



EDUCATORS' GUIDE Winter 2020 | A FANTASTIC SALAD

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Winter 2020 edition of the Asymptote Educators' Guide!

With each new guide, we aim to support educators who want to integrate Asymptote content into their pedagogy. 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, targeting middle-school, high-school, and university-level students. Each section contains suggestions for complementary activities that can be used in conjunction with each other to form complete lesson plans, or separately to complement your lessons on other content.

The lesson plans in this Educators' Guide are based on translations published in our Winter 2020 issue, "A Fantastic Salad" (available for free at http://www.asymptotejournal.com/jan-2020).

The first lesson plan is based on Olavo Amaral's intriguing short story "Uok Phlau" which contains a profound meditation on how language circumscribes one's view of the world. Students reflect in writing on both the story and Lera Boroditsky's TED Talk "How Language Shapes the Way We Think." The second lesson plan uses Dimitri Alexandrovich Prigov's list poem "Unbelievable Stories," a play on "miracle stories" popular in the media. Students learn about various kinds of irony and apply their knowledge in an analysis of the poem. Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's short story "Memoir of a Turkey" describes the discovery of a manuscript—the titular memoir—inside the cavity of a roast turkey. In the corresponding lesson plan, students appreciate the diction between 'story' and 'plot' by connecting the plotline to their reading responses via a graphic organizer. Lastly, Gnaomi Siemens's playful translations of early Renaissance horoscopes and almanacs channel cultural mores of the day.

We realize that the age ranges and instructional contexts for each lesson vary, so we encourage educators to adjust these lessons to meet their needs and to record these modifications. Your classroom 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 (http://asymptotejournal.com/blog). We would 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, completed 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 simply like to give us additional feedback, please contact us at <u>education@asymptotejournal.com</u>.

UOK PHLAU by Olavo Amaral

Olavo Amaral's short story "Uok Phlau" explores how languages reflect specific perspectives on the world. It also touches upon the concept of endangered and extinct languages. This twopart lesson plan uses Amaral's story and a TED Talk by Lera Boroditsky, a cognitive scientist, to explore the connection between language and worldview. Students reflect in writing on the idea that a language can be endangered and learn about the situation of such languages today. They take notes on both the short story and the TED Talk.

"Uok Phlau" by Olavo Amaral, translated by Isobel Foxford

https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/olavo-amaral-uok-phlau/

Learning Objectives

At the end of this unit, students will be able to

- Take notes from the reading and listening
- Use information from different sources to analyze connections between language and thought
- Articulate ideas clearly and critically in both speaking and writing

Assessment

Completed notetaking sheets Participation in small group discussion Written reflection

Approximate Grade Level

University students

Approximate Length

Lesson One (15 minutes) Lesson Two (75 minutes)

Materials Needed

Excerpt of "Uok Phlau" Chalkboard or whiteboard Notetaking sheets Computer, speakers, and projector to show a TED Talk to the class

Lesson One (15 minutes)

Students should freewrite for about five minutes in response to the questions below. When they have finished, students should discuss their ideas with a partner or in a small group.

Questions: Do you know any languages that are endangered or extinct? Why do you think languages become endangered or extinct? What is lost when a language disappears?

According to UNESCO, "A language is endangered when its speakers cease to use it, use it in fewer and fewer domains, use fewer of its registers and speaking styles, and/or stop passing it on to the next generation." An extinct language is defined as one that "is no longer the first tongue that infants learn in their homes, and ... the last speaker who did learn the language in that way has passed on within the last five decades."

http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/faq-on-endangered-languages/

Extension: Show the online version of the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger and search for languages in your country or area. http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/en/atlasmap.html

Homework

Introduce the short story *Uok Phlau* by Olavo Amaral and translated by Isobel Foxford. For homework, students should read the text and take notes following the outline below.

