices
- Apply techniques of satire and exaggeration in their own creative writing

Assessment

Close Reading
Class discussion
Written analysis
Creative writing

Approximate Grade Level

University Students

Materials Needed

"Pickled" by Johanna Sebauer Translated from the German by Lillian M. Banks and Aaron Sayne

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/pickled-johanna-sebauer/>

Additional Materials (Optional)

Excerpts from "A Modest Proposal" by Jonathan Swift

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1080/1080-h/1080-h.htm>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (60 minutes) plus optional extension activity

Homework (45 minutes)
Lesson Two (60 minutes)

Lesson One

Introduction: Trivial Conflicts and Overreactions (10 Minutes) Write this prompt on the board: What is something small that has caused a disproportionately big conflict in your life or the world?

Students discuss in pairs or small groups for 5 minutes, sharing examples. Possible examples include: Family arguments over dinner choices, a viral social media controversy, or public outcry over a celebrity's outfit.

Facilitate a brief whole-class discussion, connecting their examples to the idea of satire and hyperbole in satirical newspapers (ex: [The Onion](#) or [Der Postillion](#)). What purpose/function do these publications serve?

Introduce the idea of *trivial conflicts becoming significant*, setting the stage for the story's themes.

Reading (20 minutes)

Read "Pickled" aloud, dividing the text into sections for volunteer readers to emphasize narrative tone and pacing.

While reading, students should underline or note examples of:

- Satirical language
- Moments of exaggeration, hyperbole, and/or absurdity
- The characterization of Pertak and the narrator

Example Notes

- Satirical language: "The jar's glossy green label became an icon of debate."
- Exaggeration: The office becomes divided over the pickle jar, with absurd levels of tension.
- Pertak's characterization: His obsession with the pickle jar reflects stubbornness and rigidity.

Discussion (30 minutes)

Guided Discussion Questions:

1. What are Pertak's defining traits as a character? How does the narrator portray him, and is the portrayal fair?

2. How does the pickle incident escalate beyond reason?
3. What is the story critiquing about culture and media?
4. How does the story's humor serve its themes?
5. What does the debate over pickles symbolize about human conflicts or traditions?

Optional Extension Activity: Compare “The Pickle Affair” to other satirical pieces, such as excerpts from Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal”.

Homework: Analytical Essay (30-60 minutes, take-home)

Prompt: Analyze how humor and exaggeration are used in “The Pickle Affair” to critique media sensationalism and human behavior. Provide textual evidence to support your analysis.

Lesson Two

Warm-Up: Tone Exploration (10 Minutes)

Begin by reading an excerpt from “Pickled” aloud that demonstrates its tone and humor (e.g., the pickle jar description).

Discuss:

- What makes this scene funny or absurd?
- How does the author balance exaggeration with realism?

Emphasize how the tone drives the humor and underlines the critique of societal behavior.

Guided Brainstorming (10 Minutes)

Step 1: On the board or chart paper, brainstorm mundane topics with the class. *Examples might include:*

- Losing a sock in the laundry.
- Running out of salt or breaking the coffee pot in the kitchen.
- A minor email typo causing a misunderstanding.

Step 2: As a group, escalate one mundane topic into a dramatic, satirical scenario. (*For instance, a broken coffee machine might cause a citywide caffeine crisis.*)

Step 3: Identify key elements needed to create satire: tone, exaggeration, and critique.

Writing Workshop (30 Minutes)

Students will work individually or in pairs to create a humorous op-ed or short story based on a mundane topic of their choice.

Encourage students to mimic the tone and exaggeration seen in “Pickled”.

Provide a brief checklist for guidance:

- Choose a mundane topic.
- Identify a central character or narrator.
- Escalate the situation step by step, weaving in humor and absurdity.
- Add a subtle critique or message about societal behavior.

Sharing and Peer Feedback (10 Minutes)

Invite a few volunteers to share their drafts with the class.

