# Dreams and Reality

# Summer 2019 Educators' Guide

ASYMPTOTE

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FOR EDUCATORS

# EDUCATORS' GUIDE
# Summer 2019 | DREAMS AND REALITY

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Summer 2019 issue of the *Asymptote* Educator's Guide!

With each new issue, we aim to support educators who want to integrate content from *Asymptote* 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 four different lessons of varying lengths, covering curriculum from middle school students to college and university-level students. Each section contains suggestions for activities that can be used in conjunction with each other to form complete lesson plans, or separately to complement your lessons on other content.

The lesson plans in this guide are based on translations published in our Summer 2019 issue, "Dreams and Reality" [available at http://www.asymptotejournal.com/jul-2019]. As such, they represent a wide variety of materials, genres, and pedagogic possibilities: The lesson plan for *Thinking Like a Woman*, an excerpt from Mihaela Miroiu's memoir of the same title, asks students to think about their identity as both the origin and the result of pressures to conform to expectations coming from a variety of contexts. The translation of four Yiddish poems from Dvoyre Vogel's book *Figures of the Day* inspires the second lesson plan in this guide. Here, students engage with free verse poems that explore the arrival of advertising in urban landscapes of the early twentieth century. James Wilcox's exuberant translation of some passages from Homer's *The Iliad* provides students with the opportunity to consider alternative translations of these passages, to engage in re-writing practice, and to discuss notions of "classic literature." Lastly, a reading guide to the excerpt from Bernardo Esquinca's short story *Flies* presents an intriguing activity centered on one man's Kafkaesque tale of obsession.

We realize that the age range for each lesson varies, 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 about it helps us improve our formation of the next guide. Please leave feedback and suggestions at 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 their thoughts on and experiences in teaching world literature through the *Asymptote* blog

(http://asymptotejournal.com/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 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.

Like what we do? Then get involved with our mission so that we can bring you more exciting initiatives such as this educators' guide. Donate any amount you can afford or better yet, join us as a sustaining member or even masthead member from as little USD5 a month. Don't wait! Join the Asymptote family today: http://asymptotejournal.com/donate

# THINKING LIKE A WOMAN by Mihaela Miroiu

This lesson plan is based on the excerpt from *Thinking Like a Woman*, a memoir by the Romanian political theorist and feminist philosopher Mihaela Miroiu, translated by Jozefina Komporaly. It is available here:
https://www.asymptotejournal.com/nonfiction/thinking-like-a-woman/

The lesson plan asks students to reflect on the multiple markers that shape their identity and that create behavioral and other expectations. Miroiu's text serves as a contemporary example of such expectations as she describes her youth and adulthood under the communist regime in Romania, as well as her personal liberation in the post-communist era.

**Learning objectives**

By the end of the unit, students will have

- understood expectations originate both in traditional (family) and societal frameworks
- reflected on Miroiu's experience in communist Romania and related it to their own experience
- understood their own identity as emerging from a variety of contexts and the expectations expressed by these contexts

**Approximate level and instruction environments**
Suitable for adolescent audiences, both in middle and high school. As an introduction to or part of a social sciences unit.

**Assessment**
Group discussion

Individual texts

picture/image/collage (I—where I come from/what I am part of)

**Length**
Two 45-60 minute units

**Materials needed**
Printouts of Miroiu's text
Dry-erase board or blackboard
Handout "Introduction"
Handout "I"
Possibly: Printouts of reading questions (indented passages in the lesson plan)