Uok Phlau Outline:

- I. Yualapeng tribe
- II. The linguist
- III. How to express movement in French
- IV. How to express movement in Yualapeng
- V. Valdes' idea for how to express movement in Yualapeng
- VI. Examples: Grandpa Siwathak; Prince Iriath
- VII. Valdes meets the elders
- VIII. Valdes explanation of his experience
- IX. Yualapeng civilization

Lesson Two (75 minutes)

Discussion (45 minutes)

Check that students have completed the reading and notetaking activity before moving on to the discussion questions.

Using the notes they prepared, students should work in pairs or small groups to answer the following questions:

- 1. What does this piece of fiction imply about the relationship between one's language and culture and one's worldview? Provide evidence from the text.
- 2. What is the significance of the quotation, "Because if life is too short to see a circle completed, that does not stop it being a circle"? How are the concepts of the circle and geometry used throughout the piece?
- 3. Refer to your freewriting from the previous class. Have you added anything to your understanding of endangered or extinct languages from reading this text?

Read the translator's note. With this additional information, students may be able to add to their notes from the homework or their answers from the previous activity.

The teacher conducts a brief class discussion to go over students' responses to the above questions and to confirm comprehension of the reading.

Video (30 minutes)

Cognitive scientist Lera Boroditsky writes, "[W]hen you're learning a new language, you're not simply learning a new way of talking, you are also inadvertently learning a new way of thinking." What do you think about this idea? How is it explored in *Uok Phlau*? <u>https://www.edge.org/conversation/lera_boroditsky-how-does-our-language-shape-the-way-we-think</u>

Watch the TED Talk "How Language Shapes the Way We Think" by Lera Boroditsky. <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKK7wGAYP6k</u>

While watching the video, take notes, using the outline below:

Outline:

- I. Introduction
- II. Space
- III. Time
- IV. Number
- V. Color
- VI. Gender
- VII. Personal Weight
- VIII. Conclusion

After watching the TED Talk, students should check and compare notes with a partner. Then working individually, students should highlight some connections between their notes on the reading and the video in preparation for the written homework assignment.

Homework (5 minutes)

Search for connections between ideas from your notes from the reading and the video. Use these connections as a basis to explore the question, "Does language shape the way we think?" Use specific details from both the reading and the video in your response.

UNBELIEVABLE STORIES by Dmitri Alexandrovich Prigov

Dimitri Prigov's list poem "Unbelievable Stories" plays with the "miracle stories" so popular in the media. A common feature of these stories is the unlikely survival of an accident, as, for instance, the fall from a window on a high floor. In this lesson plan, students reflect on the presence of such stories before reading Prigov's poem, which lists a number of instances where the most likely result, death, does indeed occur. The poem's narrator insists that these outcomes are "unbelievable," and students reflect on the multiple levels of irony present in the poem.

"Unbelievable Stories" by Dmitri Alexandrovich Prigov, translated by Simon Schuchat

https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/dmitri-alexandrovich-prigov-soviet-texts/

Learning Objectives

At the end of this unit, students will be able to

- Reflect on the relevance of "miracle stories" in the media
- Identify three kinds of irony

Assessment

Discussion Written reflection Revised poem or written reflection

Approximate Grade Level

High school students University students

Approximate Length

One lesson (45 minutes) Pre-reading reflection Homework assignment with optional extension

Materials Needed

Copies of *Unbelievable Stories* <u>Article on irony with examples</u> from the website "literarydevices.net" Copies of the definitions and distinctions (see below)

Pre-reading reflection (at home before the lesson)

Assignment: Stories where someone survives a dangerous situation are a common feature in popular media. Examples are falling from great height or getting lost in nature and returning alive after a long time. *Robinson Crusoe* is a literary example of such stories.

As preparation for the lesson, please conduct an internet search using the following terms: "fall from window survive" and "awake from coma."

Optional: ESL students could search for these terms in their own language to see if these stories are similarly popular in their cultural context.

Write a paragraph addressing the following questions:

- How many results does your search produce?
- What are common features of these stories? In what kind of media venue are they being

published (new websites, video channels, etc.)?

- What else do you notice about your search results?
- Why do you think such stories are popular? Have you come across stories such as these before? What do you think and feel when you read them?

Email the paragraph to your instructor.

