



# Body Memory

Educator's Guide  
Winter 2019

✦ ASYMPTOTE



## **EDUCATOR’S GUIDE** **WINTER 2019 | BODY MEMORY**

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Winter 2019 *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 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* Winter 2019 issue, "Body Memory," (available for free at <http://asymptotejournal.com/jan-2019>) explores physical bodies as loci of identity formation, as embodiments of memory and history, and as echo chambers of political realities, be they racialized, gendered or otherwise oppressive. The four lesson plans in this Educator's Guide encourage students to think about body image in their own culture against the backdrop of Tanja Mravak's short story "Meat;" to explore, in Sayaka Osaki's poem "Aboo," how our perception of physical appearance limits our perspective; to understand and perform history as an individually and collectively constructed phenomenon in Patricia Ariza's drama *Soma Mnemosyme*; and, lastly, to engage with Victor Serge's account of fundamental displacements sweeping across 1940s Europe. All lesson plans ask the instructor and the students to expand their notion of the body *and* of the text to include figurative and formal (visual, structural, stylistic) elements and their relevance to possible interpretations.

We realize that the age ranges for each lesson vary, and so we 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 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 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 in the global conversation about translated literature as it relates to them, we are currently accepting submissions.

If you're interested in contributing, collaborating, or if you'd like to give us additional feedback, please contact us at [education@asymptotejournal.com](mailto:education@asymptotejournal.com).

# **Bodies and Storytelling Across Cultures**

Lesson Plan for “Meat” (short narrative) by Tanja Mravak, translated by Antonija Primorac, found in the Winter 2019 issue here:

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/tanja-mravak-meat/>

## **Learning Objectives**

At the end of the class students will

- have reflected on body image in their own culture
- be able speak about how body image issues may manifest in another culture
- be aware of syntactic structure and style
- know about categories of short narrative forms
- be aware of the various dimensions that constitute a literary text

## **Approximate level and instruction environments**

Undergraduate English

Creative Writing classes

Advanced ESL (Writing)

No more than 24 students

## **Length**

90 Minutes

## **Materials needed**

- Copies of “Meat” by Tanja Mravak, translated by Antonija Primorac
- Whiteboard
- 4-5 poster-size Sheets of paper
- Markers
- sellotape

## **Context for Educator**

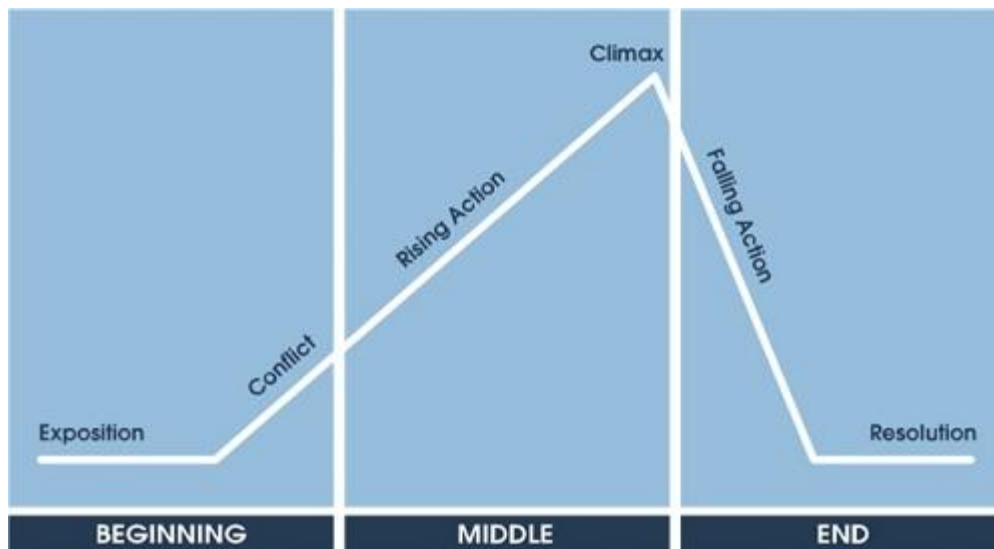
The collection this story is taken from deals with “everyday challenges that face emancipated (or sometimes, merely independent-minded) women living in the fairly patriarchal, traditional environment of the Croatian south” (translator’s note), but the story itself resembles a fable, a parable or a fairy tale. This lesson is designed to make students think about how body image is or is not relevant in traditional narratives in their own culture. Students should be encouraged to view this text as coming from another culture and to ask: how is it different/similar from/to what I see in my home culture?

