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# The Familiar with the Foreign

Educator's Guide, Summer 2018





**EDUCATOR'S GUIDE**  
**SUMMER 2018 | THE FAMILIAR WITH THE FOREIGN**

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Summer 2018 Asymptote Educator's Guide!

With each new issue, we aim to support educators who want to integrate Asymptote content into their classrooms. We hope that Asymptote's educational materials find their way into a wide range of classrooms and contexts, across regions and disciplines, and so we have tried to design a flexible resource that can supplement various learning environments. This guide includes five different lessons, covering curriculum from middle school students to college and university-level students. Each section contains activity suggestions that can be used in conjunction with each other to form complete lesson plans, or separately to complement your lessons on other content.

Asymptote's Summer 2018 issue, "The Familiar With The Foreign" is also a multilingual feature, and as such, this guide has a more vested interest in language itself as a lesson to be studied. Exposing students to multilingual literature from a young age introduces the world in fictions and forms and expands their imaginative world. It also facilitates more aptitude for empathy, curiosity about the world at large, and self-consciousness about personal and communal culture.

We realize that the age ranges for each lesson vary, and so encourage educators to adjust these lessons to meet their needs, and to record these modifications. Your classroom and teaching experience is valuable to us, and hearing it helps us improve our formation of the next guide. Please leave feedback and suggestions [here](#).

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. We'd especially love to read and share your 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).

# A House, A Home, A Neighborhood

## Learning Objectives:

- Students will engage in close-reading of a short piece of fiction
- Students will practice close-reading and examining how concepts are presented in fiction
- Students will consider connections between ideas
- Students will build connections between the text and their lives
- Students will reflect on cultural difference and understanding

## Approximate Level and Length:

Middle School or High School, 50 minute class

## Homework Assignment:

Read "[The Chronicle](#)" by Intizar Husain

## Warm-Up Activity:

1. Have the students spend the first 10 minutes of class writing about the place they live. What is it like? Do they remember moving in? What is the neighborhood like? What makes it feel like home?
2. Reconvene and briefly for 5-10 minutes to discuss what they wrote about.

## Small Group Discussion:

Break into small groups for 10-15 minutes

1. **Group 1** will examine the first two paragraphs. What ideas or concepts do they set up? How do they relate to the rest of the story?
2. **Group 2** will examine the rest of the first section, up to the star. What happens? What do the characters do when they arrive at the new house? What do we learn about this place, this culture?
3. **Group 3** will examine the second part of the story, focusing on the conversation between the narrator and his friend, who is called Comrade. What do they talk about? What do we learn about them, about their beliefs?
4. **Group 4** will also examine the second part of the story. What happens? How does the narrator feel about it? Is there a plot? Does anything change?

## Final discussion:

Reconvene for 20 minutes. Have each group present their ideas. As a class, synthesize the material from the different presentations and discuss the story:

- What ideas does it present?
- How are the different parts related to each other?
- What kind of world is this?
- What do we learn about the political situation?
- What do we learn about Ikhlāq, the narrator, and how he fits into this world?

## Homework:

Re-read what you wrote at the beginning of class. Expand and develop it – what makes your house a home?

- What kinds of connections are there between your house and the neighborhood it is in?
- What is your connection to your neighbors and your larger community?

# Language in Transit: Understanding Ethnographic Poetry

## Learning Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with stylistic elements of poetry such as enjambment and line breaks
- Students will develop formal public speaking skills
- Students will practice social science skills like research and transcription
- Students will critically connect multi-lingual literature to larger social and geographical concepts such as the diaspora

## Approximate Level and Length:

Late Middle School or High School, Two 60 minute classes

## Materials Needed:

- Copies of Shamma Al Bastaki's [from House to House](#)
- Audio Recorders / Phones or Computer equipment
- Notebooks and Writing Tools