Lesson

Introduction (5 minutes)

Students discuss their findings in small groups, then in a whole-class discussion. Establish that the outcomes of these stories are often improbable.

Reading and Discussion (20 minutes)

The poem "Unbelievable Stories" is a *list poem* that contains a number of stories based on predicaments similar to the stories students researched in their preparatory activity.

Hand out the poem and ask each student to read one stanza aloud. Leave aside the advisory note for the moment. In classes with many students, this may be done in small groups of three to five students.

Discussion questions:

- What is the effect of these stories? Are they funny? Why? Reread the text silently and note your response to the text in your notebook.
- Who thinks this is funny? (Hopefully all students will agree.)
- Are there any other reactions?
- What makes it funny?

Depending on class size, elicit answers from students directly or have them discuss them in small groups.

Deepening the Discussion (15 minutes)

The term "irony" may have come up in the initial discussion. If so, ask for a tentative definition. If not, present the following definitions and distinctions (possibly as a handout).

Definition of irony:

"Irony in its broadest sense, is a rhetorical device, literary technique, or event in which what appears, on the surface, to be the case, differs radically from what is actually the case." (Wikipedia, January 20, 2020).

Types of Irony:

- Verbal irony happens when there is a difference between what someone says and what is obviously meant. Example: Someone might say, "Such a beautiful day!" when it is sleeting outside.
- Dramatic irony occurs when the reader or audience has more information than one or more characters in a work of literature.
 Example: In Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo assumes that Juliet has died while the audience knows that she has just taken a sleeping potion.
- Situational irony is present in a situation where the final outcome of a situation is opposite of what is expected.
 Example: A police station gets robbed.

Note to instructor: There are many examples of irony on the internet. Choose the ones that are most familiar to your students. The idea is to familiarize students with the broad concept and three important types of irony.

Discussion questions:

- Can you come up with some examples for each kind of irony?
- What kinds of irony are present in Prigov's text?

Note to instructor: There are two levels of irony present in the text: verbal irony and situational irony.

Divide the class into small groups and have students reread the poem and highlight instances of verbal irony. As a class, discuss situational irony with respect to the poem.

Homework (5 minutes)

Write a list poem that uses Prigov's stanzas but makes them more specific. Example: Albert Finkelstein, a three-year boy, falls from the fourteenth floor of the building where his parents live. He dies instantly.

OR

Write a list poem that uses Prigov's poem as a scaffold. Make the stories truly "unbelievable" and surrealist. Delete all commentary (such as "against all expectations"). Be creative! Example: A child falls from the fourteenth floor of a building and transforms into a butterfly before his body hits the floor. The butterfly floats to a nearby tree.

OR

Students write 700 words explaining how verbal irony and situational irony interact in Prigov's poem.

Possible follow-up:

Students type their poems and create one or two pictures as illustrations. The stories and illustrations are exhibited in a "gallery walk."

MEMOIR OF A TURKEY by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's short story "Memoir of a Turkey" describes the discovery of a manuscript—the titular memoir—inside the cavity of a roast turkey. The lesson plan based on the story asks students to reflect on their emotional responses with the help of a graphic organizer. The organizer has students identify important events in the story and trace their emotional reaction throughout the reading of the story. This exercise leads to a discussion of "story" and "plot." An optional extension of the lesson plan has students reflect on the elements of voice in the memoir and how their use affects the reader's emotion.

"Memoir of a Turkey" by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, translated by Kayla Andrews

https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/gustavo-adolfo-becquer-memoir-of-a-turkey/

Learning Objectives

At the end of this unit, students will be able to

- Distinguish between the story (timeline) and the plot of a fictional text
- Understand the difference between content and style
- Understand dramatic irony
- Analyze elements of voice
- Develop ideas about the use of animals as narrators in fiction

Assessment

Written reflection Discussion

Approximate Grade Level

High school students University students

Approximate Length

Pre-lesson task Lesson One (55 minutes) (Optional) Lesson Two (45 minutes)

Materials Needed

"Memoir of a Turkey" "Translator's Note" Graphic organizer (included) Chalkboard or whiteboard Writing device

Pre-lesson Task

Before the lesson, ask students to think about stories they know that have animals as protagonists. Students can either note these ideas on index cards or email their ideas to the instructor.