After each reading, classmates provide constructive feedback:

- *What made the piece funny?*
- *How did the tone or exaggeration contribute to its success?*
- *What societal critique did you notice?*

Conclusion

Wrap up with reflections:

- What does satire reveal about the way humans perceive and respond to the world?
- Why do trivial things often spiral into larger conflicts in life or fiction?
- Encourage students to think about how humor can serve as both entertainment and critique.

Image, Intent, and Erasure

“In Each, Every Direction” by Martin Piñol

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/in-each-every-direction-martin-pinol/>

In this lesson, students will examine visual imagery and motifs using Martin Piñol’s piece “In Each, Every Direction”. Students will distinguish between images and motifs, and practice using motifs in their own creative writing. In the second lesson, students will gain familiarity with the genre of erasure poetry, ultimately creating their own erasure poems.

Learning Objectives

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

- Identify and analyze visual imagery and literary motifs
- Compose creative writing employing motifs
- Explore the process and purpose of erasure in creative writing
- Create erasure poems

Assessment

Group discussion

Comprehension questions

In-class writing activities

Creative writing assignments

Approximate Grade Level

University students

Materials Needed

“In Each, Every Direction” by Martin Piñol

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/in-each-every-direction-martin-pinol/>

“On Erasure” by Leigh Sugar

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/158286/on-erasure>

Any 1-2 of the following erasure poems:

1. Doris Cross’s columns, erased from Webster’s Dictionary
2. “Declaration,” by Tracy K. Smith, erased from the US Declaration of Independence
3. “Pages 1-4, an excerpt from The Ferguson Report: An Erasure” by Nicole Sealey
4. “Voyager, Book 3 (Chapter 6)” by Srikanth Reddy
5. Excerpts from “Zong!” by M. NourbeSe Philip

Additional Resources

What is Imagery?: A Literary Guide for English Students and Teachers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uX413tALG7Q>

What is a Motif?: A Literary Guide for English Students and Teachers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isBKoIORntI>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (75 minutes)

Lesson Two (75 minutes)

Preparation

Students read the piece “In Each, Every Direction” by Martin Piñol before class. Ask students to highlight instances of visual description they find striking.

Lesson One:

Warm up (10 minutes)

Display the two versions of Qi Kun’s poem referenced in Piñol’s piece, side by side as shown:

“The fisherman has already left,
The island is still there.
The island’s full of cliffs,
Bashed by waves upon waves.
Who is that man there
Climbing toward the island summit?
In a straw rain cape,
He appears tiny on top.”

“When the fisherman is gone,
The island is still theory.
The island’s full of summits,
Beaten by waves upon waves.
Who has invited him there?
He’s on the summit alone.
Dressed in a coir raincoat,
He’s dwarfed on the summit.”

Ask students to read each version aloud for the class, a few times. Discuss the following questions as a class:

- What differences do you note between these two translations of Qi Kun’s poem, on the level of language?
- How do these distinctions of language impact your reading experience and interpretation of each version?
- What do you make of the images presented by this poem? What is the emotional tenor of the scene depicted? Point to specific aspects of visual description that contribute to your interpretation.
- *Optional exercise – ask students to make a quick sketch of the scene depicted in this poem.*

Use student responses to discuss the poem’s visual imagery, encouraging students to make connections between the image/s presented and the poem’s emotional subtext.

Class discussion (15 minutes)

Gather students’ initial impressions of Martin Piñol’s piece “In Each, Every Direction”. Ask students which image/s from the piece they found particularly striking, and why, encouraging similar connections between the visual imagery and the emotional subtext of the piece. Ask students what role Qi Kun’s poem plays in the text.

Answers may include: *the poem is a jumping-off point for the writer; the two versions of the poem prompt the writer to reflect on the differences between people who seem alike; the writer*

revisits phrasing and images from the poem throughout the piece; as he analyzes the poem, the writer examines experiences of distance and transience in his own life; and so on.