## Context For Educator:

### **Read over excerpt from the Translator's Note:**

*These poems were birthed from interview transcripts that I conducted with elderly members of different Creek communities, and while most of them were conducted in Arabic and some UAE minority languages, such as Ajami, I have translated most of the material into English, keeping some in the original languages, either in the actual script or transliterated where I felt the sounds and oratory quality of the words outweighed their meanings. In the process of making these works, I have been thinking about what is at stake in my choice to write predominantly in English, with a few exceptions where I feel the language needs to stay in its original iteration. Does this deviation from the original spoken languages lie in the choice of writing in English, or does it reside more in the style I am adopting instead? I would say both, with perhaps more emphasis on the latter. Even if my poems had retained the original Arabic or Ajami, Hindi, etc., in which they were spoken, there would still be a considerable difference in style, for the Arabic of the interviews was not classical, but highly colloquial and of the Emirati dialect (and its broken variations). The colloquial essence is not a loan of the English language; it is not a quality I found in English that I sought to emulate in writing these poems: rather, colloquialisms are embedded in the Emirati conversational dialect, which I tried to mimic in my semi-translations.*

## Class 1 - Class Reading:

Ask for volunteers to read sections of it. Read through the whole section as a class.

If there are Arabic speakers in the class, read those sections out loud.

If there are none, observe those untranslated sections in silence.

## Class Discussion:

Discuss the following questions together as a class:

1. What is the poem taking about?
2. Who do you imagine the speakers might be?
3. How does the format of the poetry and the poetic elements impact the reading for you?
4. When listening to these poems, what are you reminded of in your own life?
5. What do you think the relationship of the listener is to the speaker?
6. Why do you think the writer chose to translate these conversations into English only partially?

## **Define Ethnographic Poetry:**

In Greek: Ethnos means “folk/the people” and Grapho means “to write”

Sherry Ortner in “Anthropology and Social Theory” (2006) defines it as “To understand another life world using the self—as much of it as possible—as the instrument of knowing.”

Ethnographic writing focuses on everyday situations with ordinary people, and an emphasis on their point of view.

Talk about Al Bastaki’s poem as a form of ethnographic poetry, and the need for ethnographic poetry, Al Bastaki’s translation decisions in relationship to immigrant communities. Reference the context as necessary for class discussion.

## **Terminology to review with the class:**

- Colloquial language (and colloquialisms) versus Classical language
- Oratory versus Literary
- Dialect versus Language
- Transliteration: where words from another language are spelled out to help you pronounce the word, but not translate the meaning.

## **Poetic elements to highlight in the text:**

- The use of enjambment: when a sentence runs into the next line with no formal punctuation, and continues.
- The use of stanzas: a group of lines that forms a metrical unit called a verse
- The use of format: the text is left-aligned and right-aligned

## **Activity:**

Have students underline certain transliterated words and discuss if they understood the meaning of those words, and how they were able to contextualize it or why they were not able to figure it out.

## **Class 2 - Peer Project:**

### **Create your own Ethnographic Poetry**

**(Offer the option to complete this assignment by yourself, a family member or a friend)**

Respond to one of the following prompts and record your answer into an audio track.

1. What is one of your favourite or least favourite memories?
2. Tell a story about a ritual – it can be cultural, personal or relational.
- 3.

From that audio track, transcribe your words into a text document.

Using the transcription text as a primary source, edit into a poem in the style of House to House, making sure to pay attention to enjambment, stanzas and formatting.

If students are multilingual speakers, feel free to allow them switch codes in the recording and include it in the final piece, using transliteration techniques.

