

VARIATIONS ON A JOURNEY

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE
FALL 2018



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Fall 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 Fall 2018 issue, "Variations on a Journey" is interested in contextualized writing in relation to movements of people and histories. From the personal epistolary and narrative form, to commemorative poetry and dramatic forms. Language is vibrant and diverse because of these specific histories and events that give rise to unique forms, language variation and thematic concerns.

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.

Obsolete Memories

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 Nguyễn Đức Tùng's "[Meeting a Jarai Tribesman and his Wife in New York City](#)"

Warm-Up Activity:

10 minutes of class discussion

1. Begin by asking students for general impressions of the text.
2. Provide a brief overview of Vietnamese history, specifically, the New Economic Zones program.

Small Group Discussion:

Break into small groups for 10-15 minutes

1. Group One will examine what we learn about the husband, the Jarai tribesman.
2. Group Two will examine what we learn about his wife.
3. Group Three will trace the references to New York City, and what life is like there.
4. Group Four will consider how the refugee experience is represented.

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 text.

- How does the narrator see this couple – what kind of relationship do these three people have to each other? How does this text represent memory?
- What kinds of things are remembered, and how, and what is forgotten?
- What does the narrator mean by saying that “all memories become obsolete.
- Time, too, becomes obsolete” and how does this text confirm or challenge those claims?

As a way of concluding discussion, you may project the translator’s note on the board (or hand out copies of it). Read it together.

Explain terms that the students may not know, such as *naturalism*, *magical realism*, *vicissitudes*.

Discuss how (or whether) the Note helps the reader understand the story. You may finish with a discussion of the lines from Kokuin, or ask the students to write about their relationship to the text as a homework assignment.

The Poetry of Objects

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be familiar with stylistic poetry elements such as symbolism, imagery, and metaphor
- Students will exercise observational skills and translate details into descriptive language
- Students will be exposed to and engage with poetic and political historical writing

Approximate Level and Length:

Late Middle School or High School, One 60 minute class

Materials Needed:

- Copies of Rosmon Tuazon's "[Memento](#)", *Five Poems*
- Brainstorm board (can be chart paper, whiteboard, blackboard or smart board)

Context For Educator:

Read over a section from the Translator's Note:

I also felt that in the poems of Mr. Tuazon that I translated a theme that was explored was that of the citizen as both witness and co-creator of history, the outcome of which in turn is only out of reach for the citizen only if he chooses to stand by the side of the road, refusing to get anywhere; if he chooses to believe that he was never there to begin with—a timely theme given the current state of affairs in the Philippines.

Class Reading and Close Read:

20 minutes

- Ask for a single reader to read the poem to the class. Then divide the poem's couplets (except the last one) between pairs or small groups in the class and have each group do an active brainstorm of what the emotions that are created by the objects and their paired symbols or metaphors.

Class Discussion:

20 minutes. Have each group present their brainstorm of emotions and compile all the interpretations into one big list on the board.

- Discuss what the title of the poem "Memento", means
- An object kept as a reminder of a souvenir of a person or event
- Discuss the meaning of the final two sentences in relation to the list of emotions on the board, and the poem's title. Consider these questions:
- How does the poem's speaker feel about the city they come from?
- What kind of histories are hinted at in the poem?
- Consider a short overview of the history of the Philippines.
Use this as a guide: <http://www.philippine-history.org/>

Activity and Homework:

20 minutes

- Have students brainstorm some big events of history that have happened in the country, compile a list of these on the board.
- As a writing exercise, ask students to compose a few couplets each in the style of "Memento".
- Using specific objects related to the history events on the board, pair them up with related images and metaphors.
- Compile all these couplets into a class collection.

Transits Between Text and Image

Learning Objectives:

- Students will demonstrate close-reading skills by analyzing the relationship between text and image in fiction
- Students will become familiar with the poetics of Catalan writer J.V. Foix
- Students will practice writing a creative close-reading analysis

Approximate Level and Length:

High School, One 60 minute class

Materials Needed:

- Copies of J.V. Foix's [*Notes on El Port de la Selva*](#), translated by Lawrence Venuti
- Chalkboard, whiteboard, or copies of discussion points
- Notebooks and writing tools
- Poster paper

Context for Educator:

Read the following excerpt from the Anglo-Catalan Society's anthology on J. V. Foix's work:

The year 1993 marked the centenary of the birth of J. V. Foix (1893-1987), probably the most enduring of modern Catalan poets, and one whose work continues to present a formidable challenge to his readers...