**Lesson Plan**

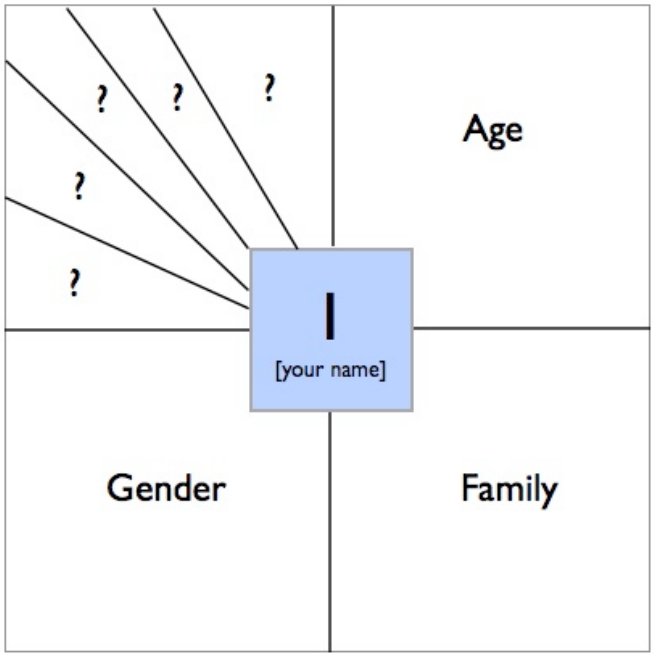
I. Introduction [15 minutes]

Reflection prompt:
"We all belong to different groups that are defined by, for instance, our sex, our race, our age, our family, our class or work mates, the country we live in . . . As a member of a group you are expected to behave in a certain way. For instance, a small child may not yet be expected to have good table manners or to regulate her emotions. For a teenager, that is different."

Look at this diagram and think about the groups that influence who you are.

---

I am .... , and people expect me to be/do .....

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[Student activity] Make a list of the categories you identified and your answers. [15 minutes]

Example:
Age: 17
Race: Hispanic (from Mexico City)
Family: one parent, two siblings
…

In which areas of your life do you think expectations of *what you do* or *how you behave* are based on your belonging to a particular group? What do you think is the group that causes the most expectations to conform? How? Who or what is the origin of these expectations?

[Student activity] Write freely about these questions for five minutes. Use your list as a guide.

Class discussion. Consider drawing the image on the board and substitute “Our Class” in the center of the diagram.

II Reading [60 - 90 minutes]

Background information.

Handout
---

“Thinking Like a Woman” by Romanian author Mihaela Miroiu is an excerpt from her memoir of the same title. The translator explains:

From the biographical note:

Mihaela Miroiu is a Romanian political theorist and feminist philosopher. She is the author of twelve books published in Romanian, including *Drumul către autonomie. Teorii politice feministe* [The Road to Autonomy: Feminist Political Theories] (Polirom, 2004), *Neprețuitele femei* [Priceless Women] (Polirom, 2006), and *Convenio. Despre natură, femei și morală* [Convenio: On Women, Nature and Morals] (Alternative Publishing House, 1996). She also edited or co-edited nine volumes, mainly on feminism and feminist theory. Miroiu’s memoir, *Thinking Like a Woman* (original title: *Cu mintea mea de femeie*, Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2017) was shortlisted for the PEN 2018 Awards.
[...]

From the translator’s note:

Miroiu does not attempt to downplay the defining influence of communism. However, she also discusses many situations that show how it infringed upon her life. For Miroiu, telling these stories is an essential moral duty in an era in which, following the fall of the Ceauşescu regime, the recent communist past is little understood. These stories, and Miroiu’s poignant analysis, constitute part of the crucial task of understanding the world that formed contemporary Romania and its collective memory.
---

Historical note:
In 1944, Romania was occupied by the Soviet Union. A communist regime was established in 1947. It lasted until 1989 when violent protests erupted and the ruling dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu and his wife were captured and executed by a firing squad.

---

Reading the text (60 minutes)

[Student activity] Read the first section of the text and think about the following questions (on board or as handout):

> Why do you think reading is considered a “sinful habit” for a woman? What expectation of women is described? What particular kind of woman does this expectation apply to? Is there a similar expectation for men?
>
> The narrator says she decided to “keep out of her [the priest wife’s] way as much as [she] could, so [she] wouldn’t be seen hanging nearby.” Why do you think the narrator feels that way?
>
> Can you think of similar social mechanisms in your own life? Do some people in a group you belong to not conform to expectations of that group? How do you and other members of that group feel about this?

Write down your thoughts about these questions (60 seconds).

Discuss your answers with your partner.

Discussion with the class as a whole.

Add to your original thoughts in writing (60 seconds).