# Analyzing Art As Community-Based Resistance

## Learning Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the relationship between art and immigration in contemporary Mexico
- Students will practice reading nonfiction pieces for argument
- Students will design an artistic project to express resistance to a community issue

## Approximate Level and Length:

High School, One 60 minute class for discussion, Four additional classes for project

## Materials Needed:

- Copies of Cristina Rivera Garza’s [2501 Migrants](#) by Alejandro Santiago
- Poster paper, notebooks, and writing tools

## Context For Educator:

**This lesson explores the following excerpt from the translator’s note:**

*Stories of violence in Mexico have become ubiquitous in the twenty-first century. One might think of the internationally publicized news of the three film students whose bodies were dissolved in acid earlier this year, or the 2014 Ayotzinapa attack on a group of teenagers, but these are just two examples of the horrific events that have been occurring throughout Mexico. As Cristina Rivera Garza puts it, “What we Mexicans at the beginning of the twenty-first century have been forced to witness—on the streets, on pedestrian bridges, on television, or in newspapers—is, without a doubt, one of the most chilling spectacles of contemporary horror.” It is precisely the root of this violence and the pain it causes that Cristina Rivera Garza has endeavored to examine in her book *Dolerse: Textos desde un país herido* (Grieving: Texts from a Wounded Country, 2011). She identifies the horror Mexico has experienced as being “intimately tied to the neoliberal state’s rollbacks of welfare and social protection granted by the 1917 Mexican Constitution and it is linked, too, to the surge of a ferocious group of global capitalists generically known as Narcos.”*

*While the cause of the violence is central to *Dolerse*, Rivera Garza’s true objective is to make pain and suffering visible as a mode of resistance. She explains: “When everything falls silent, when the gravity of the facts far surpasses our understanding and even our imagination, then it is there, ready, open, stammering, injured, babbling: the language of pain, the pain we share with others. And that is the importance of suffering. The political need to express how you cause me pain, to say ‘I grieve with you,’ and to tell you my story.”*

## Pre-Class Activity:

- Have students read Cristina Rivera Garza’s *2501 Migrants* by Alejandro Santiago, including the biographies and translator’s note
- Watch the trailer of a documentary on Alejandro Santiago’s project, available [here](#).

## **Activity 1: Reading Art As Resistance**

### **One 60-minute class**

**Context:** This activity aims to encourage students to consider reading nonfiction as an active and purposeful process, rather than a passive absorption of information. Students will critically analyze how the five sections of *2501 Migrants* by Alejandro Santiago build an argument on art and resistance in contemporary Mexico.

### **Instructions:**

Conduct a class discussion on students' first impressions of the text, with a focus on Rivera Garza's possible intentions behind the piece. Guide the conversation to the following argument from the translator's note:

While the cause of the violence is central to *Dolerse*, Rivera Garza's true objective is to make pain and suffering visible as a mode of resistance.

Split students into five groups and distribute poster paper. Have each group perform a close reading of one section of the piece and brainstorm answers to the following questions, grounding their responses in evidence from the text:

In your view, what is the purpose of your section? How does it relate to the broader objectives of the piece?

What sources does Rivera Garza include in your section? What are the effects of these sources on you as a reader? Consider the use of personal and theoretical elements, as well as the roles of the following concepts: borders, labor and the creative process, the body.

What does it mean to resist? How do you understand the relationship between art and resistance in the context of Alejandro Santiago's project? Consider both the strengths and limitations of art in resistance movements.

Have groups present their responses. Draw connections between sections.

### **Closing Exercise and Homework:**

At the end of class, have students brainstorm a list of social issues in their community. Split students into groups based on the issue they are most passionate about. For homework, have students research this issue as it specifically relates to their community.



## **Activity 2: Creating Art As Resistance**

### **Four 60-minute classes**

#### **Instructions**

##### **Class 1: Ideation**

Revisit the topic of art and resistance. Conduct a class discussion on how Alejandro Santiago's project acts as a mode of resistance and creates a political demand for change. Consider unpacking the following quotations from Rivera Garza's piece:

Halfway between an agora and a small, non-profit business, the creation of the clay migrants challenges, and by challenging, questions, the process of the production of flesh-and-blood migrants. If the former responds to the human needs of the region, providing the community members with a way to stay, that is to say, to stimulate the community, the latter responds to the needs of North American capital that provokes a diaspora that, in Oaxaca and so many other states in Mexico, has left in its wake a rosary of ghost towns.