Possible questions to ask:

- What (kinds of) stories about animals do you know? (Please name at least three.)
- What genres do you think of when you hear that a story has a non-human narrator?
- What stories do you know where animals are the protagonists or even the narrators?
- If a story has an animal as a narrator, can it be realistic? In what sense might it be realistic?

Note to instructor: The requirement to write down ideas and send them to the instructor serves primarily to encourage students to think about the topic more deeply. They are not meant for assessment (you may want to tell this to the students). The questions help direct students' thinking but may limit their ideas about the kinds of stories they can think of.

Lesson One (55 minutes)

Introduction (15 minutes)

Gather students in pairs or small groups and ask them to share their ideas from the pre-lesson task. Depending on the grade level, you may address the question about realism (see above).

You may refer to the following books or find examples from the students' cultural context:

- Books with animals as protagonists: George Orwell, *Animal Farm*; Richard Adams, *Watership Down*; Natsume Oseki, *I Am a Cat*; Beatrix Potter, *Peter Rabbit*; Aesop, *Fables*. For further examples, see this <u>list at Goodreads</u>.
- Films: Finding Nemo; Bambi; The Adventures of Milo and Otis; Chicken Run.

Reading (20 minutes)

Optional: Read story aloud to students.

Hand out copies of the text. Ask students to read the text and to observe their emotions while reading. They may use the emotion diagram (below in "Resources") and define important points in the story as they see them.

Students read the text individually and fill in the graphic.

After Reading: Story and Plot (20 minutes)

Students write a brief summary (two to three sentences) of the story.

Students get together in pairs or small groups of three to five (if the class is large) and discuss their impressions of the story. If they used the graphic organizer, they can compare their work.

Class discussion: The groups/pairs share their findings.

If the fact that there are two stories in this piece comes up, note this on the board. After the discussion, refer back to this observation or mention it.

Offer the following definitions to students (on the board or as a handout):

"A story is a series of events recorded in their chronological order. A plot is a series of events deliberately arranged so as to reveal their dramatic, thematic, and emotional significance." ([Janet Burroway. *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*)

Ask students to add a timeline of the events in the story to their summary.

Then, students get together in pairs and discuss the difference between story and plot according to Burroway's definition. What is the *effect of plotting* in the story? If students used the graphic organizer, they have already recorded the plot.

Note to Instructor: Students should become aware of their emotional reaction to the plotting. It is clear from the beginning that the narrator of the memoir is dead. How does the author keep up suspense/tension/emotional involvement despite our knowledge of the ending?

Optional: Lesson Two (45 minutes)

After Reading: Voice (20 minutes)

Ask students to get together in pairs or small groups to concentrate on the turkey's story and to write down five words or expressions that characterize the turkey. For each expression they should find an example from the text.

Note to instructor: You may want to point out to (or elicit from) the students that character is also revealed in how someone speaks and not just in what they say.

Collect students' answers and record them on the board so that the categories "diction," "syntax," "rhythm," and "detail" appear. You may have to provide and define these categories, but the textual evidence should come from the students.

Hand out the "Translator's Note" and ask students to read it and add to the preceding discussion.

Ask students to write a five-minute reflection on how the turkey's voice affects their reading of the story.

Written Reflection (10 minutes)

Students write a brief reflection in their notebooks on how the fact that the narrator of the memoir is an animal shapes the emotional impact of the story. How could this story be rewritten for a human narrator without resorting to cannibalism?

Wrap-up (10 minutes)

Students share their reflections in small groups.

