



COSMIC CONNECTIONS
SPRING 2019 EDUCATORS' GUIDE





EDUCATOR’S GUIDE **Spring 2019 | COSMIC CONNECTIONS**

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. From <i>Five Poems</i> by Georgi Gospodinov	5
<i>For rising middle school students</i>	
<i>For high school students</i>	
<i>For ELL Students</i>	
3. Gertrud Kolmar’s “Mourning Play” – An Introduction to lyric poetry	11
<i>For high school students</i>	
<i>For undergraduate college students</i>	
3. Finding Voices in Translation: a (re)Translation Class Project – Considering two contemporary essays on translation	15
<i>For college students</i>	
4. “To Cut Out” – Diana Khoi Nguyen’s work	20
<i>For high school students</i>	
<i>For college students</i>	
6. Acknowledgments	22

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Spring 2019 issue of the *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 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.

Asymptote's Spring 2019 issue, "Cosmic Connections" (available for free at <http://www.asymptotejournal.com/apr-2019>) explores the intricate connections and contradictions of movement and connection, both in the physical world through travel and in relation to the interior through questions of philosophy, psychology and identity. The first set of lesson plans in this guide is based on three of the *Five Poems* by Georgi Gospodinov. These lesson plans are geared towards English Language Learners and high school students, and they contain various activities that allow students to engage with these poems on a linguistic and thematic level. Another lesson plan uses the translation of Gertrud Kolmar's poem "Mourning Play" to have students practice reading a lyric poem on thematic and formal level. It could be used either as an introduction to a unit on poetry or as a standalone lesson. The section "Finding Voices in Translation" uses two essays from *Asymptote*'s current feature on translation to guide students towards a more considered approach to their own translation projects in the light of current discussions of translation theory. A further lesson plan asks students to consider Diana Khoi Nguyen's complex work, both through the slide show and interview published in *Asymptote*'s Spring issue and through crafting and considering their own collages.

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

(<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 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.

From FIVE POEMS by Georgi Gospodinov

The following three lesson plans are each based on one poem from *Five Poems* by Bulgarian poet Georgi Gospodinov, available here:

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/five-poems>

It is not necessary to complete all three lesson plans; each one can be taught individually. The first lesson plan is based on “Place des Vosges.” It would be appropriate for a unit on prepositional phrases for English language learners. The second lesson plan uses “Toutes directions” as source material, and it focuses the use of idioms and proverbs. The third lesson plan is about the poem “Disbanding Love’s Armies.” It encourages students to explore the mood in the poem and acquaints them with figurative language.

I “Place des Vosges”

Learning objectives

By the end of the class, students will have

- read and understood a poem with particular attention to grammatical forms
- reviewed the use of prepositions and compose a text which deploys a variety of prepositional phrases

Approximate level and instruction environments

Middle school and above, English language learners

Materials needed

- “Place des Vosges” from Five Poems by Georgi Gospodinov
- Picture(s) of Place des Vosges

Length

One 45-minute lesson

Lesson Plan

Warm up (10 minutes)

Review prepositional phrases, as needed. Prepositional phrases consist of a preposition and an object.

Show students a picture of the setting for today’s poem: “Place des Vosges.”

Ask students to describe the photo using prepositional phrases and make a list of these on the board. For example, a photo from the French Monuments website (see Resources) can be described as follows: two people are sitting on a bench, the toddler is next to the fountain, the baby carriage is parked in the grass, etc.

Reading (25 minutes)

Distribute copies of the poem to students. Read the poem aloud to students, and then

have students do a choral reading of the poem.

Have students highlight the use of prepositional phrases in the poem (e.g. “in the garden,” “among the mothers and fathers,” “on the paths”).

Draw a simple sketch of the scene described in the poem to demonstrate understanding of the location of people in the garden. Students share their sketches with a partner.

After clarifying any misunderstandings related to language, move on to a discussion of the themes. Discuss the following questions with a partner and then as a class: What does it mean “to have all the time in the world”? What does this poem tell us about the difference between how young and old perceive time? Why does the speaker want to slow down? What is the relationship between people and time?