Alejandro Santiago says that few times has he felt more naked than when in front of a migration officer. He doesn't say that interrogation is a weapon of the empire that harms his body, but he suggests it. What he does say is that this is one of the reasons why his migrants are naked: all of them are permanently there, at the gate, exposing themselves, responding. They are all crossing. Eternal gerund. And I, who have passed so many times over that stretch and who, even now, still endure that subtle bewilderment and that kind of horror that provokes the need to prove who I am, who among all the I's am I; I stand looking at the clay bodies and, suddenly, I feel like I am a part of them.

And that is when you, which is another way of saying I, see us.

Split students into groups based on their chosen community issue. Have students share the research they conducted and brainstorm potential artistic responses to the issue, using notebook paper. Students might consider sculpture, painting, music, theatre, poetry, photography, or a combination of artistic forms.

##### **Class 2: Creation**

Distribute poster paper to each group. Have students begin to design a creative project to address their chosen issue. Students may finish drafts for homework.

##### **Class 3: Peer Review / Revisions**

Have groups briefly present their project proposals, solicit feedback from peers, and work on revisions. Students may continue revisions for homework.

##### **Class 4: Final Presentations**

Have groups formally present their projects to the class.

# Stories in Between and Across

## Learning Objectives:

- Students will read, understand, and discuss a nonfiction reading passage
- Students will identify literary elements used in the reading
- Students will apply what they have learned through a writing activity

## Approximate Level and Length:

High school or university, Two 50 minute classes

## Materials Needed:

- Copies of [\*Stories from the Barbershop\*](#) by Nikola Popović
- Chalkboard/whiteboard
- Highlighters

## Day 1

### Warm-Up Activity: 15 minutes

Share the quotation at the beginning of the piece with the students:

*“The towns and cities of Bosnia abound with stories. In these tales the real and unrecorded history of the region the life of the people and of generations long since passed, are concealed in the guise of unlikely events and under a mask of frequently improvised names.” -Ivo Andric, *The Vizier’s Elephant**

1. Ask students to respond to the quotation by freewriting for 5 minutes. They might also consider the following questions: How is information passed from one generation to the next? How have you learned about the history of your region and people’s lives?
2. Pair students and have them share their responses with a partner. Answers may vary, but may
3. include ideas such as storytelling (oral or written), rituals, education, music, movies, art, and so on. Ask a few students to report on their partner discussions.

### Review of Literary Elements: 10 minutes

Review the following literary elements, which are used in the piece, giving particular attention to any that might be new to students.

- Sensory details
- Simile
- Alliteration
- Repetition
- List
- Rhetorical questions
- Varied sentence length and vocabulary

### Reading and Literary Elements: 20 minutes

1. Briefly introduce the piece and its author and translator. Instruct students to read the first three paragraphs of *Stories from the Barbershop*. In groups of three, each student will read one paragraph aloud. While reading, students highlight or label the use of literary elements in these three paragraphs.
2. After students have finished, call on groups to give examples they found. Then engage in further full class discussion by asking students the following questions:
3. How do you think these paragraphs relate to the quotation at the beginning of the article? What do you think the rest of this piece will be about?

### **Assign homework:**

For homework, the students will finish reading the piece. Students should read for understanding, and they should follow the same procedure to highlight or label the use of literary elements.

Assign students to conduct an internet search on one of the artists mentioned in the reading. They should be prepared to give a brief summary of basic information about the person and what he or she is famous for (about 2-3 minutes). They are:

- Abdul Halim Hafez (musician)
- Yul Brynner (film actor)
- Samir Kassir (writer of history of Beirut)
- Omar Sharif (film actor)
- Fayrouz (Lebanese musician)
- Abdul Wahab (Egyptian composer).

### **Day Two**

#### **Group discussion: 20-25 minutes**

In groups, students discuss the following questions, taking brief notes on their answers. If time allows, recap and develop answers as a class.

1. Compare the two barbers, Farouk and Mike. How are they similar or different?
2. What is the relationship between the opening quotation and the stories of Farouk and Mike as told by the author? In this piece, how does storytelling function as a connection between people in and across cultures?
3. What literary elements are used in this piece? Give specific examples. How would the piece change if different literary elements were used?

