



## THE *ASYMPTOTE* GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

### FALL 2015 ISSUE

#### CONTENTS

1. Introduction & Instructions
2. Fall 2015 Issue Introduction
3. Setting the Context
4. Discussion Questions
5. Feedback
6. Credits

## INTRODUCTION

At *Asymptote's* educational arm, we believe that world literature provides much potential for learning in the classroom. Starting from the Fall 2015 issue, we will be releasing a free *Asymptote* guide for educators that will accompany each issue, encouraging an exploration of the themes covered in the quarterly, as well as suggesting exercises that can be further adapted for your own classroom use.

In the following pages, you will find teaching material which attempt to articulate the current issue's themes in a concrete way as well as a variety of suggested discussion questions and activities which tap on the writing featured in *Asymptote*, and beyond.

## INSTRUCTIONS

In assigning the reading for your students, you should set the context first for your students. Feel free to articulate the issue's theme in a way that suits your own purposes in your classroom. This theme should also serve as an overarching framework for classroom activities.

In the section 'Setting the Context,' we offer advice on developing the themes in particular ways for the students by providing real-world examples with a view to framing the themes articulated in the issue.

Following from this will be a set of discussion questions and activities which teachers and instructors may use in the classroom. These activities and discussion questions tap on the writing featured in the issue and beyond *Asymptote*. Teachers and instructors are strongly encouraged to personalise the lesson for their own means.

Finally, we urge teachers and instructors who use our materials, or even just those who are passing through, to leave feedback about this initiative here: <http://goo.gl/forms/xoyMpDnquE>

You can contact us directly at [education@asymptotejournal.com](mailto:education@asymptotejournal.com)

## OCTOBER 2015 ISSUE INTRODUCTION

### Adrift in Time

#### **An *Asymptote* guide for educators**

A global perspective on literature inevitably reveals the universal elements of human life. Regardless of location or language, we all experience birth, death, nature, politics . . . and the passage of time. Literature can push us into the future, imagining new developments, and helping us dig into the past, telling and re-telling stories. Literature can also expose disjunctions in time: the ability of past ghosts to haunt the here and now; the clashing of past traditions, present realities, and future visions; the seeds of modernity embedded in the traditions of the past.

*Asymptote's* October 2015 issue invites you to travel through time . . . and to consider how traveling through time manifests itself across literary works from different languages and parts of the world.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

We all experience the passage of time. But the exact elements and events that make up the past, present, and future depend, of course, on where and when you live.

Take present-day Hong Kong for example: ceded to the British by China in 1842 at the end of the first Opium War, and then handed back to China by the British in 1997. As a result, Hong Kong has two past identities: Chinese and British. In one respect, the 1997 handover was an attempt to set time right - to return Hong Kong to the path it was taking before the British wrested it away from China. But as the Chinese government attempts to exert more control over Hong Kong, despite the special provisions supposedly made for Hong Kong's semi-autonomy as an SAR (Special Administrative Region), the handover may appear to many Hong Kongers as an unwelcome meddling with time - the attempt to impose a sense of Chinese national identity onto a people that sees itself as distinct from the rest of the Chinese nation. This disgruntlement with the central government's increasing attempts to infringe upon Hong Kong's sovereignty culminated with mass protests starting in September 2014 - a movement termed the "[Umbrella Revolution](#)," after the umbrellas that protesters used to defend themselves from the police. We invite you to read the poems in this issue's special Hong Kong poetry feature and consider how they depict Hong Kong's past, and what Hong Kong's present and future looks like in relation to that past.

Another example: Iceland. With a language that has changed relatively little in the last thousand years, this tiny country takes great pride in its distinct identity and language. This pride, along with modern global forces, led to national independence in 1918, after an influx of soldiers, cinema, and consequences from faraway lands. Now globally recognised as a source of art and culture as well as a place of timeless natural beauty, Icelanders must face questions of how to interact with the world while maintaining their own identity—and language. We invite you to read the Icelandic poetry in this issue, along with the interview with Sjón, a novelist and poet. What relation do these writings have with the ancient sagas, and how does that influence extend beyond the island and through the ages? What other literature could provide insight into 'languages spoken by few' and their role in global communication and culture?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These are a few questions you may find useful in thinking through the topics raised by this *Asymptote* issue. Deploy them as they are, modify them, or use them as a starting point for coming up with your own!