Writing (10 minutes)

Choose a place and write a descriptive paragraph or a poem using a variety of prepositional phrases in your writing.

Students can begin brainstorming ideas in class and finish the assignment for homework.

Resources

<https://frenchmoments.eu/place-des-vosges-paris/>

II “Toutes directions”

Learning objectives

By the end of the class, students will have analyzed the use of “all roads lead to Rome” in the poem and in journalistic writing.

Approximate level and instruction environments

Middle school and above, English language learners

Materials Needed

“Toutes directions” from *Five Poems* by Georgi Gospodinov

Picture of a French road sign reading “Toutes Directions” available here:

<https://sgenbn.fr/education-dans-quelle-direction-macron-marche-t-il/toutes-directions/>

Devices with internet access (optional)

Length

One 45-minute class

Lesson Plan

Warm-up (5 minutes)

Introduce the title of the poem and have students look at the picture of the French road sign reading “toutes directions”. What comes to mind when you see this picture? What do you think the poem will be about?

Reading (10 minutes)

Read the poem aloud to the students, and then have students read the poem aloud to a partner.

Discuss: How does this poem play with the meaning of “All roads lead to Rome”?

(Background: It means all paths end up in the same place or there are many ways to achieve the same goal. More information about the history can be found at <https://writingexplained.org/idiom-dictionary/all-roads-lead-to-rome.>)

Research & Discussion (20 minutes)

Small groups of students work together to conduct an internet search for news headlines containing the words “all roads lead to”. Each group should write a different article title on the board. If it is not possible for the students to do an online search, the teacher can prepare headlines for students to work with. Sample search results from April 2019: All Roads Lead to Single Payer, All Roads Lead to Notre Dame, All Roads Lead to Winterfell, All Roads (and repairs) lead to the Governor.

After each group has written a headline on the board, groups can discuss the following questions: From reading the title, what do you think the article is about? Why do you think the author chose to use “all roads lead to” as a basis for the headline? In other words, how might it relate to the definition of “all roads lead to Rome” given above? Can you think of other examples of proverbs or idioms?

Writing (10 minutes)

Depending on the class, assign writing assignment A or B. Explain the instructions, have students begin working on it in class, and then finish for homework. If time, have students share their work in a subsequent class or display them on a class bulletin board.

A: One strategy for writing interesting newspaper headlines or blog post titles is to use a proverb or idiom. Think about the examples of other proverbs or idioms that you brainstormed during the previous discussion. Use these as the basis for writing titles for a school or local news event. Write 3 different titles. Then choose your favorite title and explain why you think it is the most effective.

B: Think about the examples of other proverbs or idioms that you brainstormed during the previous discussion. Write a short poem based on a proverb or idiom in the style of "Toutes directions."

III "Disbanding Love's Armies"

Learning Objectives

By the end of the class, students will have read a poem and identified how mood is conveyed through word choice and figurative language

Approximate level and instruction environments

High school and above, English language learners

Materials Needed

"Disbanding Love's Armies" from *Five Poems* by Georgi Gospodinov

Highlighters and writing utensils

Chalkboard or whiteboard

Copies of the frame for composing a poem

Length

One 45-minute class

Lesson Plan

Warm up (5 minutes)

What feelings would people have in the following situations?

Taking a family vacation. Having a disagreement with a friend or partner. Getting a good score on a test.

Reading (5 minutes)

Students read the poem aloud with a partner and discuss their initial thoughts.

Mood (10 minutes)

"In literature, mood is a literary element that evokes certain feelings or vibes in readers through words and descriptions. Usually, mood is referred to as the atmosphere of a literary piece, as it creates an emotional setting that surrounds the readers"

(Literarydevices.net).

What is the mood of this poem? Why do you think so? In other words, what specific words or phrases from the poem convey this mood?

Exploring figurative language (10 minutes)

A simile compares two things with the use of the words “like” or “as.” Individually, have students highlight the similes in the poem.

Draw a chart like the one below on the board. Ask students for their ideas and fill in the blanks as a class. An example has been provided.