An overarching objective for the set of activities as a whole is to have students think about a literary text from various angles, that is, text as narrative, text as addressing “issues” both thematic and political, and text as a language construct.

Be aware that the story contains a semi-explicit description of a sexual encounter. You and your students should be comfortable with that.

### PRE-CLASS ACTIVITY—“Text as Narrative”

Students read the text at home and think about how the story does or does not correspond to the classic narrative arc (stasis, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution).



Plot diagram created for [www.StoryboardThat.com](http://www.StoryboardThat.com) - Creative Commons License (100% free use)

## LESSON

Introduction (warmup)—15 minutes:

1. Students write in their notebooks about the story, that is, what happens, what is important about the story, how is the story being told.
2. Students get together in pairs to talk about their insights. They draw a narrative arc (or use printouts of the one above) and locate events in the story on that arc.
3. Plenary discussion: Instructor draws narrative arc and locates events along the arc.

There may be disagreement about the turning point. That is ok. The activity serves mainly to give students an opportunity to re-read the text and note its structural characteristics.

### Activity 1: Contextualizing the Story (20 - 25 minutes) — “Text as Addressing Ideas”

1. Instructor distributes poster-sized paper on tables around the classroom. Each paper has one word/concept in its center. The words can either be the result of a group discussion, chosen by the instructor or some of the following:

“gender,” “body image,” “diet,” “romance,” “sickness,” “beauty,” “character” or, on a more structural level, “fairy tale,” “fable,” “narrative” ....

2. Each student gets a marker and walks silently around the classroom to record her thoughts on how the narrative explores these concepts. If students seem to be “finished” after a short time have them go back and respond to the ideas of others (each student should respond to at least two others, maybe in a complete sentence).
3. Instructor tapes the posters to the wall and discusses results in the group. She may circle or highlight important and/or controversial concepts.
4. Each student writes down 2 - 3 new ideas about the story and shares them with her partner.

### **Activity 2: Body image (25 minutes)**

Share the translator’s note with the students:

The author writes stories that deal with “everyday challenges that face emancipated (or sometimes, merely independent-minded) women living in the fairly patriarchal, traditional environment of the Croatian South.”

1. Students spend 5 -10 minutes writing about body image in their own culture and think about how their own culture could be characterized (in light of the characterization of the Croatian South as “fairly patriarchal” and “traditional.”) Here, they may address some of the following questions:
  - a. Is a person’s outward appearance important in your culture? How? In what way? (romantically, professionally, as a proof of self-discipline ...)
  - b. What are the methods people use to get to that standard?How is that achieved in the story?
  - c. What are the consequences of not conforming to the standard?
  - d. How is that standard communicated in your culture?
2. Students share their thoughts, first in pairs, then as a group
3. Class as a whole (or in larger groups, depending on class size) create a compare and contrast chart pointing out how the text’s depiction is different/similar to their own culture.

While the preceding activities deal with Mravak’s/Primorac’s text primarily as a transmitter of ideas, this activity focuses on the language dimension of the text. We speak about how a text works when we speak about narrative (as in the pre-class activity)—and this activity asks the same question though on a stylistic level.

### Activity 3: Structural/language analysis (more advanced) — 20 minutes “Text as Language”

This could also be a homework prompt

This activity asks students to consider the language (form) of the text. You may want to point out that the text is a translation and that the language you are talking about is the translator’s language. This introduces an interesting aspect, and some students might be interested in exploring this question further.