#### **Artist research sharing: 20-25 minutes**

Regroup students so there is one student who has researched each of the people mentioned in the reading. Have students exchange information and take notes on each artist.

After students have shared information with their group members, discuss the following question: What role do these artists have in the barbers' stories and the overall piece? If time allows, have groups share their ideas.

### **Assign homework:**

Assign one of the following for homework. If possible, have students share their work in a following class. Choose a person, place, or thing that is important in your region. Write a one-page nonfiction piece in the style of *Stories from the Barbershop*, using various literary elements and references to artists.

Choose one paragraph from *Stories from the Barbershop* that includes a variety of literary elements. Rewrite the paragraph: keep the content, but change the type of literary elements used. For example, you might change a rhetorical question to a sentence, or change a metaphor to a simile, or use different sensory details. Then write a reflection on what you learned from this exercise, including the effects of using certain literary elements. The completed assignment should be one page in length.

# Translating For Myself

## Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn to read a literary text with attention and to analyze details.
- Students will learn about the structure of English by comparing it with a related language: French.
- Students will expand vocabulary by experimenting with word choices.
- Students will develop creative writing strategies for varying one's writing style and vocabulary.

## Approximate Level and Length:

For Upper Level High School or Entry-Level College or Beginner French Students

## Materials Needed:

- Projector to show "[Kasala for Myself](#)" poems to the class
- Dictionaries: French-English, English only, English thesaurus (if using online, try Larousse English-French dictionary and thesaurus.com)

## Introduction:

Explain to the class that today you are going to become writers and translators, even though you don't necessarily know the other language you're translating from.

## Exercise One: Finding the Right Word

*Plan for at least 20 minutes for the first portion. If you include the creative writing activity, it may take an additional 15-20 minutes (plus time to share students' work).*

This exercise can be used to help students understand the way poets use words precisely, and at the same time the way that poetry can help us see a word or an idea differently. It may be used as a short preparation for "Kasala for Myself" or as part of a larger creative writing assignment.

1. Ask the class: what does "famous" mean? Have students share definitions. Put a few definitions and synonyms for "famous" on the board and discuss the differences (e.g. well-known, conspicuous, talked-about, legendary, notorious, etc.).
2. Ask students for a few examples of things or people that are famous in these different ways (i.e. well-known vs. legendary vs. notorious).
3. Next, look at the following poem, "Famous" by Naomi Shihab Nye together (if you can, project it on a screen). Read the poem out loud.
4. Can you replace the word "famous" with any of the words you have on the board? You may want to divide up the poem into sections and have groups or pairs of students work on alternative words in each section. Do certain synonyms work? Which ones never work? Which ones only fit some of the lines? Can you define the kind of "famous" the speaker in the poem aspires to? How does that compare to your earlier definitions?
5. Optional expansion activity for creative writing (*Skip this if time is limited or if you want to focus solely on "Kasala for Myself"*): Have students choose an adjective that describes something they would like to be, possibly building on the definitions and examples for the word "famous" (e.g. important, rich, gorgeous, powerful, etc) and then choosing alternate examples that fit their definition. Ask them to write a poem about their chosen adjective.

## **Famous**

BY NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

The river is famous to the fish.  
The loud voice is famous to silence,  
which knew it would inherit the earth  
before anybody said so.

The cat sleeping on the fence is famous to  
the birds  
watching him from the birdhouse.

The tear is famous, briefly, to the cheek.

The idea you carry close to your bosom  
is famous to your bosom.

The boot is famous to the earth,  
more famous than the dress shoe,  
which is famous only to floors.

The bent photograph is famous to the one  
who carries it  
and not at all famous to the one who is  
pictured.

I want to be famous to shuffling men  
who smile while crossing streets,  
sticky children in grocery lines,  
famous as the one who smiled back.

I want to be famous in the way a pulley is  
famous,  
or a buttonhole, not because it did any-  
thing spectacular,  
but because it never forgot what it could  
do.