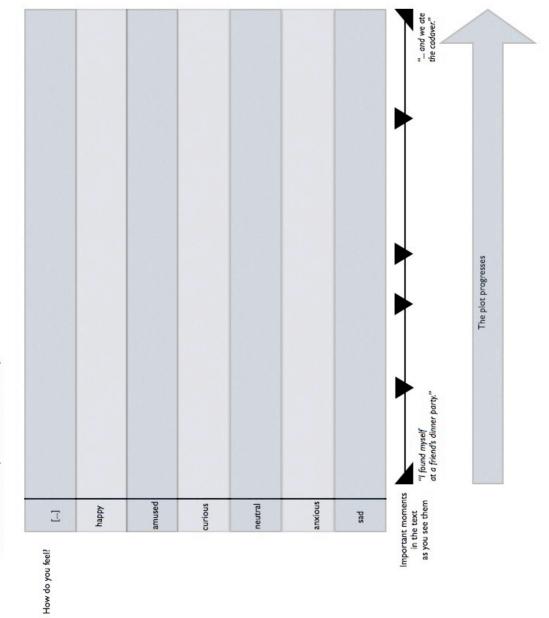
Homework (5 minutes)

Choose a book you have read or a movie you have watched and write a summary of the story and a description of the plot. Explain the dramatic, thematic, or emotional effect of plotting, that is, how does the arrangement of the events (the plot) affect your experience of the piece?

Resource

Diagram "Tracking Emotions." See following page.

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer: Memoir of a Turkey



EPHEMERIS by Anonymous

Gnaomi Siemens's playful translations of early Renaissance horoscopes form the starting point of this lesson plan. Students collect some examples of modern horoscopes and reflect on their relevance in today's world. They then read Siemens's translations and compare them with contemporary horoscopes. Like horoscopes, almanacs express the character of a culture. A second unit in this lesson plan presents students with a historic example of an almanac page and has them think about how almanacs present the suchness of a period and culture. A practical creative assignment allows for an application of these insights to students' own culture.

"Ephemeris" by Anonymous, translated by Gnaomi Siemens

https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/anonymous-ephemeris/

Learning Objectives

At the end of this unit, students will be able to

- Analyze the components and structure of horoscopes
- Identify the defining traits of almanacs
- Reflect on their own culture and
- Apply their understanding of their culture in the creation of an almanac page

Assessment

Discussion Written horoscope Almanac page

Approximate Grade Level

High school students Rising college students

Approximate Length

Pre-lesson task Lesson One (60 minutes) Lesson Two (60 minutes) Possible follow-up project: Gallery walk

Materials

"Ephemeris" "Translator's Note" Chalkboard or whiteboard Markers Optional: fortune cookies

Lesson One

Pre-lesson Task

Tell students to flip through some magazines or newspapers at home, at a news stand, or even online and to look for the horoscope sections.

Ask students to cut or print out horoscopes for three signs to bring to class.

Ask them to think about why they chose these specific pieces.

In Class (10 minutes)

Verify that students all have horoscopes. Begin a group discussion.

Group discussion questions:

- What do you know about horoscopes?
- Why did you pick the ones you brought to class?

Gather student responses on the board.

After recording student responses, ask the following questions:

- Are horoscopes recent or old?
- Where can we find them?
- What are/were they for?
- Who reads or read them? Why?
- Should the readership trust horoscopes?
- How are they perceived by the readership? By science?

Reading (30 minutes)

Students read only the first two paragraphs of the translator's note along with the poem's title ("Ephemeris").

Prior to beginning the reading, ask the students the following questions:

- What do you expect to read?
- Do you think this is a modern text?

Organize the students in small groups.

Each group reads two of the horoscopes that were brought to class.

Students read the translations in "Ephemeris" and compare Siemens' translations with the horoscopes of their choosing.

As the students read, ask them to annotate the pieces to highlight their similarities and differences. Observe form, topics, styles, and other peculiarities.

Next, gather the students together and discuss the following question:

• How are contemporary horoscopes different from the ones in "Ephemeris"?

Collect the results on the board.

Further Reading (15 minutes)

Students read the final paragraph of the translator's note.

Using the map created for "Ephemeris" on the board, invite students to identify all elements of the horoscopes in "Ephemeris" that they see as an adaptation to a new temporal context.

As a whole group, discuss the following questions:

• As readers, do you find this adaptation interesting? Would you rather read a translation echoing the temporal context of when these horoscopes were originally written?