Ask students what they understand by the term ‘motif.’ Discuss the difference between an ‘image’ and a ‘motif’ in a literary text, emphasizing the recurring nature of the motif. Students may be encouraged to look up the term ‘motif’ in the context of visual art as well. Ask students what motif/s they notice in Piñol’s piece. They will likely point to images/figures from Qi Kun’s poem that Piñol revisits throughout the piece: *the island, the summit, the fisherman, the nameless figure, the waves*. Gather their answers on the board.

Discuss the following question: What does the scene presented by Qi Kun’s poem come to symbolize in Piñol’s piece? Encourage a range of interpretations.

Group discussion (25 minutes)

Divide the class into small groups and ask them to discuss the following questions:

- Choose one motif from those listed on the board (e.g., the island) and note places where it appears in the text. What kinds of descriptions usually accompany this motif? What parallels does Piñol draw between this motif and events/spaces/characters from memory?
- What other words and phrases do you notice repeated throughout the text? What effect does the recurrence of these phrases create for a reader?
- How do you interpret the titles ascribed to each section of the piece?
- Note any places in the text where the writer reflects on the process of writing. Circle the verbs that Piñol uses when reflecting on writing. What can these words tell us about the writer’s relationship to writing, to language?
- What do you think Piñol *intended* to write about? What does Piñol end up writing about in this piece? What would you say is the true subject of this piece?
- “Waves are interpretations. From those who witness them at a distance ever growing.” How does this quotation relate to the processes of reading, writing, and translation?

Allow each group to share their answers and record their insights on the board. Take special note of multiple interpretations when students are discussing a particular motif. Discuss the following question as a full class: When you compose a piece of writing, how faithfully does a final draft reflect your initial intentions?

Writing activity (25 minutes)

Taking inspiration from Piñol’s piece, instruct students to expand on the images/figures in Qi Kun’s poem by writing a piece of creative prose (fiction or nonfiction). They may pick any number of the motifs they’ve identified to explore in their piece, with the option to relate these motifs to their own experiences. The following questions may be used as prompts:

- When in your life have you felt like a fisherman leaving the shore behind? Or a tiny figure climbing a hill in the rain? Or the cliffs beaten and bashed by the waves? Or the waves themselves?
- Do you have any memories of waving to someone, dear or distant, as they departed?
- What did it feel like the first time you composed a piece of creative writing?

- Expand on the scene laid out in Qi Kun’s poem. What is the story of the fisherman, the island, the nameless figure on the summit?
- Think of moment in your life when two distinct possibilities were presented to you, as in Piñol’s cliff-jumping anecdote. Write out “two translations of what happened next.”

Homework

Reading:

- Students read the essay “On Erasure” by Leigh Sugar on the Poetry Foundation.

Writing:

- Students continue working on the in-class writing activity, composing a piece of creative prose of about 500-750 words that employs a motif (or many). Instruct students to bring a physical copy of their piece to class.

Lesson Two:

Warm up (10 minutes)

Display Piñol’s “erasure” of Qi Kun’s poem for the class. It may be helpful to display a version where the struck-through words are not visible, as below:

The fisherman
 is still
 full of
 waves upon waves.
 there
 the summit
 In rain

Ask students to read this aloud a few times.

Then discuss the following questions:

- Do you think this erasure is a poem in its own right?
- Compare this erasure to the two original versions of the poem. What has been retained? What has been lost?
- Is the emotional tenor of this erasure similar or different to the original poems?
- What, if anything, has the poem gained from the process of erasure? What have you gained as a reader?
- For what reason did Piñol conduct this erasure exercise? What do you think he gained from it?

Students will likely note the loss of some motifs they identified in the prior lesson, such as ‘the island’ and ‘the nameless figure,’ but may also acknowledge greater ambiguity around the meaning of ‘waves’ in this erasure.