[Student activity] Read the second part of the text and think about the following questions:

> The narrator speaks about two time periods in the first paragraph: “During my teenage years . . .” and “By the time I became a teacher, communism was much more advanced…” What is similar about these time periods? What is different?
>
> Further down, the narrator states that “Communism reinvented woman as a kind of Shiva . . .” What does she refer to here? How is this different from, or similar to, gender ideas in the society you live in?
>
> What do you make of the last paragraph in this section? What different notions of women and men form the basis of this paragraph? What do you think about the idea of “a whole woman” in this paragraph?

Write down your thoughts about these questions (60 seconds).

Discuss your answers with your partner.

Discussion with the class as a whole.

Add to your original thoughts in writing (60 seconds).

[Student activity] Read the third part of the text and think about the following questions:

> In this section, the narrator speaks about newfound freedom. Where is that freedom expressed? Which periods of history does she refer to?
>
> How does the way she describes her new sense of freedom illuminate her previous repression, in addition to how she has expressed it in the previous sections?
>
> When you think of yourself, what expectations would you like to be freed from?
> What would the consequences of such liberation be?
> Does your compliance with certain expectations come with benefits? Which?

Write down your thoughts about these questions (5 minutes).

Discuss your answers with your partner.

Discussion with the class as a whole.

Add to your original thoughts in writing (5 minutes). How are Miroiu's experiences similar to, or different from, the way you feel expectations affect you?

III Synthesis [Homework]

Homework Assignment

- Students create a physical collage or other visual representations that show how their current identity is a result of belonging to a group, and of meeting or not meeting expectations that group formulates. They may use text, pictures, symbols, objects, etc.
- The work should be accompanied by a one-paragraph artist's statement explaining the work (using their reflection notes from reading Miroiu's text).

**Possible follow-up**
In class: Students exhibit their visual representations and engage in discussions with their peers.

**Assessment**
Collages and artist's statements.

How many contexts has the student identified?
Has s/he developed an understanding of expectation and conformity?
Does the work exhibit differentiation of different contexts, that is, are there differences in how the students describe different contexts and their expectations?

# From FIGURES OF THE DAY by Dvoyre Vogel

This lesson plan is based on poems from Dvoyre Vogel's book *Figures of the Day*, published in the Summer issue of *Asymptote* and available here:
https://www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/dvoyre-vogel-figures-of-the-day/

**Learning objectives**
Students will be able to
- demonstrate an awareness of the themes and imagery in the poems
- explain the poems and an opinion of the poems to classmates

**Assessment**
- Short group presentation on an assigned poem with limited preparation
- Writing to reflect on the poems and to self-assess the group presentation

**Approximate grade level**
High school and above

**Materials needed**
From *Figures of the Day* by Dvoyre Vogel
Chalkboard or whiteboard
Highlighters
Speakers, for listening to the recording
Projector, if using Option B for the warm-up activity

**Approximate length**
One 90-minute lesson or two 45-minute lessons

**Lesson plan**

I. Warm-up (10 minutes)
Discussion: Think about the street where you live or a favorite street in your area. What do the buildings look like there? Do you see any advertisements or lights? (If possible, this can be homework in preparation for this lesson, and students can take notes about what they see in their own environment.)

Option A: Write the titles of the poems on the board: "Advertising Panels in the Rain," "A Poem about Colorful Neon Signs," "Grey Streets, Grey Buildings," "The Lament For Courtyard Walls." What images come to mind when you hear these titles? Briefly imagine or sketch an image individually, and then share your ideas with a partner. As a class, discuss a few ideas in plenary and encourage students to think about how these images might be similar or different to the environment they described in the warm-up discussion.

Option B: Show paintings (*Automat*, *Early Sunday Morning*, or *Night Windows* by Edward Hopper) or other images of cities from the early twentieth century. When you look at these paintings, what do you notice? Think about your answer individually, and then share your ideas with a partner. As a class, discuss a few ideas in plenary and encourage students to think about how these images might be similar or different to the environment they described in the warm-up discussion.

II. Class reading of “Advertising Panels in the Rain” (20 minutes)
The teacher reads “Advertising Panels in the Rain” aloud. Pair students and have students read the poem to each other again. Give students the opportunity to ask questions and discuss their first impressions of the poem, especially the images created by the poem.