Assignment:

1. Look at the language of the text, particularly the syntax.

Syntax in literature can roughly be defined as:

“the way in which words and sentences are placed together. Usually in the English language the syntax should follow a pattern of subject-verb-object agreement but sometimes authors play around with this to achieve a lyrical, rhythmic, rhetoric or questioning effect.”

(see <https://literary-devices.com/content/syntax/>)

2. Write a few example sentences on your board. (Alternatively you can make a handout for the students to work on these). Good sentences to use are:

Beginning of the text:

- She’d cook stews, Bolognese sauces, carbonaras. She’d fry potato chips, make crepes; twice a week she’d roast veal.
- Croissants, donuts, brioches, strudel, jam buns and baklavas.

Middle of the text:

- “You eat wonderfully,” said Vatro.  
“Thank you, and so do you,” Madga laughed.  
He put a piece of meat on a fork and brought it to Magda’s lips.

Towards the end of the text:

- Her mother bent down, took the elastic band, stretched it a bit, and when she looked up she saw a gap between Magda’s thighs.

3. Have the students write down one or two observations about these sentences. Alternatively, you may want to model how to map a sentence.
4. Ask: How do these sentences conform or not conform to conventional English sentences? Look particularly at the first, long paragraph: Why do you think the author uses this syntax? What effect does it have? (You want students to come up with the idea that the dense language with its paratactic sentences

conveys the abundance of Magda's outlook on life in the beginning of the story).

5. Students record 2 insights in their notebooks.
6. Share either as a group or in pairs.

### **Wrap-up**

Talk about the story as a whole and about the various dimensions of the text you have looked at, that is, narrative structure, content, political and cultural aspects, and style (if using Activity 3).

Students might contribute examples from their own reading where one of these aspects is prominent.

You may want to point out aspects of the story you haven't talked about such as the sense of humor, the lack of setting, the use of direct speech or other aspects that relate to materials or concepts you have worked with in your class.

Each student should note down two take-aways to email to you after the class.

### **Homework**

The homework is primarily focused on writing. Students should be encouraged to provide writing from their in-class activities that are the starting point for the ideas they develop in this writing..

Students can either:

- Write an exploratory text where they address two ideas present in "Meat" and develop these ideas further by investigating how these ideas are present or not present in their own culture. (This could have a word limit of 1000 words where you grade on the depth of the analysis of "meat" and the specificity of the argument)
- Alternatively, students could write a poem that uses food preparation to get at a larger idea
- Example: "Da Capo," by Jane Hirshfield, a reading of which can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/nfgHgNkHx9M>



# **Aboo by Sayaka Asaki**

Lesson Plan for “Aboo” (poem) by Sayaka Asaki, translated by Jeffrey Angles, found in the Winter 2019 issue here:

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/sayaka-osaki-new-habitat/>

## **Learning Objectives**

Students will read a poem with attention to vocabulary, expression, and theme

Students will read and understand a news article

Students will complete a Venn Diagram to analyze similarities and differences

## **Approximate Grade Level**

Upper elementary and above

## **Materials Needed**

*Aboo* (from *New Habitat*) by Sayaka Asaki, translated by Jeffrey Angles

Chalkboard or white board

Highlighters and writing utensils

Copies of a news article *Giant tortoise on the run no more* (See Resources)

Copies of a Venn Diagram (See Resources)

## **Approximate Length**

One 90-minute lesson or two 45-minute lessons

## **Lesson One**

### **Warm up (5 minutes)**

Let students know that they will be reading a poem about an animal that escaped from a zoo. Have students complete a brief freewrite to answer the following questions:

What comes to mind when you hear the word “zoo”?

What do you think about zoos?

### **Reading (20 minutes)**

Students should read the poem *Aboo* by Sayaka Asaki aloud with a partner.