[Arthur Terry's essay] attempts to explain Foix's poetics in terms of a cosmic vision which affects the smallest details of his poems and accounts for the constant presence of metamorphoses. Manuel Carbonell examines with great subtlety the relations between modernity and tradition in Foix's work, stressing the importance of the 'Instant' in which time is made eternal, and which frees us from historical contingency. Marie-Claire Zimmerman concentrates on a single collection, Sol, i de dol, and shows in impressive detail how the voice of the speaker is deliberately constructed as independent from the author: 'In Sol, i de dol, the voice gradually constructs its solitude and its place in the world... Language is above all a movement, a tension, the material energy of the world in a reduced, poetic space.' And finally, Dominic Keown provides a useful corrective to over-solemn interpretations of Foix by insisting on the centrality of humor in his works, or, as he puts it himself: 'at the heart of Foix's creativity there is a certain playfulness stemming from the tension between the uncomplicated nature of the poetic vision and the complexity of its expression.'

Pre-Class Activity:

- Have students read J. V. Foix's *Notes on El Port de la Selva*, including the biographies

Activity 1: Drawing the Poetics of Sea Imagery

25 minutes

- Split the class into 8 groups and distribute poster paper.
- Have each group perform a creative close-reading of one section of Foix's work, with a focus on Foix's evocation of the sea.
 1. Students should first individually analyze the defining image(s) of their section.
 2. Students should collectively discuss their analyses
 3. Finally, students should use poster paper to draw an image that represents what is written in their section.
- Have groups present their posters and analyses. Draw connections between sections.

Activity 2: Mapping Scholarly Conversations:

25 minutes

- Explain that students will use their close-readings from the first activity to identify and/or challenge scholarly ideas put forth about Foix's work.
- Drawing on the Anglo-Catalan Society's preface, introduce (on paper or the board) four characteristics of Foix's work that scholars have identified:
 - a. Cosmic visions and metamorphoses
 - b. Relationships between the "modern" and the "traditional"
 - c. Language as "a movement, a tension, the material energy of the world in a reduced poetic space"
 - d. Literary playfulness
- Give groups 5-10 minutes to analyze to what extent these four characteristics can be identified in their section of Notes on El Port de la Selva. Encourage students to think of additional characteristics based on their own analyses of Foix's work.
- Have groups present and debate their responses.

Writing Assignment:

Write a series of literary "notes" about a local natural resource, in the style of J. V. Foix's *Notes on El Port de la Selva*. You may consider including photographs or drawings in your piece.

Resources:

- <http://www.anglo-catalan.org/downloads/acsop-monographs/issue10.pdf>

Writing an Odyssey

Learning Objectives:

- Students will read, understand, and discuss the reading passage, develop written communication skills, and analyze how authors/translators use language in fiction

Approximate Level and Length:

High School or University, Two 60 minute classes

Materials Needed:

- Copies of "[The Odyssey](#)" by Ana Luísa Amaral
- Chalkboard/whiteboard
- Materials for writing letters to a partner (pen and paper, classroom discussion board, etc.)

Instructions:

In this lesson, students will engage in guided letter writing activities. For each prompt, students write a one-page letter to their partner. Then they exchange letters, read their partner's letter, and write a half a page reply. The purpose of the letter exchange is for students to experience the genre of letter writing (greeting, body, closing), and to develop written communication skills. The letters also give students opportunities to explore the piece and prepare ideas for in class discussion. Letters can be evaluated on the following criteria: content, language use, engagement with the piece and partner's letter, format and word count.

If possible, students' letters could be collected and displayed as a shared class object. This could be done in a variety of ways, transforming individual paper letters into booklets, bulletin boards, or scanned copies uploaded to a class site. Alternatively, students can compose the letters online, using a class discussion board or blog. Further information about using letter exchanges in class can be found in the Resources section below.

Pre-Class:

- Students should write a letter to their partner in response to Letter One Prompt for homework and bring it to the next class.