Exploring Erasure Poetry (20 minutes)

Introduce the genre of erasure poetry and recap key takeaways from the essay “On Erasure” by Leigh Sugar. Discuss the following questions and record student responses on the board:

- What are some of the purposes of erasure as identified in the essay? What other purposes do you think erasure could be used for?
- What dangers of erasure does Sugar highlight? What are some other dangers of engaging in erasure?
- What does erasure do to a source text's intention?
- Piñol borrows and intersperses language and imagery from Qi Kun's poem throughout his piece. How is this similar to erasure? How does this differ from erasure?

Read any 1-2 of the erasure poems listed under the class materials. Provide context where necessary about the poets studied and the source texts they used. With each example, encourage students to reflect on the purpose of erasure, and the power dynamics that underpin the erasure project, highlighting the intent of the source text and the intent of the erasure.

Practicing Erasure (20 minutes)

Now that students are familiar with the genre of erasure poetry and the considerations that inform an erasure project, instruct them to practice erasure with excerpts of Piñol's text. First, encourage students to answer a few of the questions that Sugar outlines in her essay:

1. Who/what is being erased? Who/what is doing the erasing? Why?
2. What stance is the erasure writer/poem taking in relation to the source material?

Following this, students may choose a specific section of Piñol's text as their source text and create short erasure poems. Gather as a class to share these erasure poems. Multiple students will likely have chosen the same section of Piñol's piece as a source text – highlight such instances and discuss students' distinct approaches to the same source text. Discuss the following question: did this exercise make you think of Piñol's piece differently? Did it reveal something about the text, or impact your interpretation of the text?

Erasure as Creative Writing (25 minutes)

Instruct students to revisit the pieces of creative writing they composed in response to Piñol's text, and engage in erasure with their own work. Gather and discuss the following questions as a class:

- What did this exercise reveal about your own piece or your writing process?
- How did it feel to erase your own work, as compared to erasing a source text by a different author?
- Does your erasure poem retain any of the motifs you were working with in the original piece?
- Does your erasure poem retain the intention with which you wrote the original piece, or have you drifted?

Assignment

Instruct students to complete their erasure poems and submit these along with their original pieces of creative writing. Teachers may also hold a reading in a future class so students can showcase their work.

The Language of the Ghazal

From “A Park Wished For” by Enver Ali Akova, translated by Zeynep Özer

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/a-park-wished-for-enver-ali-akova/>

In this lesson, students explore the rich tradition of the ghazal, a form with origins in Arabic poetry, by reading Enver Ali Akova’s “No Fish at All”, translated from the Turkish by Zeynep Özer. Through annotation and discussion activities, students develop familiarity with the ghazal and its defining characteristics. To further their engagement, students read the translator’s note and reflect on the poem’s themes and techniques.

Learning Objectives

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

- Read and discuss a ghazal
- Identify the characteristics of the ghazal
- Write an original reflection piece

Assessment

Small group discussion

Writing assignment

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

University students

Materials Needed

From “A Park Wished For” by Enver Ali Akova, translated by Zeynep Özer

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/a-park-wished-for-enver-ali-akova/>

Additional Materials (Optional)

Ghazal (Poetry Foundation)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/education/glossary/ghazal>

Ghazal (Poets.org)

<https://poets.org/glossary/ghazal>

Ghazal Poetry

<https://artincontext.org/ghazal-poetry/>

Mimi Khalvati – Ghazal – Annotation

<https://youtu.be/aqfTRhZXXyY?si=NynkwEFp2ouj0e1h>

Ghazal Poetry: How to Write a Ghazal Poem

<https://writers.com/how-to-write-a-ghazal-poem>

Alliteration, Assonance, and Consonance

<https://www.yourdictionary.com/articles/alliteration-assonance-consonance-poetry>

The Pen, the Throat, the Ear: On Ghazals (Poetry Foundation)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/blog/from-poetry-magazine/85538/the-pen-the-throat-the-ear-on-ghazals>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (60 minutes)

Lesson One:

Reading (10 minutes)

Introduce the poem “No Fish at All”, which was originally written in Turkish and translated to English.