After reading, students should highlight any unfamiliar vocabulary. List the unknown words on the board and ask class members to assist by providing definitions or examples of these words.

After students have read and understood the vocabulary used in the poem, ask students

Who does “you” refer to in this poem, giving specific lines from the text to support your idea? In other words, what kind of animal has escaped from the zoo?

After time for individual reflection, ask students for their ideas in plenary.

Inform students that according to the Author’s Note, this poem is based on the news of a giant tortoise who escaped from a zoo in Japan.

*Aboo is an Aldabra giant tortoise, approximately 55 kilograms in weight and one meter in length. Around 11:30 am on August 1, 2017, Aboo vanished from the Shibukawa Zoo in Okayama Prefecture where she was allowed to roam freely within an enclosure, and her disappearance quickly became national news. When the head of the zoo was interviewed, he admitted, “We were duped by our preconception that since she was a tortoise, she had to be slow.” This poem contains references to Kaori Oshima’s Japanese translation of Michael Ende’s Momo, in particular, the scenes in which the tortoise Cassiopeia appears.*

### **Discussion (20 minutes)**

- When you were reading this poem, did you imagine a tortoise? Why or why not?
- Does the poem relate to any of the ideas about zoos that you discussed at the beginning of class?
- Which specific details or techniques does the author use to allude to a tortoise without actually naming it?
- Which words or lines are your favorite in this poem? Why?
- What feelings or emotions do you think this poem evokes?
- What themes do you think this poem addresses?

### **Homework**

Students should write a one-paragraph answer to one of the discussion questions above.

## **Lesson Two**

### **Reading (10 minutes)**

Briefly review the poem *Aboo* that students read in the previous class.

In pairs, students take turns reading aloud a news article about this event, such as *Giant tortoise on the run no more* (See Resources)

As students finish reading aloud, they can orally summarize the article or ask any questions that they might have about the content.

### **Graphic Organizer (30 minutes)**

After checking that students have read and understood the news article, ask students to look for similarities and differences between the poem and the news

article. If students need more guidance, the teacher could suggest students look to the following areas: content, language, punctuation, format, and others, such as sensory details, line breaks, or repetition.

Students complete a Venn Diagram (see Resources) to record their ideas. The similarities should be noted in the middle where the circles overlap, and the differences should be noted in the corresponding outer parts of the circle.

In plenary, ask students for their findings, perhaps asking students to write their answers on the board.

- What are the similarities between the poem and the news article?
- What are the differences between the poem and the news article?
- Based on these readings, what other observations do you have about poetry and prose?

### **Homework (5 minutes for explanation)**

Students choose a recent article from the news and write a poem based on it; alternatively, the teacher can assign an article or recent human-interest news story appropriate for the class. Like *Aboo*, student-written poems should include some of the features or techniques that were noted about poems in the previous activity. If time allows, have students share their poems in a subsequent class.

### **Resources**

A printable Venn Diagram can be found at

[http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson\\_images/lesson378/venn.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson378/venn.pdf)

*Giant tortoise on the run no more* from *The Japan Times*

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/08/16/national/large-bounty-offered-giant-tortoise-run/#.XDGX5y17FPM>

# Constructing Historical Memory Through The Arts

Lesson Plan for “Soma Mnemosyne” (drama) by Patricia Ariza, translated by David Pegg, found in the Winter 2019 issue here:

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/drama/patricia-ariza-soma-mnemosyne/>

## **Learning Objectives**

- Students will become familiar with the concept of historical memory
- Students will demonstrate close-reading skills by analyzing the representation of historical memory in drama
- Students will engage in the construction of memory by creating a collective visual narrative of activism in their community, state, or country

## **Approximate Level and Length**

Late middle school or high school, three 60-minute classes

## **Materials Needed**

- Copies of Patricia Ariza’s Soma Mnemosyne, translated by David Pegg
- Notebooks and writing tools
- Poster paper