1. Write the simile.
2. What two things (A, B) are compared?
3. What feeling does the simile convey?

Simile	A	B	What feeling does the simile convey?
I feel like an army in peacetime	I feel	An army in peacetime	Feeling a lack of purpose

Discussion (10 minutes)

“Empathy is the experience of understanding another person's thoughts, feelings, and condition from his or her point of view, rather than from one's own” (Psychology Today).

In an interview with The Calvert Journal, Gospodinov said, “Empathy is a basic principle of reading and literature; without empathy, we are unable to identify with the characters” (See Resources).

In the poem, how does the speaker imagine the woman feels? How do you know? As a reader, do you feel empathy for the speaker in this poem? For the woman? Why or why not?

Homework Assignment (5 minutes)

The following writing activity can be started in class and finished for homework. Students could share their work in the next class, if possible.

(See poem scaffold on next page)

Write a poem by filling in the blanks with your own ideas. Feel free to change the topic or mood of the poem. After finishing the poem, answer the questions below.

She / He / They _____ in that way
that tells you everything
has already been decided, and said
_____, I feel like _____

_____;

like a _____
like a _____.

You have long been thinking it over, I said
it sounds like a poem.
The end has been left for me, here:
I am _____

_____.

What mood did you want to convey in your poem? What words or phrases did you use to convey this mood? What feelings did you want to convey through the similes you wrote?

Resources

Definition of Empathy at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/empathy>
Interview with Georgi Gospodinov at
<https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/10556/georgi-gospodinov-bulgarias-most-translated-contemporary-writer-on-empathy>

Reading the Lyric Poem: Gertrud Kolmar's "Mourning Play"

Please refer to Gertrud Kolmar's "Mourning Play," translated by Anna Henke and Julia Gutterman, available at <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/animal-dreams/>

Learning Objectives

By the end of the class, students will have

- practiced a deliberate reading of Kolmar's poem
- developed an understanding of the elements of a short lyric

Approximate level and instruction environments

Suitable for adolescent audiences. High school juniors and seniors; undergraduate students; as an introduction to a unit about poetry.

Materials needed

Printouts of poem

Dry-erase board or blackboard

Length

One period of 60 minutes or two adjacent periods with one of 45 minutes and about 15 to 20 minutes of the following period

Context for instructor

This lesson plan allows students to explore a lyrical poem both on a thematic and a formal level. This could be a standalone lesson or a lesson introducing a unit about poetry. Kolmar's poetry is considered "opaque" and this poem is a good example. As such, it provides an opportunity to acquaint students with the notion that poetry, particularly modern poetry, is often not fully decipherable and that this residual mystery is, indeed, desirable in that it allows us to linger over the poem rather than to process it to be filed away as "done."

Lesson Plan

I Warm-up Activity [10 minutes]

Read the poem to students. (Do not hand out the poem yet)

Question: what do students notice about the poem? (Write down points on board)

- Sound
- Topic
- Mood
- What do they think about the title?

Students write down brief responses to these questions.

Re-read the poem to students. Encourage them to add to their initial responses.

Brief class discussion. Students share their responses first with their neighbors, then in the group.

Note: the idea is to encourage class discussion and close listening. Ideally students come up with “rhyme,” the fact that the poem is “about a tiger,” the idea that the poem is “sad.” Do not correct students when they understand the title as “morning play.”

II Activity 1 — Thematic reading of the poem [20 minutes]

Hand out a printed version of the poem.

Students gather in groups of three and read the printed poem. They discuss the differences between their initial impression and the way they understand the poem now.

1. Check that students understand the vocabulary of the poem. Have them guess the meaning of the following words before providing definitions.

Vocabulary

“Seam” (v.) — join with a seam; connect.

“Fallow” — of a field: plowed but left unseeded.

“Diurnal” — occurring or active during daytime.

“League” — a unit of distance.

“Stay” — a brief period of residence or visiting

2. Students go, stanza by stanza, and describe in their own words what the stanza is about. This could be done in small groups and students could write down paraphrases of the stanzas on one piece of paper.