- What image(s) springs to mind when you read the poem?
- What do you notice about the poem?

Discuss students’ ideas in plenary.

Annotation (20 minutes)

Outline the typical characteristics of a ghazal:

- Written about love
- Written in couplets
- Has the same number of syllables in each line
- Has a radeef – a refrain which is repeated
- Has a kafiya – a rhyming phrase which appears before the radeef
- Includes a reference to the poet
- Resistant to narrative structure

Have students annotate the poem “No Fish at All”, marking the characteristics of the ghazal which are used (or modified) in the English translation of the poem. Debrief in plenary.

Note: If necessary, the teacher can explain these characteristics and illustrate them by using one of the couplets from “No Fish at All”. Alternatively, the teacher could introduce the concepts by using a different English language ghazal. (Sample annotations of English language ghazals can be found at “Mimi Khalvati - Ghazal – Annotation”

<https://youtu.be/aqfTRhZXXyY?si=NynkwEFp2ouj0e1h> and Hip Hop Ghazal by Patricia Smith at <https://writers.com/how-to-write-a-ghazal-poem>

Translator’s Note (15 minutes)

Read the translator’s note and answer the following questions:

- What did you learn about the ghazal?

- What did you learn about Özer’s process or approach to translating Ali Akova’s poems?

Analysis of Sound (15 minutes)

Özer says, “Sound then became my guide as I wrestled with repeating consonants, rhymes, and duplications – natural and impactful in Turkish but less so in English. Hence the sibilance, alliteration and repetition of all *twists* and *turns*.”

- What sounds did you notice when reading the poem?
- Can you identify the use of sibilance, alliteration, assonance, consonance in the ghazal? (Definitions available at: <https://www.yourdictionary.com/articles/alliteration-asonance-consonance-poetry>)
- What are the effects or significance of these sounds?

Debrief students’ answers in plenary.

Homework

Write a short paragraph to reflect on one of the following prompts:

- “When I first encountered Enver Ali Akova’s poetry, his lines felt like droplets lingering on a bough, waiting to meet the water below. Deliberate and silent, they created sonic and lyric ripples which patiently expanded far beyond their physical bounds.” Özer uses the image of droplets on a branch to describe the poem. What image(s) sprang to mind when you read the poem the first time? Did this image change or develop as you reread it? Did you notice any “sonic ripples” in the poem? As a reader, how do you perceive the connection between sounds and images?
- “Like the rest of *A Park Wished For*, the five poems here explore a restless movement between interior and exterior spaces, internal voice and interpersonal address, the familiar and the unknown.” When you read the poem, did you notice these shifts? Can you identify any specific examples from the poem? What do they mean to you?

Extension Activities (optional)

A. As the translator’s note mentions, “... the ghazal has seen wide global movement in recent decades, even becoming more prominent in English-language poetry.” Read, annotate, and share a ghazal in English (or another language) with the class. (Some ghazal poems in English can be found at:

- Ghazal (Poetry Foundation) <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/education/glossary/ghazal>
- Ghazal (Poets.org) <https://poets.org/glossary/ghazal>
- Ghazal Poetry <https://artincontext.org/ghazal-poetry/>

B. Write an original ghazal and share it with the class. (Additional information on writing a ghazal can be found at: How to Write a Ghazal Poem <https://writers.com/how-to-write-a-ghazal-poem>)

Finding your Wasteland

From “Personal Identification Number” by Lidija Dimkovska, translated by Christina E. Kramer

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/personal-identification-number-lidija-dimkovska/>

The extract from Dimkovska’s novel covers many different themes, yet one central aspect of it is the dichotomy between the narrator’s research on communes, and her father’s dream of finding a ‘wasteland’ or a kind of anti-commune. The reader’s expectations are inverted throughout the text as the wasteland is first idealised rather than condemned, and secondly exploited as a commercial opportunity. This lesson is designed to help students navigate the space between this key terminology as well as imagining their own versions of Dimkovska’s terminology by inverting other traditionally negative literary signifiers.