## **Context for Educator**

Review the Council on Foreign Relation’s overview of Colombia’s armed conflict: Civil conflict in Colombia, one of the United States’ closest allies in Latin America, has left as many as 220,000 dead, 25,000 disappeared, and 5.7 million displaced over the last half century. A peace process between the government and leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known by its Spanish acronym, FARC), the country’s largest insurgent group, halted the violence in 2016. The process faces many challenges, including widespread public concern that the peace deal offers too much leniency to perpetrators of violence. But the deal’s backers are hopeful that the early phases of demobilization, which are already underway, will lead to a sustainable peace.

Additional information available here: <https://www.cfr.org/background/colombias-civil-conflict>

Review *Asymptote*’s biography of Patricia Ariza:

Patricia Ariza is a poet, playwright, actor, director, and political activist from Colombia. In addition to writing and directing the play Soma Mnemosyne, she has participated in countless other plays as one of the co-founder’s of Teatro La Candelaria, which has been at the forefront of political and experimental theater in Colombia since it was founded in 1966. Due to her outstanding career in art and culture, Patricia Ariza was honored with the Prince Claus Award in 2007 and the Gilder/Coigney International Theatre Award in 2014.

Watch a performance of the drama in Spanish with English subtitles:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBJLqC4z5KI>

### **Pre-Class Activity**

- Have students read and annotate Soma Mnemosyne and the accompanying biographies.
- Have students watch the performance of the drama (optional).

### **Activity 1: Defining Memory (60 minutes)**

Instructions:

1. Explain that students will examine the concept of memory and how individual and collective memories are constructed.
2. Ask students to recall an event that was shared by the entire class, such as a school trip, and write down everything they remember about the event in their notebooks.
3. Go around the room and have students tell different memories of the class event.
4. Have two volunteers explain memory in their own words, and then share the following definitions with the class. Source: <http://memoriesatschool.aranzadi-zientziak.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/informeFinalENG.pdf>
  - a. Memory: the eclectic and selective reconstruction of the past
  - b. Collective memory: memories, often mythicized representations of the past, shared by a group that foster the collective identity of this given group or community
  - c. Historical memory: the attempt carried out by a group or community to keep traces of their past, as well as maintain and pass on to future generations the image or representation of the past they have created
    - i. Each community creates its own image or representation of its past.
    - ii. Memory can change since we always look at the past from the present.
    - iii. Historical memory is not the past, but rather the product of an attempt to connect with the past.
5. In pairs or small groups, have students discuss how collective memory relates to the exercise from the beginning of the class and to Patricia Ariza's drama. Encourage groups to share their responses with the class.

## **Activity 2: Analyzing Historical Memory in Drama (60 minutes)**

Instructions:

1. Briefly review background information on Colombia's armed conflict and Patricia Ariza's biography.
2. Conduct a class discussion on students' impressions of the drama, with a focus on the construction of historical memory. You could guide the conversation with the following questions:
  - a. What do you think is the purpose of the drama, and who is its intended audience?
  - b. How did your impressions of the piece change after watching a performance of it?
  - c. What kinds of memories are portrayed, and how are they evoked? Students might discuss the setting, characters, objects, recordings, and videos, among other aspects of the piece.
  - d. Compare and contrast *La Encargada* and *the Woman Who Forgets*. What does the audience learn from each character? How are their roles similar and/or different? Encourage students to ground their responses in evidence from the text.

## **Homework**

Have students bring in an image, text, object, or audiovisual material related to experiences of activists in the recent past in their community, state, or country.