Follow by a discussion of the theme of the poem as a whole.

Elicit: anthropomorphizing of animals and the cage; feeling trapped and alienated; homelessness; mourning; loss of freedom.

3. Ask students to write one question they still have about the poem. Questions can range from questions about the meaning of particular lines, about the mention of the candle in the last stanza but also about word choice etc.

Possible questions to consider (if students have trouble coming up with questions):

How is the theme of captivity expressed in the poem?

What do you make of the idea that “things slide and splinter” in the second stanza?

How do they depart?

What could it mean that they are “seamed”? (What other ways of connecting impressions exist? How is this perception particular to the cage?)

What is the prominent theme for you in the third stanza?

Why do you think the poet uses the image of “a candle only, soot-soiled, golden” for the tiger? [the German original reads literally “a golden soot striped candle”]

4. Instructor records questions on blackboard/whiteboard/piece of paper and the class discusses them together.

Note: It might be worthwhile to point out that the poem does not need to be fully “explained” or “deciphered,” that it may remain mysterious. Reading poetry can, to some extent, be a playful exploration of language. When a student asks a question (“what does xxx mean?”), the instructor can encourage the student to explore on her own (“How do you think this could be meaningful, based on your reading of the poem, your experience, your understanding?”)

III Activity 2 — Formal reading of the poem [10 minutes]

1. Introduction: the lyrical poem. Provide a brief definition in audience-appropriate language. Point out the reference to music and sound.

Lyric is one of the three general categories of poetic lit., the others being narrative (or epic) and dramatic [...] Although the differentiating features between these arbitrary categories are sometimes moot, lyric poetry may be said to retain most prominently the elements which evidence its origin in musical expression—singing, chanting, and recitation to musical accompaniment [...] In the case of lyric, ... the musical element is intrinsic to the work intellectually as well as aesthetically ...

From “Lyric” in: *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, Princeton, NJ, 1993.

2. Question: In what way is this a lyrical poem? Where do you see musical elements? How do they contribute to/influence your reading of the poem?

3. Question: What do you observe about the form of the poem? (elicit: stanzas, rhythm, rhyme, internal rhymes)

4. This is a translation from German. What do you think the main challenges of translating this poem were?

Note: You may want to share this excerpt from the translators' note:

The difficulty and opacity of Kolmar's German has prompted critics to compare her with Annette von Droste-Hülshoff. The translators have not attempted to dispel this darkness but to trace its signature in English. In the following selections, the translators have tried to preserve as closely as possible the rhyme schemes and strict meter that characterize much of Kolmar's poetry. "Trauerspiel," with its iambs and alternating rhyme scheme, proved particularly challenging in this regard.

IV Wrap up

Instructor chooses three questions generated in activity 1. Students choose one and write about it for 5 minutes. Instructor collects the writing.

Instructor or student volunteer reads the poem to the class.

Finding Voices in Translation: a (re)Translation Class Project

Please refer to “On (In)Visibility” by Maggie Zebracka, available at <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/maggie-zebracka-on-invisibility/>

and “The *turbo* and the *chiaro*” by Frederika Randall, available at <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/special-feature/frederika-randall-the-turbo-and-the-chiaro/>

Note: Portions of this lesson are adapted from Marcia H. Lindgren, Life Blumberg, and Joshua Langseth, Department of Classics, University of Iowa. "From Literal to Literary. A Translation Project for Latin Poetry Classes."

Learning Objectives

By the end of the class, students will have

- experienced translation as a form of creative, literary expression (not as a language-learning exercise).
- understood the varieties of translation and the ways that different translations give different kinds of access to a text.

Approximate level and instruction environments

College-level students in foreign language classes or in any monolingual class with a creative writing component

This project focuses on the creation of individual, literary translations using writing drafts, as well as previously translated source texts. Texts about translation are provided in order to guide the student writers' thinking about the process.