In preparation for writing their own horoscopes, students will do some preliminary work as a group.

Optional: The instructor may want to bring a bag of fortune cookies. Each student picks a fortune cookie and reads the fortune to the class. Other students then share some ideas based on the

fortune for a horoscope. When all the fortune cookies have been discussed, students may use the lines from the fortune cookies as the opening or closing lines of their horoscopes^{*}.

Note to Instructor : For this activity, fortune cookies are an entertaining way to get started. However, anything that fosters inspiration is welcome. Excerpts from the horoscopes students brought to class and/or excerpts from Siemens' translations could be used here as well.

Homework (5 minutes)

Write a horoscope (or more if they feel inspired) of about one hundred words.

Students poll their relatives (preferably from different generations) and friends about horoscopes using the questions from the first in-class activity and bring the results to class.

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

Pre-lesson Task

Students go to a library or a bookstore and ask for almanacs.

Assignment:

- Flip through the pages, observe the cover and the table of contents: What kind of texts are these? Are they books per se? What are they about? Who are their likely readers, the general public or a more specific audience?
- Write down your answers and bring them to class.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Begin by organizing the results of the students' horoscope polls (completed as homework) on the board. Use students' findings to start a discussion.

Discussion question:

• Why do you think we are talking about horoscopes and almanacs?

Depending on the ideas they come up with, use this page of the <u>Smithsonian</u> website to show them the cover of an American almanac. Build on their reactions to provide them more information about <u>the history of horoscopes</u>.

Discussion questions:

- What is your general impression of the almanacs you found in the preliminary assignment?
- Answer the questions listed in the preliminary assignment.

Expand the discussion by having them visually compare the almanacs they observed before the class with the ones available on the website of the <u>Smithsonian</u> and the French National Library's <u>Gallica</u> website.

Note to instructor: Gallica's language barrier can be circumvented by choosing illustrated pages ahead of time, that is, pages that display engravings or maps. There are many. The more students observe, the better, as it will help them reflect on their own culture.

Discussion questions:

- What are common topics?
- Do almanacs tell a story? Do we learn something?
- Why are images always combined with text?
- Are almanacs similar to encyclopedias? In what way? How are they different?
- What kind the topics are illustrated on the more visual pages? How are they meant to be used?

Analysis of a Historical Almanac (20 minutes)

Using the French almanac available on <u>Gallica</u>, ask students what they know of France and its defining cultural and historical traits from the second half of the 19th century.

Ask the following question:

• How do you think it is to live in France in the second half of the 19th century? What common experiences do people share?"

Write down all of the students' ideas on the board to form a knowledge map.

See the following page on fashion in 1894 as an example of what pages could be used in the classroom:



Creation of an Almanac Page (20 minutes)

Ask students to think about the country they live in.

Discussion questions:

- How is it to live in _____ in the 21st century? In 2020?
- What do we all share?
- What makes us a society/community/culture?

Create a second knowledge map on the board.

Students discuss their impressions of what they feel is relevant to the culture they live in or, possibly, of what might be important to citizens of their country.

Using the second knowledge map, ask students to collect a number of topics they think might be useful in creating their own almanac page.

Note to instructor: Assist students in narrowing down their topics. Give examples. They could create a page on the landmarks of the place they live in, a page on the logos of sports teams, or a page depicting objects necessary for survival in a snow storm.

Homework (5 minutes)

Create an almanac page on a topic you feel is relevant to the culture or society you live in.

A good almanac page has written information and images. The images may be copied or cut out from other media. All images should be accompanied by explanatory text on the page.

Add a personal reflection (100 words) on why you felt this topic is important in your culture.

These pages can be used in an optional gallery walk or be presented to the class. Alternatively, students can choose to create a collection accompanied by a table of contents and an index.

FEEDBACK

Thanks for taking the time to read our Winter 2020 Educator's Guide. We hope you found it useful and engaging.

Have questions, comments, critiques, or testimonials?

Please leave your feedback at <u>http://tinyurl.com/asymptoteforedu</u>. We look forward to hearing from you!

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