Letter One Prompt: *Write a one-page letter to your partner. In the first paragraph, answer the following two questions: Can you give an example of a letter from a novel or movie? What role did the letter play in the story? In the second paragraph, write an answer to the following question: What do you know or imagine about the process of writing or sending this letter? Your letter should include a greeting and a closing.*

Lesson One - Letter Exchange

20 minutes

- Students should exchange letters written in response to the Letter One Prompt, read their partner's letter, and write about half a page reply.
- Wrap up the activity by asking a few students to briefly share an example of a letter in literature.

Discussion:

20 minutes

Introduce "The Odyssey" with this quotation from the translator's note:

"The Odyssey" is an excerpt from poet Ana Luísa Amaral's only novel Ara (winner of the 2014 PEN prize in Portugal) which shifts effortlessly back and forth between poetry and prose. This remarkable passage must be the first time an author has inhabited the very soul of a letter as it makes the odyssey from sender to receiver.

Put students into groups of four (two letter writing pairs) to discuss the following questions.

- What aspects of sending and receiving a letter are often depicted in literature or movies?
- What aspects of sending and receiving a letter might appear in "The Odyssey"?
- How is letter writing similar or different to other genres of writing?

Reading:

20 minutes

In their groups, students should read out "The Odyssey", taking turns to read the paragraphs in round robin style. After reading, they should briefly summarize the piece and ask questions about anything they do not understand.

Homework:

Letter Two Prompt: Write a one page letter to your partner. The body of your letter should address the idea from the translator's note that "...there is a delight in playing with language..." In what ways do you think the author and/or translator of The Odyssey play with the language? Give and discuss at least two specific examples from the text, why you chose them, and what impression they made on you as a reader. (You might consider some of the following: simile, metaphor, repetition, sensory imagery, word play/puns, anthropomorphism, narrative voice, gender, or title.)

Lesson 2 - Letter Exchange:

20 minutes

- Students should exchange letters written in response to the Letter Two Prompt, read their partner's letter, and write about half a page reply

Class Discussion (40 minutes)

In small groups and then as a class, discuss the following topics:

- What examples of playing with language did you discuss in your letter exchange? Which examples were most effective for you as a reader and why?
- In "The Odyssey", a letter is humanized. What feelings or traits does the letter have that are similar to humans? How is gender constructed and represented in the text? What is the effect of anthropomorphism in this piece?
- How is "The Odyssey" similar or different to other examples of letters in literature or movies?
- What did you learn about the process of letter writing through the letter exchange with your partner?

If further examples of playing with language are needed, students can refer to the information from the Translator's Note for further explanation of the "difficulties" of translating the piece, such as gender, compound nouns, and puns. In addition, refer students to specific quotations from the piece, such as the following:

"The one who bought her hadn't been thinking about chosen moments, but she had: when the owner of the shop plucked her from the stack of envelopes and blank sheets of paper, when unknown hands picked her up, like the beginning of a friendship, her blank heart, half-envelope, half-enveloped, beat a little faster. And thus she became the mythical result of that love triangle between envelope, paper and the hand holding the pen."

"What happened next was almost a deluge: black marks like raindrops in a storm, the sheet of paper ravaged by all those things previously put on hold: brief confidences, between-the-lines hints of love interspersed among the titles of books, moments of affection."

"Then there were days of waiting among boxes and people, the noise of engines and new streets. She was fascinated to see how different it all was from the shop where she had lived and from the factory where she had first seen light. With a faint rustle, she fell in among her sisters, but they were all so different: letters from banks, a foreign postcard, an advertisement for children's clothing, mere clones."

Homework:

If time, have students share their work in a subsequent class.

Write a one page letter to the author and/or translator to ask questions about the poem. Write not only your questions, but the reasons for your questions and possible answers to the questions. The letter should include a greeting and a closing.

In the style of "The Odyssey", write about the life cycle of an object. Play with language as you write a one page piece of fiction.