### Globalisation, Technology, & Time

1. How has globalisation and technology affected the language you speak, and your experience with other languages? What is being lost and gained with these changes?

From this issue:

*“When the day comes that we have to speak to our refrigerators in English (which I believe is not far in the future), Icelandic will retreat very fast.”*

from “An Interview with Sjón”

<http://www.asymptotejournal.com/interview/an-interview-with-sjon/>

2. How has technology changed the ways we can write and read fiction? Which past writer would you love to see write in a contemporary medium (twitter, blogs, etc.)? How has hypertext changed our sense of ‘choose-your-own adventure’ stories? Does multiplicity bring us closer together, or further disconnected? What about multiple translations of a single text?

From this issue:

Alberto Chimal’s “The Time Traveller”

<http://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/alberto-chimal-the-time-traveller/>

### Time and the Sci-Fi Imagination

3. How has science fiction informed our understanding of global possibilities? How is its scope different from historical fiction? Have you noticed differences in sci-fi imagination in different parts of the world? Compare an *Asymptote* piece with one of your favourite contemporary or classic sci-fi stories.

From this issue:

“Descent into Yoppa Valley” by Yasutaka Tsutsui

<http://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/yasutaka-tsutsui-descent-into-yoppa-valley/>

### **Time Passing, Worlds Turning**

4. What was happening in your part of the world a year ago? How about forty years ago?

Read “The Trace in the Bones” by Leila Guerriero and the selection of Hong Kong poetry one year after the Umbrella Revolution, and consider what has happened in your own area. Choose a location on the other side of the world and investigate what was happening there a year ago, and perhaps forty years ago. What are the similarities? Are there recurring issues? How does each culture, and literature, approach common ideas and problems?

### **Timeless Realities**

5. How do the facts of the physical world, even those as simple as day and night, unite us across borders? How do different cultures respond to common realities?

Consider “Common Night” by Merdan Ehet’éli and “Bhagat” by Prem Prakash. What are the effects of the structure of these poems? How does the writers’ handling of stanza breaks and form contribute to the mood of each piece?

### **The Times They Are A-Changing**

6. How does familiarity with literature, art, music, movies, myths, etc. from different parts of the world influence how one writes, how one creates art, and how one translates? How does this familiarity influence what an individual conceives as “tradition” and “modernity”? How does this familiarity affect an individual’s creative engagement with the past, present, and/or future?

From this issue:

Our interview with artist Nina Papaconstantinou

<http://www.asymptotejournal.com/visual/eva-heisler-nina-papaconstantinou-drawing-the-printed-page/>

An interview with artist Jumaadi

<http://www.asymptotejournal.com/visual/tiffany-tsao-jumaadi-art-as-vehicle-to-connect/>

An interview with translator Richard Zenith

<http://www.asymptotejournal.com/interview/an-interview-with-richard-zenith/>

An interview with poet Rosanna Warren

<http://www.asymptotejournal.com/interview/an-interview-with-rosanna-warren/>

## Times of Upheaval

7. Revolution demands a break with the past and bases itself on a radical re-envisioning of the future. Does a revolution always mean change is underfoot? Does the degree and gravity of the change differ when one's position in the world, and one's timeframe changes?

From this issue:

Poems from our special feature on Hong Kong poetry

<http://www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/lok-fung-october-in-the-city/>

<http://www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/tang-siu-wa-three-poems/>

Writers on Writers Feature:

<http://www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/nha-thuyen-on-nguyen-quoc-chanh/>

## FEEDBACK

Thank you for reading through our first ever educational guide! We invite you to do a quick survey over here: <http://goo.gl/forms/xoyMpDnquE>

## CREDITS

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