### **Exercise Two: Translating Words**

*Allow 20-25 minutes for the first part of this exercise and the same for the creative writing assignment.*  
You may wish to have the students start the creative writing task in class, where you can offer guidance,  
and finish it at home, leaving time to share the poems later.

Present the poem “Kasala for Myself”

1. Tell students a little about its author, Fiston Mwanza Mujila.
2. Explain that the word “kasala” in the title means a kind of praise song, usually the kind reserved for an important person. In that way, it’s a little like the poem by Naomi Shihab Nye, in that the speaker wants to praise himself as if he were a powerful or famous person. And like the first poem, he gives us his own unusual ideas about this kind of praise for important people.
3. Explain that the poem was written in French and that you’re going to try to translate a little piece of it together.
4. Give the students the poem and the simple interlinear translation at the top of the next page.
5. Explain that someone has made a start at the translation, but a few words are missing.
6. Put students in pairs or small groups and give them access to a French-English dictionary
7. Explain a few of the translation decisions made in the “trot”: *j’ai décidé* = I decided; *marcher* = to walk/ walking; adjectives in French are often after the noun, in English they are usually in front of the noun. Tell them to look at the possibilities and translate the missing words or phrases (they vary in difficulty!). Let students work for 10-12 minutes.
8. Have groups share their versions and compare when and if there are differences among groups. Why did they decide as they did?
9. Ask if they considered: sounds (vowels, consonants), register (formal, informal), ordinary versus unusual words (bazarder). Look back at their translations and try out a few different options (more formal, with more assonance, with more unusual words, etc.)
10. What versions do they like best? Do they like how their poems sound?

j'ai décidé encore de rêver  
I decided still to \_\_\_\_\_

non pas de marcher sur la lune  
Not of walking on the moon

ou d'inventer une énième arme chimique  
Or of inventing an nth chemical \_\_\_\_\_

mais d'ouvrir une espèce de bar merveilleux  
But of opening a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ bar

d'y bazarder non pas l'ivresse ou une quelconque beuverie  
To there \_\_\_\_\_ not the drunkenness or \_\_\_\_\_

mais l'espérance  
But \_\_\_\_\_

### **Exercise Three: Comparison**

Look at J. Bret Maney's translation of this section:

I decided to dream again  
not of walking on the moon or  
inventing an umpteenth WMD  
but of opening a sort of magical bar  
and there to sell not drunkenness, or binges  
but hope

1. How do his choices compare to yours? Did he come up with anything that you didn't think of at all? Did he choose anything that you rejected?
2. Look at the whole of Maney's translation. What choices did he make about sound, register, and unusual words? The first line is "I decided to be happy." Does the poem feel happy? What words or images are essential in making the poem feel happy or not so happy? How might you make different word choices for those words and images (while staying within range of the original meaning) that might amplify the feeling of happiness? How might you make the poem feel less happy, again, sticking with the original meaning? Note: you might need to look at the original French text and look up some words to check on this

### **Creative Writing Assignment:**

1. Looking at the translator's note about the poem and the definition of "kasala," and recalling that the poet is writing a "praise song" for himself, write down 3 or 4 other examples of poems or songs in praise of something or someone.
2. Imagine writing a song of praise for yourself. What might you include? What aspects of yourself or what accomplishments or goals might you praise?
3. Note at least two things you would praise about yourself that other people might not consider so positive (for example, other people might have told you that you're too loud or too quiet, whereas you think that your loudness or quietness are good things). Like the poet in "Kasala for Myself", show how your qualities are important for you or the world around you.
4. Using this poem as your model, write a poem that begins "I decided to be happy," and contains
5. stanzas that begin "I decided to dream," and "I decided to be."

## **FEEDBACK**

Thanks for taking the time to read the Asymptote Guide for Educators. We hope you found it useful and engaging. Have questions, comments, critiques, or testimonials? Please leave your feedback [here](#). We look forward to hearing from you!

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