As Maggie Zebracka's essay suggests, we have many resources when it comes to thinking about craft in the creative writing process. However, when we reflect on translation, we are frequently caught between metaphors (about faithfulness or visibility, for example) and legalistic concerns (the ethics of translation, the duty of the translator, etc.). For students being introduced to translation, neither laws nor analogies provide helpful tools for crafting a literary text. This series of tasks will help to guide students through the process of translating and creating a strong, creative text based on well thought-out artistic choices.

The assessment portion (see Grading Rubric) is flexible, as the nature of the translation projects will vary greatly. In some cases, instructors may wish to create detailed rubrics relating to specific writing tasks. In others, the creative portion may be emphasized, or the focus may be on understanding the original and the creative portion will receive less weight.

Lesson Plan

I. Groundwork

Students should choose to work with a text which has already been translated. This is key to the process, as it will allow them to consider a fuller range of choices than they might consider if limited to their own process.

Instructors in language classes may wish to offer students a selection of texts to choose from. However, advanced students may enjoy choosing their own texts.

What elements do I need to consider when translating this particular text? How do I understand the voice, register, rhetorical situation, and cultural context of the original? Who else has translated this author? Are there existing translations that are contemporary with the original text? Are there translations written in the English of my era?

What type of translation will I write? Close, loose, or imitation? An imitation is a translation inspired by the manner or subject of the original work, one that puts an entirely new spin on the original text.

Who will I imagine my audience to be? A general audience, other college (or high school) students, or a smaller in-group, such as my friends or classmates?

Will I leave the names and historical references as they are, will I try to gloss them within the text, or will I try to substitute modern equivalents? Will I include notes, or use in-text glossing?

II. Literal Translation

Short, autonomous pieces work best for this project. Students should do an initial translation of the text as a single draft. They should stick as closely as possible to the wording of the original text and put aside complex solutions for awkward phrasing, distinctive cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and so on. This first draft simply allows the student and instructor to confirm that the student has understood the source text and is prepared to do further work.

III. Literary Translation

Before revising their drafts, students should read the essays by Frederika Randall and Maggie Zebracka.

Questions on Zebracka's essay:

Is it possible to talk about "tips" for good translation? Why can't translators have "muses"? Or can they?

Zebracka uses the metaphors of construction and house-building to talk about the translation process. What do these metaphors imply about the process? How is this different, for example, from thinking about the translator as a transmitter of ideas or as a medium (more internal, less concrete metaphors)?

Questions on Randall's essay:

What does Randall have to say about the idea of "common knowledge" in translating?

Explain in your own words what Randall means in this passage: “There are always ideas, images, and feelings attached to and hidden behind the words in a written passage. Polysemy, tacit underlying premises and assumptions, abstraction: all can make the lexical and semantic sense unstable, multiple.”

What examples does she give of "incommunicability" from her own translation experience?

Using these essays, students should begin to re-consider some of the issues raised in the Groundwork portion. Will they choose to be as invisible as possible or will they make their creative voice heard? How? This could be as simple as notes or glossing, or as complex as a choice to imitate the text in a different voice or to use it as a point of departure for a radically different creation.

What are the obscure aspects of the text? Where is there clarity? Are there gaps in my understanding, or are there things the text assumes or obscures? How will I deal with these obscure passages? In some cases, the obscurity may lie in the use of a particular form, which provides structure and constraints, but also links the work to many others of the same kind. In other cases, a complex network of cultural associations may give the original dimensions difficult to capture in the translation. The student should articulate the range of issues to be addressed in a translation.

Reading and Reflection

The next step is for students to compare their own translation of a text or text passage to someone else's version. Students should have identified at least one published version of their chosen text and should examine it in detail:

In what ways does this other version differ from their own version?

Are there places in which the other translator has evidently made a choice about the intended readers' "common knowledge"? For instance, are things glossed, are there notes, or are things left unexplained?

Are the specific choices that make this other translator visible? For example, we might notice language that now seems outdated or translation choices that depart dramatically from the text. What effect do these choices have?

Are there places where the other translator has found a different solution to a difficult portion of the text?

Are there places where the student and the other translator differ on the meaning of the text and offer different interpretations in their translations?

Essay

Students revise their translation and write a short essay.