- Highlight any colors or shapes mentioned in the poem. What might the contrast of neutral and bright colors show?
- Underline the lines of the poem which refer to advertisements or lights. What movements do they make? How are they similar to human bodies?
- Circle the lines of the poem which refer to people in the city. What feelings do they have? What movements do they make?
- What similarities or differences are there between the people in the advertisement and people in the city?
- How do you think it would feel to live in the world depicted in this poem? Is it similar or different to the world that we live in? Why do you think so?

Go over the questions as a class, making sure that students understand, as they will be completing a similar process more independently for the remaining poems.

III. Group reading of the poems (20 minutes)
Divide the students into groups of 4-6 students, so that each group is working on one of the remaining poems: “A Poem about Colorful Neon Signs,” “Grey Streets, Grey Buildings,” “The Lament For Courtyard Walls.”

- Highlight any colors or shapes mentioned in the poem. What might the contrast of neutral and bright colors show?
- Underline the lines of the poem which refer to advertisements or lights. What movements do they make? How are they similar to human bodies?
- How do you think it would feel to live in the world depicted in this poem? Is it similar or different to the world that we live in? Why do you think so?

After the groups have finished reading and analyzing the poem, students should prepare to present the information to the class and divide the roles accordingly.

IV. Group presentation of the poems (20 minutes)
Have each group present their poem to the class. Group members should divide the roles of reading the poem and explaining their answers to their classmates. Listening students should take notes on each poem in preparation for the homework assignment.

V. Background information (15 minutes)
Then have students read the bio and translator’s note. (Alternatively, the teacher could give a short lecture on relevant information from them.) Individually, students consider their answers to the following questions and then invite students to share their answers with their group or the class.

1. What do you think is most interesting about this poet and/or her poems?

2. Vogel wrote these poems nearly 100 years ago. Do you agree with Schnee that "Vogel's descriptions of bodies, of alienation in cities being invaded by lighting and advertising has only grown more poignant over the years"? Why or why not?

3. What did you learn about the Yiddish language from reading the bio and translator's note? Supplement students' answers by providing additional information, such as according to UNESCO, Yiddish is a "severely endangered language"; and by listening to an excerpt from the original in Yiddish, read by Anna Rozenfeld.

VI. Assign homework (5 minutes)

Write a reflection (1-2 paragraphs) on at least two of the poems read during today's class and be sure to cover the colors, movement, and animate and inanimate bodies mentioned in the poems. Reflect on what it would feel like to live in this world and if this world is similar to or different from the place where you live. Then write another paragraph to reflect on your group's presentation and your individual performance in class today. Were you able to clearly explain the poem to your classmates? Why or why not?

# Translations of THE ILIAD

This lesson plan is based on various translations of passages in *The Iliad*, most prominently a new translation by James Wilcox, available here: https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/homer-the-iliad/
The comparison of various translations of the same text as well as Wilcox's exuberant version of the poem facilitate an analysis and discussion of poetic terms and students' own writing.

**Learning objectives**
Students will

- analyze word choice, line breaks, rhyme, meter, and other components of poetic form
- discuss differences between "translators" and "transducers"
- develop working definitions of "classic" and reflect on education and canon formation (Option IV A only).

**Assessment**
Versions of a translation of a portion of *The Iliad*.
Written reflection (topic varies depending on option selected)

**Level**
Advanced high school
College (English, Classics, Humanities)

**Materials needed**
Photocopies of the passages in questions (lines 304-317, 348-363, 380-392, 405-427) in various translations (each handout should contain only one translation). Attached are three, but instructors are encouraged to bring in others! (Note: do not give them the Wilcox translation yet)
Copies of the Wilcox version for all of the students

**Lesson Plan**

I. Pre-activity Homework:
Prior to the first meeting, give each student one handout, containing one of the translations (there should be a variety). Their assignment is to read the text, and then rewrite it in their own words. Be sure to tell them that the original is an epic poem, and that they should feel free to play with poetic form – adding line breaks, rhymes, changing meter, etc. if they would like to.

II. In-class:
(5-10 minutes) Begin with a general discussion. Did they enjoy the activity? Was it difficult? What was challenging about it? Did you use a dictionary? Did you change the form at all? How?
If students are not familiar with *The Iliad*, ask them whether they can figure out what is happening in the excerpt. (5-10 minutes)

(15-20 minutes group work, 15-20 min presentations) Divide the class into four groups, one

for each set of lines. Each group is to compare their versions, both from the handouts (they should have a few different versions among them), and the ones they created. Discuss the differences.