Extension:

Read "Love, Poem 5: The Letter" by Emily Dickinson. What similarities and differences can you find between it and The Odyssey? Secondary poem available at <http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/115/the-poems-of-emily-dickinson-series-two/4409/love-poem-5-the-letter>

For more information about letter writing, see Exploring Literature through Letter Writing Groups at <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/exploring-literature-through-letter-397.html?tab=3#tabs>

Language as Liberation: Analyzing the (Un)Said

Four 60-minute classes

Learning Objectives

- Students will demonstrate close-reading skills by analyzing the relationship between language and liberation in drama
- Students will create thematic intertextual conversations between different writers
- Students will practice writing a close-reading analysis

Approximate Level and Length:

Undergraduate, two 50-minute classes for discussion-based activities

Materials Needed:

- Copies of Jon Fosse's *Death Variations*, translated by May-Brit Akerholt
- Chalkboard, whiteboard, or copies of discussion points
- Notebooks and writing tools

Context for Educator:

Review the translator's note:

Jon Fosse's language is a special form of dialect, New Norwegian. His characters are entrenched in a world that comes alive because of language and the way he uses it. He warns his translators against the sin of paraphrasing in order to make a text "explicable." You have to be fully aware of the ways Fosse deploys a seemingly ordinary, simple language, and creates a poetic, nuanced, and complex dialogue.

Fosse's theatre has been compared to Beckett, Bernard, Chekhov; labels have included absurdist theatre, psychological theatre, hyperrealism. I resist putting any label on his dramatic writing, as I don't want to reduce his theatre to a 'description.' His characters exist in a world created by Fosse's unique manipulation of the dramatic landscape; the characters are the language they speak. My interest lies in how he brings into play, even liberates, the resources of language to create his own form of the art we call theatre.

Pre-Class Activity:

- Have students read Jon Fosse's "Death Variations", including the biographies and translator's note

Activity 1: Questions of Freedom:

50 minutes

Instructions:

1. Have four volunteers read the play to the class. Performers should be mindful of stage directions, pauses, and breaks in the dialogue.
2. Share the following questions on paper or the board. Give students 10-15 minutes to free write on one or more of the prompts.
In your view, what is happening in the play?
- What elements of the piece did you find most intriguing or unusual? What are the effects of these elements? You might consider the roles of pauses, gazes, movement, setting, and lack of punctuation, as well as how gender is constructed through language.
- How do you understand the relationship between language (spoken or unspoken) and freedom as it relates to the text?
- What does the translator mean when she states that Fosse “liberates the resources of language”? To what extent do you agree with this? Support your responses with evidence from the text.
3. Conduct a class discussion on students’ impressions of the piece, with a focus on the relationship between language and liberation. Use the free write prompts as a guide.

Activity 2: Exploring Natality, Mortality, and Plurality:

50 minutes

Context: This activity encourages students to generate dialogues between Fosse's *Death Variations* and Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, in which Arendt proposes natality and plurality, rather than mortality, as the two core elements of the human condition.

Instructions:

1. Explain that students will draw connections between Fosse's *Death Variations* and Arendt's *The Human Condition*.
2. Introduce students to Arendt's concepts of natality and plurality. Share the following discussion points about *The Human Condition* on paper or the board:
 - *Arendt suggests three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action. She argues that "of the three, action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting." Implying that one must consider oneself political as part of the human condition, she continues: "In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of the political, as distinguished from metaphysical thought."*
 - *On plurality, Arendt states that it is "the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live."*
3. Have two volunteers explain and/or challenge Arendt's concepts of natality and plurality. If you have access to the book, consider analyzing additional passages that address these concepts.
4. Split students into pairs or small groups. Share the following questions on paper or the board and have groups collectively brainstorm answers:
 - *How could Arendt's concepts of natality and plurality speak to aspects of Fosse's play?*
 - *Could *Death Variations* be interpreted as political? How so?*
 - *Considering some of the arguments in *The Human Condition*, how do you understand the title of Fosse's play? If you were to give the play a different title, what would it be?*
5. Reconvene as a class and have groups present their responses.

Writing Assignment (Homework):

Write a short paper that discusses a question of “freedom” in Fosse’s *Death Variations*. You might unpack relationships between characters, linguistic elements, the play and *The Human Condition*, or another configuration. Support your argument with evidence from the text.

As an example, you might analyze the language of the Older Woman’s opening lines as a starting point to discuss a question of personal, political, and/or linguistic liberation that is explored throughout the piece.

THE OLDER WOMAN

talks to herself

As if it was always there

and never there

and it can never be known

and never be

forsaken

It is a life

with another tranquility

than the one we’ll see

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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