Learning Objectives

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

- Identify key associations with the concepts of a commune and a wasteland
- Describe aspects which could link the two concepts of a commune and a wasteland
- Analyze aspects of the extract which create a positive image of a wasteland
- Speculate as to why Dimkovska inverted the traditional negative image of a wasteland
- Create their own fiction that inverts traditionally negative symbolism

Assessment

Class discussion

Independent writing task

Approximate Grade Level

University students

Materials Needed

From *Personal Identification Number* by Lidija Dimkovska, translated from the Macedonian by Christina E. Kramer

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/personal-identification-number-lidija-dimkovska/>

Supplementary Materials

“The Waste Land” by T.S Eliot
[The Waste Land | The Poetry Foundation](#)

“The Waste Land” summary and analysis
<https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/t-s-eliot/the-waste-land>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (60 minutes)

Lesson One

Warm up (15 minutes)

Students have read the extract as homework before the lesson. At the start of the lesson, write the word “wasteland” on one side of the board and “commune” on the other side, with space around both terms. Use different colours for both.

Ask the students what they associate with both terms, as a think, pair, share activity. During the feedback phase, students come and write their ideas on the board as a mind map or the teacher records the ideas on the board. If it doesn't come up on behalf of the students, draw attention to T.S Eliot's canonical, dystopian poem “The Waste Land”. Ask if one of the students could provide a brief description or summary of the poem. If background knowledge is lacking, provide the summary from Litcharts from the supplementary materials above.

After feedback on both sides, ask the students if there is anything that could connect the idea of a commune to the idea of a wasteland? (Cults, coercive control, etc.).

Draw arrows linking the two sides of the board and write the linking ideas in between in a different color.

A positive wasteland? (15 minutes)

Write the leading quote of the story, “a man needs to find a wasteland” on the board.

Ask students to share their initial reactions to this line in the story, and whether that reaction changed over the course of the story. Why did their reaction change?

Ask students to go back to the story and identify instances where the wasteland is described as something positive, as opposed to the traditionally negative associations with the word.

Students then get into groups and compare their evidence.

Understanding the author's wasteland (15 minutes)

In the feedback phase, have the class discuss what they think the author was trying to convey in her positive conception of a wasteland. Answers could include:

- A reaction to an increasingly connected yet alienating world
- Everybody needs a 'wasteland' time of nothingness and the space to rest, relax and recover
- An acceptance of the introverted on the same level as the extroverted
- As a metaphor for the complicated history of Greece, Macedonia and Cyprus as well as a positive look to the future
- As an ironic commentary of Western Europe's stereotyping and exploitation of Eastern Europe
- As a reaction to the capitalist repackaging and marketing of her father's dreams

Closing discussion to this segment as a class: What would your 'wasteland' be? What would it look like?

Writing your wasteland (15 minutes)

Wrap up the activity and introduction to the homework task.

Discuss these questions with the whole class:

- *Which overwhelmingly negative concepts are there in literature?*
- *How could we invert them into something positive?*

Possibilities:

- Darkness, stormy weather, snakes, etc.
- Inverting the imagery or expectations of using such symbolism in literature: What if the snake gave Eve some different advice in the Garden of Eden? What if a storm had unexpected, positive consequences?

Homework task: Write your own short fiction (a short story or a scene from a longer story) of around 500 words that takes an overwhelmingly negative symbol or concept in literature and inverts it into something positive.

In the next lesson, students read and give feedback on each other's pieces, focusing on its negative symbolism and its inversion.

FEEDBACK

Thanks for taking the time to read our Winter 2025 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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