Questions to consider:
Pick a word or phrase in one version. Now, find its counterpart in other versions. How do the different choices create a different impression of the action? What connotations do they have? Do they seem more dramatic, more elaborate, more colloquial? (for example: Achilles "bathed in tears" vs "burst into tears" vs "weeping")
Some versions are in prose form, some are poetry—do they have a different feel to them? How so?
If you're looking at a version in poetic form—is there rhyme? Is there a fixed meter?
Do some versions seem older, or more contemporary? What makes them feel that way?

Option A: after examining the various texts, each group can work together to create their own collectively authored version and present it to the class, explaining the choices made.

Option B: Assign each group a specific aspect (word choice, rhyme and meter, sentence structure). They will analyze the differences between the various versions and present them to the class.

(10 minutes) After the presentations, return to general discussion. What did they think of the different versions? Which versions do they like more, and why?
Notice – does anyone discuss "accuracy" or "authenticity"? Does anyone ask which translation is the "correct" one? You may raise these questions at this point, or wait.

Now, tell students that you're going to introduce them to a new version by James Wilcox. Explain that James Wilcox calls himself a "transducer," not a translator. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* a "transducer" is a

> device that converts input energy into output energy, the latter usually differing in kind but bearing a known relation to input. Originally, the term referred to a device that converted mechanical stimuli into electrical output, but it has been broadened to include devices that sense all forms of stimuli—such as heat, radiation, sound, strain, vibration, pressure, acceleration, and so on—and that can produce output signals other than electrical—such as pneumatic or hydraulic.

After collecting some responses and discussing them, remind students that *The Iliad* was originally an oral poem. Homer may have been the author, or the editor who wrote down what is now considered the authoritative version of texts that had been circulating orally for a long time (scholars are divided on this question). Does this change how students feel?

Now, hand out Wilcox's version. Give students a few minutes to read it on their own. Read the translation out loud together. Discuss. What is this version like? What is unique about Wilcox's version? What do they like about it? What do they not like about it?

How does the above definition of the word "transducer" illuminate Wilcox's view of translation and the text itself?

Draw students' attention (though they will likely notice on their own) to word choices like "gumball," "boohoo," "Laser." Do these words seem appropriate? Why or why not?

**Homework**

Students create their own version of one of the passages (again), and explain the translation choices they made, or compare it to the other versions (or one of the other versions).

OR

(5-10 minutes)
Raise the question of a "classic." What does it mean? We often define classics as either 1. old texts or 2. great texts.
Generate discussion by naming some texts and asking whether they are classics, such as *War and Peace*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, etc. If they list a text as a classic, ask how many people have read it, and if they haven't, ask them how they know that it's great, or what makes it great.

Once you have settled on a definition of a classic, raise a new problem—that multiple versions, or various translations, seem to contradict this idea. Is this a problem?

**Homework**

Option 1. Ask students to write a reflection on this question; whether multiple different translations contradict the idea of a "classic."

Option 2. Ask students to evaluate Wilcox's translation, explaining what they like or dislike about it and why, and, potentially, whether or not it should be considered a "classic."

Alexander Pope translation

304-317

The chiefs in sullen majesty retired.
Achilles with Patroclus took his way,
Where near his tents his hollow vessels lay.
Meantime Atrides launched with numerous oars
A well-rigged ship for Chrysa's sacred shores:
High on the deck was fair Chryseïs placed,
And sage Ulysses with the conduct graced:
Safe in her sides the hecatomb they stowed,
Then, swiftly sailing, cut the liquid road.
The host to expiate next the king prepares
With pure lustrations and with solemn prayers.
Washed by the briny wave, the pious train
Are cleansed, and cast the ablutions in the main.
Along the shores whole hecatombs were laid,
And bulls and goats to Phœbus' altars paid.
The sable fumes in curling spires arise,
And waft their grateful odours to the skies.