In their essay, they should:

- Introduce the text, giving an overview of the original text's content, structure, and cultural and historical context.
- Explain their strategies and choices in translating these aspects of the text.

Oral Presentation

The final portion of the project is declamation: students perform their finished translation. Students must introduce the work and explain briefly how they chose to translate it (essentially, this is a summary of what they have written in their reflection essays). They then recite their translations from memory.

If suitable, work can also be presented orally by a group of students in a story-theater style. The group must choose movements and gestures to accompany each line and may alternate between individual, pair, and whole group recitation.

The project evaluation is based on the completion of the steps in the process, rather than on the final project alone, so as not to penalize students who choose the most challenging texts.

Sample Grading Rubric

This is adapted from Lindgren et al. It will be necessary to adapt your rubric to the variety of projects students choose. For that reason, this rubric offers basic categories and simple assessments.

Name:

Total points/grade:

Part 1: Literal Translation [10 points]

Typed, double-spaced with fewer than three mechanical or translation errors [____/5]

Handed in on time [____/5]

Part 2: Polished Translation [45 points]

Typed, double-spaced with fewer than three mechanical errors [____/5]

Handed in on time [____/5]

Effective use of form. [____/10]

Originality/effective use of language [____/15]

(Includes adaptation to contemporary idiomatic English, choice of social and cultural context, register, imagery, etc.)

Conveyed style, themes, and tone of original [____/10]

Part 3: Explanatory Essay [30 points]

Typed, double-spaced with fewer than three mechanical errors [_____/5]

Handed in on time [_____/5]

Showed understanding of original text's content, structure, and cultural context [_____/10]

Revealed thoughtful consideration of choices [_____/ 10]

Part 4: Class Presentation [15 points]

Presented at appropriate speed; spoke clearly and with sufficient volume [_____/ 5]

Used appropriate expression and gesture (to enhance/convey meaning) [_____/5]

Presented engaging background material [_____/5]

Comments:

Diana Khoi Nguyen, To Cut Out

Khoi's article is freely available here: <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/visual/diana-khoi-nguyen-eva-heisler-to-cut-out/>

Learning Objective

Students will reflect on the role art plays in grief and identity and consider the representational strategies of different media.

Approximate level and instruction environments

High school or college

Materials needed

Ability to view video and slideshow in class

Length

One 45-minute class period with preparation and homework

Preparation

Students should find a photograph they like and cut out a portion of the photograph. This may be a person or an object. Students should then glue the photograph with the resulting gap onto a piece of paper. The gap left by the cut out person or object should then be filled by something else. This could be text, another object or person, a pattern.

Lesson Plan

Begin class with a discussion (~10 minutes) of the student collages:

What did you cut out? What did you fill in the missing portion with? Did people write a description of what was missing? Or attempt to draw it? Or did they fill in the space with something entirely different? Was the added material complementary, or contrasting? What new ideas or emotions were added to the photograph?

Next, as a class, look at the slide show, and watch the video. Discuss.

Nguyen's project is partly inspired by her brother cutting himself out of family photographs. In her work, which is in some ways a process of mourning and memorialization, she fills in the missing space of the photograph with words, images, or a background of natural scenes. How does this compare to the photograph projects of the class?

Nguyen explains that one of the ideas behind her work is the technique of *gyotaku*, which involves putting ink on the body of a fish and then pressing it into paper, like a stamp. She says she likes the idea that this method creates an impression, rather than capturing the whole of the fish. How is this technique related to her work? What is the difference between what is captured in a photograph, and what is captured in her work?

What kind of video is this? Does it tell a story? What elements or themes are raised that do not appear in the slideshow? What is their significance?

Homework

Drawing on the themes and ideas raised in the discussion of Nguyen's work, write an analysis of your collage project. What themes or ideas do you see in your piece? What is its mood—is it a joyful piece, or a sad one? What was captured in your project? If you had to do another collage, which photograph would you choose? What would you cut out and what would you use to fill in the gap?

FEEDBACK

Thanks for taking the time to read our Spring 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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