## **Activity 3: Constructing Historical Memory (60 minutes)**

Instructions:

1. Have students briefly present their images to the class and then place them randomly on poster paper.
2. After each image is presented, have students look silently at the visual arrangement for a few minutes, making note of the sensations produced by the accumulation of images. Have students write a few lines about that perception and share with the class.
3. As a second exercise, have groups of two to three students stand up at once and choose one or several images to move from the first to a second piece of poster paper. None of the images should be hidden or completely visible. Students should speak about and give meaning to their choice of photographs and also actively connect them with the composition that is being generated.
4. If time permits, as a third exercise, have students create a sequential narrative with the images; they should form a line of images with a beginning and an end, but the shape can be free. The sequence could be lineal, fragmented, chronological, dispersed, reasoned, or none of these. The narrative that emerges through the consensus of the students will be a fictional recreation or construction, based on reality, of activism.

5. Have students reflect on the relationship between the exercises and the construction of historical memory in Patricia Ariza's drama, and then share with the class. Encourage students to consider how memory takes place in the encounter between participants, poster paper, and observers, and by multiplying those interactions in unanticipated ways.

# **Travel and Identity. Excerpts from the Notebooks of Victor Serge**

Lesson Plan for “Excerpts from the Notebooks of Victor Serge” (nonfiction) by Victor Serge, translated by Mitchell Abidor and Richard Greeman, found in the Winter 2019 issue here: <https://tinyurl.com/victorsergenotebooks>

## **Learning Objectives**

Develop skills for the close reading of non-fiction texts.

Use summary and paraphrase to show textual comprehension.

Use textual analysis, and critical response to display deeper understanding of texts.

Place travel writing in a historical and political context.

Identify and understand the use of point of view in a piece of travel writing.

Identify the ways that nationality, political orientation, gender, ethnicity, and race shape observations in travel writing.

Develop awareness of the role of one's own identity in shaping observations of new places.

## **Approximate Grade Levels**

University students either in a general literature class or a course on travel writing; may be used at first-year or advanced levels

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 2 hour-long classes and 2 days of homework

## **Lesson Plan**

### **I. Context**

Victor Serge was born into a family of Russian exiles living in Belgium. He traveled to France, Spain, and Russia, but was not at home in any country and pursued by the government at times in each place. Serge was deeply involved in politics, writing essays, poems, and novels concerned with the social and political conflicts of his time.

### **II. Introduction to reading analysis**

For the instructor:

Depending on the students' level and the course context, use a general introduction to Serge as preparatory reading.

Use either of the following:

#### **1. Advanced students**

For students in a literature course, the Serge text may be read in combination with one or more of his poems. This offers the opportunity to examine several examples of his politically engaged writing, both in



non-fictional and poetic form. The following introduction is available online, as part of a full text of a translation of Serge's poems. James Brook. "Mourning the Fallen, Mourning the Revolution," Victor Serge. *A Blaze in the Desert. Selected Poems.* 1-26

## 2. Introductory students

Students in a general literature or travel writing class may rely on the author's biography on the Asymptote page.

### **Pre-reading homework**

#### Biography Questions

1. Having read a description of Serge's life, what elements of his personal identity (nationality, gender, ethnicity, race) may have had an impact on his observations and writing and why?
2. Describe Serge's political position, at the time when he was writing these notebooks.
3. What are two aspects of Serge's politics that you have questions about?

### **III. Reading analysis**

For the instructor:

In the strictest sense, Serge's notebooks are a kind of travel writing. He describes what he sees as he moves from one place to another, portrays the conditions in which he travels, and contrasts cities and nations as he does so. Like any traveler, Serge brings with him his own cultural and geographical framework. When he meets people, he organizes them according to their place of origin, or according to the places where they've been, all according to a scheme of geographical meaning that he carries with him.

### **In-class discussion & writing preparation**

#### **My inner map**

As a preparation for reading, ask students to consider their own sense of geography. This can be done first as a think-pair-share activity, with students reflecting on the question, and then pairing with a partner to exchange ideas before sharing it with the full class.

- What places (cities? neighborhoods?) in your area are associated with wealth? Which ones are associated with poverty? What places are considered appealing destinations (a certain part of a big city? an attractive area in the

countryside or seashore?)? Which places are considered unattractive or even dangerous?