348-363

Not so his loss the fierce Achilles bore,
But sad retiring to the sounding shore,
O'er the wild margin of the deep he hung,
That kindred deep from whence his mother sprung;
There, bathed in tears of anger and disdain,
Thus loud lamented to the stormy main:
"O parent goddess! since in early bloom
Thy son must fall, by too severe a doom;
Sure, to so short a race of glory born,
Great Jove in justice should this span adorn;
Honour and fame at least the Thunderer owed;
And ill he pays the promise of a god,
If yon proud monarch thus thy son defies,
Obscures my glories, and resumes my prize."
Far in the deep recesses of the main,
Where aged Ocean holds his watery reign,
The goddess-mother heard. The waves divide;
And like a mist she rose above the tide;
Beheld him mourning on the naked shores,
And thus the sorrows of his soul explores:
"Why grieves my son? thy anguish let me share,
Reveal the cause, and trust a parent's care."

380-392

To Phœbus prayed, and Phœbus heard the prayer:
A dreadful plague ensues; the avenging darts
Incessant fly, and pierce the Grecian hearts.
A prophet then, inspired by heaven, arose,
And points the crime, and thence derives the woes:

Myself the first the assembled chiefs incline
To avert the vengeance of the Power divine;
Then, rising in his wrath, the monarch stormed;
Incensed he threatened, and his threats performed.
The fair Chryseïs to her sire was sent,
With offered gifts to make the god relent;
But now he seized Briseïs' heavenly charms,
And of my valour's prize defrauds my arms,
Defrauds the votes of all the Grecian train;
And service, faith, and justice, plead in vain.

405-427

The affrighted gods confessed their awful lord,
They dropped the fetters, trembled and adored.
This, goddess, this to his remembrance call,
Embrace his knees, at his tribunal fall;
Conjure him far to drive the Grecian train,
To hurl them headlong to their fleet and main,
To heap the shores with copious death, and bring
The Greeks to know the curse of such a king:
Let Agamemnon lift his haughty head
O'er all his wide dominion of the dead,
And mourn in blood, that e'er he durst disgrace
The boldest warrior of the Grecian race."
"Unhappy son!" fair Thetis thus replies,
While tears celestial trickle from her eyes,
"Why have I borne thee with a mother's throes,
To fates averse, and nursed for future woes?
So short a space the light of heaven to view!
So short a space! and filled with sorrow too!
O might a parent's careful wish prevail,
Far, far from Ilion should thy vessels sail,
And thou, from camps remote, the danger shun,
Which now, alas! too nearly threats my son.
Yet—what I can—to move thy suit I'll go
To great Olympus crowned with fleecy snow.
Meantime, secure within thy ships, from far
Behold the field, nor mingle in the war.
The sire of gods, and all the ethereal train,
On the warm limits of the farthest main,
Now mix with mortals, nor disdain to grace
The feasts of Æthiopia's blameless race:
Twelve days the Powers indulge the genial rite,
Returning with the twelfth revolving light.
Then will I mount the brazen dome, and move
The high tribunal of immortal Jove."

A. T. Murray translation

304-317

So when the two had made an end of contending with violent words, they rose, and broke up the gathering beside the ships of the Achaeans. The son of Peleus went his way to his huts and his balanced ships together with the son of Menoetius, and with his men; but the son of Atreus launched a swift ship on the sea, and chose for it twenty rowers, and drove on board a hecatomb for the god, and brought the fair-cheeked daughter of Chryses and set her in the ship; and Odysseus of many wiles went on board to take command. So these embarked and sailed over the watery ways; but the son of Atreus bade the people purify themselves. And they purified themselves, and cast the defilement into the sea, and offered to Apollo perfect hecatombs of bulls and goats by the shore of the barren[1] sea; and the savour thereof went up to heaven, eddying amid the smoke.

348-363

But Achilles burst into tears, and withdrew apart from his comrades, and sat down on the shore of the grey sea, looking forth over the wine-dark deep. Earnestly he prayed to his dear mother with hands outstretched: “Mother, since you bore me, though to so brief a span of life, honour surely ought the Olympian to have given into my hands, Zeus who thunders on high; but now he has honoured me not a bit. Truly the son of Atreus, wide-ruling Agamemnon has dishonoured me: for he has taken and keeps my prize through his own arrogant act.” So he spoke, weeping, and his lady mother heard him, as she sat in the depths of the sea beside the old man, her father. And speedily she came forth from the grey sea like a mist, and sat down before him, as he wept, and she stroked him with her hand, and spoke to him, and called him by name: “My child, why do you weep? What sorrow has come upon your heart? Speak out; hide it not in your mind, that we both may know.”

380-392

So the old man went back again in anger; and Apollo heard his prayer, for he was very dear to him, and sent against the Argives an evil shaft. Then the people began to die thick and fast, and the shafts of the god ranged everywhere throughout the wide camp of the Achaeans. But to us the prophet with sure knowledge declared the oracles of the god who strikes from afar.
“Forthwith, then, I first bade propitiate the god, but thereafter anger seized the son of Atreus, and straightway he arose and spoke a threatening word, which now has come to pass. For the quick-glancing Achaeans are taking the maiden in a swift ship to Chryse and are bearing gifts to the god; while the other woman the heralds have just now taken from my tent and led away, the daughter of Briseus, whom the sons of the Achaeans gave me.

405-427

He sat down by the side of the son of Cronos, exulting in his glory, and the blessed gods were seized with fear of him, and did not bind Zeus. Bring this now to his remembrance, and sit by his side, and clasp his knees, in hope that he might perhaps wish to succour the Trojans, and for those others, the Achaeans, to pen them in among the sterns of their ships and around the sea as they are slain, so that they may all have profit of their king, and that the son of Atreus, wide-ruling Agamemnon may know his blindness in that he did no honour to the best of the Achaeans.” Then Thetis answered him as she wept: “Ah me, my child, why did I rear you, cursed in my child-bearing? Would that it had been your lot to remain by your ships without tears and without grief, since your span of life is brief and endures no long time; but now you are doomed to a speedy death and are laden with sorrow above all men; therefore to an evil fate I bore you in our halls. Yet in order to tell this your word to Zeus who delights in the thunderbolt I will myself go to snowy

Olympus, in hope that he may be persuaded. But remain by your swift, sea-faring ships, and continue your wrath against the Achaeans, and refrain utterly from battle; for Zeus went yesterday to Oceanus, to the blameless Ethiopians for a feast, and all the gods followed with him; but on the twelfth day he will come back again to Olympus, and then will I go to the house of Zeus with threshold of bronze, and will clasp his knees in prayer, and I think I shall win him."

Samuel Butler Translation

304-317

When they had quarreled thus angrily, they rose, and broke up the assembly at the ships of the Achaeans. The son of Peleus went back to his tents and ships with the son of Menoitios and his company, while Agamemnon drew a vessel into the water and chose a crew of twenty oarsmen. He escorted Chryseis on board and sent moreover a hecatomb for the god. And Odysseus went as leader. These, then, went on board and sailed their ways over the sea. But the son of Atreus bade the people purify themselves; so they purified themselves and cast their filth into the sea. Then they offered hecatombs of bulls and goats without blemish on the sea-shore, and the smoke with the savor of their sacrifice rose curling up towards heaven.

348-363

Then Achilles went all alone by the side of the hoar sea [pontos], weeping and looking out upon the boundless waste of waters. He raised his hands in prayer to his immortal mother, "Mother," he cried, "you bore me doomed to live but for a brief season; surely Zeus, who thunders from Olympus, might have given honor [timê] in return. It is not so.
Agamemnon, son of Atreus, has done me dishonor, and has robbed me of my prize by force." As he spoke he wept aloud, and his mother heard him where she was sitting in the depths of the sea hard by the Old One, her father. Forthwith she rose as it were a gray mist out of the waves, sat down before him as he stood weeping, caressed him with her hand, and said, "My son, why are you weeping? What is it that gives you grief [penthos]? Keep it not from my thinking [noos], but tell me, that we may know it together."

380-392

So he went back in anger, and Apollo, who loved him dearly, heard his prayer. Then the god sent a deadly dart upon the Argives, and the people died thick on one another, for the arrows went everywhere among the wide host of the Achaeans. At last a seer [mantis] in the fullness of his knowledge declared to us the oracles of Apollo, and I was myself first to say that we should appease him. Whereon the son of Atreus rose in anger, and threatened that which he has since done. The Achaeans are now taking the girl in a ship to Chryse, and sending gifts of sacrifice to the god; but the heralds have just taken from my tent the daughter of Briseus, whom the Achaeans had awarded to myself.