- What assumptions might you make about people from the places described above? Are there any qualities or stereotypes associated with them? (i.e. people from this neighborhood are rich and arrogant or people from this other place are uneducated, etc.)
- How does your own place of origin fit into this larger map of places? What qualities are associated with it? What kind of reputation does it have, and is that different for people who live there and people who don't? In other words, do "outsiders" have a generally accurate or generally inaccurate picture of the place where you live? Do "insiders" have opportunities to share with outsiders their view of the place where you live (are they on tv? do they write? make music? take pictures? make movies?)?
- If you were to meet people from your place of origin while traveling elsewhere, would you feel an immediate connection to them or not? Would you feel that you had something in common or not?
- Note: at this point, you might also refer students to political writers who have discussed their region. What sorts of political opinions are associated with this region? What conflicts?

## **B. Textual analysis**

### **Internal geography and external politics.**

This activity should be prepared in advance of class discussion, but students can be placed in groups to share their answers. The goal is to first see the variety of ways that an author's voice enters a non-fiction narrative and the range of interpretations of what is a "political" perspective. Students answers should differ.

1. What places does Serge visit in the course of this trip?
2. Note, at the beginning, two phrases where Serge talks about an observation or an emotion that seems to you to be strictly personal.
3. Note the first two phrases where Serge makes observations that express a political perspective.
4. Serge mentions the following place names in the section "Nomads" as he discusses people around him on the ship. Where are these places (you may wish to display a map of Paris, or refer students to a description of Berlin-Wedding in the early 20th c.)? What people or places are they connected to on the ship? Why does he bring them up?

Montparnasse

Champs-Élysées

## Les Deux Magots

Belleville

Wedding

Rosa Luxemburg Square

5. Why does Serge associate the people on the ship with these places in France and Germany? How does that enable him to organize people and to define what he is experiencing? What are the disadvantages?
6. What is missing from Serge's descriptions of these people and parts of the ship? What details would you like to know more about, but can't find in his journals?
7. Expansion activity: have students read Serge's poem "Marseille" from *A Blaze in the Desert*. Compare the poem's perspective on the city with that found in the journal.

### C. Seeing Difference

Again, advance preparation is helpful when doing close reading activities. These questions could be posted on a class discussion board or discussed in small groups.

1. About what people (racial or ethnic groups, nations) does Serge make broad, general statements?
2. Which statements are positive? Negative? Neutral?
3. Based on his descriptions of others, what do we learn about Serge? What does he value? What behavior, qualities, or appearances does he reject?
4. 4. What would we be able to figure out about Serge based solely on this text, without knowing all we do about his biography?
5. Serge was a poet and a novelist. How does he observe the details of the world around him with a poet's eye? Look particularly at his descriptions of the natural world. Note two or three passages where he is particularly engaged with this kind of description.

6. Where does Serge discuss differences of opinion with those around him? What does he discuss and what differences emerge? Find at least two instances.

### **Goals for writing activity**

Identify and understand the use of point of view in politically engaged writing.  
Compare forms of political and social critique in politically engaged texts.  
Develop skills in the formulation of point of view in a personal essay.

### **Writing strategy**

**Freewriting:** Write for 10 minutes about one part of the place where you're from (a building? a playground? a typical feature of the kind of housing here?) Describe what it looks like, who uses it, what they use it for.

**Analysis:** Look back at your description. What does it tell you about the inhabitants? What do they have or what do they lack? What do they value?

**Your perspective:** What is the relationship between the social and political situation of your location and the way people live? In what way does their local geography reflect their political and social situation? How are people connected to each other, or not? How are they connected to resources and forms of political or social influence, or not?

**Essay:** Write an essay with two strands: a precise description of a certain place, and a description of the social and political situation of that place.

*An additional writing activity could be modeled on Serge's journals, or on the poem "Marseille."*

## **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 at <http://tinyurl.com/asymptoteforedu>. We look forward to hearing from you!

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