405-427

When therefore he took his seat all-glorious beside the son of Kronos, the other gods were afraid, and did not bind him. Go, then, to him, remind him of all this, clasp his knees, and bid him give succor to the Trojans. Let the Achaeans be hemmed in at the sterns of their ships, and perish on the sea-shore, that they may reap what joy they may of their king, and that Agamemnon may rue his derangement [atê] in offering insult to the best [aristos] of the Achaeans." Thetis wept and answered, "My son, woe is me that I should have borne or suckled you. Would indeed that you had lived your span free from all sorrow at your ships, for it is all too brief; alas, that you should be at once short of life and long of sorrow above your peers: woe, therefore, was the hour in which I bore you; nevertheless I will go to the snowy heights of Olympus, and tell this tale to Zeus, if he will hear our prayer: meanwhile stay where you are with your ships, nurse your anger [mênis] against the Achaeans, and hold aloof from fight. For Zeus went yesterday to Okeanos, to a feast among the Ethiopians, and the other gods went with him. He will return to Olympus twelve days hence; I will then go to his mansion paved with bronze and will beseech him; nor do I doubt that I shall be able to persuade him."

# From “FLIES” by Bernardo Esquinca

This lesson plan contains a reading/writing guide focusing on the excerpt from Esquinca’s short story “Flies” in a translation by Audrey Manchester, available here: https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/bernardo-esquinca-flies/
This surrealist story should appeal to middle and high school students.

**Learning objectives**

Students will
- analyze Esquinca’s use of point of view technique
- find textual evidence for the narrator’s unreliability
- write a short story of their own

**Assessment**
- Class discussion
- Student writing (short story)

**Grade level**
Middle and high school

**Materials needed**
Dry-erase or blackboard
Printouts of the story excerpt
Printouts of story prompt

**Length**

One 45- or 60-minute lesson
Possible follow-up lesson for students to workshop their stories

**Lesson plan**

Preparation

Prior to the lesson, inform the students that you will be reading a text entitled *Flies*. Ask them to write down at least three ideas about what kind of text this could be. Students should think about genre and content.

Class meeting

Warm-up (5 minutes)
Students discuss their ideas with a partner and choose three out of the six ideas about the story and present them to the class.

Reading (30 minutes)
Divide your students into groups of three to five and hand out the text. Students should take turns to read the text to each other (four students reading one of the "tapes", one student reading the psychiatrist's report).

[Note: Depending on grade level and language competency, you may want to hand out definitions for the following words (or write/project the definitions on the board).

To fornicate
Replete (adj.)
To summon
Culvert (n.)
Vicissitude (n.)
To thrive
To germinate
Vanguard
Infernal (adj.)
Atavistic (adj)
To alleviate
To fetter
Ailment (n.)
To brandish]

Reading questions (groups should discuss and then write down their answers):

Find titles for each of the tapes.

How would you characterize the first speaker (recorded on the tapes)? Is he a reliable narrator? Why or why not? Give evidence from the text to support your answer.

At the end of Tape 1, the speaker states that "Flies thrive in shit, and we've sown a garden of twenty million intestines for them." Unpack that sentence. What are flies being compared to?

Look at these sentences from Tape 2: "So little attention and, by contrast, a growing repertoire of too many accumulating ideas …" and "…it suddenly seems to me that the world has become a better place—one full of possibilities." Can you make a suggestion as to what the flies represent in the speaker's life? How does their presence affect the speaker?

What is the main theme of Tape 5? Why is the mythology of flies important to the speaker?

What function does the Notebook serve? How is the doctor's voice different from the patient's? List at least four differences (content, stylistic, etc.).

Class discussion (15 minutes)
Discuss the story as a whole class and share answers to the reading questions.

Homework

Write a story of your own that is told through tape recordings of an unreliable narrator. At least 1500 words. You may add a notebook excerpt by a second person.
Think about using repeated phrases like the narrator in Esquinca's story.

## FEEDBACK

Thanks for taking the time to read our Summer 2019 Guide for Educators. 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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