





EDUCATOR’S GUIDE

Summer 2023 | BETWEEN SKY AND SEA

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Summer 2023 issue of the *Asymptote* Educator's Guide!

Our latest guide contains four unique lesson plans to help you bring exciting and diverse world literature into all sorts of classrooms. Each lesson is paired with poems, fiction, and drama from "Between Sky and Sea," our Summer 2023 issue, which is available here: <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/jul-2023/>

The first lesson in this guide "Translating from Poetry to Prose," encourages students to explore the nature of poetry, prose, and translation through reading and reflecting on a translated poem. "Artful Insights," the second lesson, provides students with an opportunity to deliver informative presentations which inspired the events of a dramatic text. "Water Imagery and the Female 'Self'" uses two short stories to explore the connotations of water imagery in relation to ideas of female identity. In the final lesson in this guide, "Using Imagery to Evoke Time," students analyze the ways in which poetic imagery creates temporal meaning.

We realize that the age ranges and instructional contexts 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 experiences are valuable to us, and hearing about them helps us improve our formation for the next guide. Please leave feedback and suggestions here: <http://tinyurl.com/asymptote4edu>.

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 which can be found here: <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/>

We'd especially love to read and share 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.

Translating from Poetry to Prose

From *The Book of Sinera* by Salvador Espriu, translated from the Catalan by Sonia Alland and Richard Jeffrey Newman

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/from-the-book-of-sinera-salvador-espriu/>

In this lesson, students will explore the nature of poetry, prose, and translation through reading and reflecting on Espriu's poem. The poem's status as a translation will only be revealed after a first reading, meaning that the students will not go into their reading with any preconceived notions. First, they will examine the poem for its main meaning, contrasts, and imagery. Then, the students will read the translator's note to discover the translators' creative processes between the Catalan and the English. The students will mirror the translators' processes by eventually turning this poem into a piece of prose. In order to achieve this, they will pick out the main thread and imagery of the poem. Then, the whole class will reflect on the features of prose which they may want to add or develop in their own work. The homework task is to rewrite the poem as an original work of prose. Opportunities for feedback and reflection are provided in the extension section.

Learning Objectives

By the end of these lessons, students should be able to:

- Identify the main aspects of Espriu's poem "XXXV"
- Revise their first reading in light of new information
- Describe the challenges and processes in the translator's note
- Contrast the main differences between poetry and prose
- Create an original piece of prose based on "XXXV"
- Reflect on other student's work and the creative process

Assessment

- Class discussion
- Individual reading
- Reading comprehension
- Independent writing task

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

University students

Materials Needed

From *The Book of Sinera* by Salvador Espriu, translated from the Catalan by Sonia Alland and Richard Jeffrey Newman

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/from-the-book-of-sinera-salvador-espriu/>

Information on Catalonia

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20345071>

Approximate Length

Lesson one (60 minutes)

Pre-lesson activities

Students read a copy of the poem without the author's name or original language: just the poem and title, and consider the following questions:

1. Where in the world do you think this poem is set? Which clues are there?
2. Which main contrasts do you notice?
3. What could the author mean by the following quotes:
 - a. "I've given my life for the difficult gain of a few bare words"
 - b. "I've seen my life as a wall"

Lesson One

Introduction (10 minutes)

First of all, collect the students' ideas about where in the world they think the poem is set. Then, reveal the poet's name and the translation language on the board and ask the following questions:

1. Where is Catalonia? Is it a country? (See weblink with information on Catalonia before the lesson)
2. Did you have any idea that you were reading a translation? Would it have changed your reading experience if you did?

Reading the Translator's Note (15 minutes)

Have the students read a copy of the translator's note (on the drop-down menu to the side of the poem) independently and discuss the following questions as a class:

1. What were the translators' main goals in translating the piece?
2. Why do you think they chose not to focus on preserving the 'music' of the original?
3. What was their greatest challenge?
4. What was their strategy to cope?

Picking out the thread and imagery (20 minutes)

Tell the students that they are now going to follow the same strategy that the translators followed when translating the poem to create their own, unique pieces of literature.

Have the students create an empty table that looks like this, or provide them with one:

Main 'story'	Main imagery
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A journey ends on a river. 2. Alighting from the boat. 3. Going down a well-known path. 4. Taking in the landscape 5. Reminiscing: 'I've seen my life as a wall'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shrubs • sunlight (evening) • cypress trees (leaves) • a long, dry riverbed • the crest of a hill • sunset • a wall (metaphorical)

Split the class into two halves. One half focus on picking out the main 'storyline' of the poem, and the other half focus on picking out the main imagery.

While they are working, draw the table on the board.

In the plenary, have students come to the board and write what they think are the main aspects of the poem's story and imagery. Have them correct and supplement each other's contributions as they go.

Rewriting the Poem as Prose (15 minutes)

The translators initially rewrote these poems as prose texts before translating them into English. As a class, discuss the following question: *What are the main differences between poetry and prose texts?*

The students will now work towards rewriting this poem as a prose piece. Discuss as a class the main aspects of prose texts that they *may* want to add, change, or develop when turning this poem into prose. Have them create a list underneath their tables and make notes on the board as you go.

Main Aspects of Prose Texts

- A storyline: A hint at before/after the prose piece as a snapshot of something bigger
- A paragraph structure
- Dialogue
- Character(s)
- Narrative perspective
- First/second/third
- Close third
- Omniscient narrator, or unreliable narrator?
- A sense of time

As well as any other ideas your class may have.

Homework Task

For homework, have the students rewrite the poem as a piece of prose (400-500 words). Tell them to try to preserve the main thread and imagery of Espriu's poem, but everything else is left open to them.

In the next lesson, have the students read or listen to each other's pieces and give feedback on the main similarities and differences between the student's texts, as well as what they think each captured particularly well.

Extension Activity

As an extension, you could have the students swap prose texts with each other and then write someone else's prose text back into a unique poem.

Questions for Reflection after the Lesson/Extension

1. Are the pieces you have created original works of prose?
2. Are they translations, although they are both in the same language?
3. Is a translation an original work of literature?
4. Is the poem you wrote from a fellow student's prose a translation of their work, or of Espriu's work?
 - a. Is it possibly both? Or neither?

Artful Insights

from *Brancusi v. United States* by Tatiana Niculescu, translated by ~~(tr. by~~ Amanda L. Andrei and Codin Andrei)

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/drama/brancusi-v-united-states-tatiana-niculescu/>

Tatiana Niculescu's *Brancusi v. United States* depicts scenes related to the court case brought by the Romanian artist and sculptor Constantin Brâncuși. In the 1920s, when his sculpture *Bird in Space* entered the US, it was deemed a common object instead of art—an incident which ultimately led the court to grapple with the question of how to define art. In this lesson plan, students begin by reading two scenes from the play before choosing topics from the text on which to deliver informative presentations to the class. Finally, in an interactive discussion board activity, students synthesize information from both the reading and the presentations.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Read closely to make predictions and identify topics of interest in the text
- Develop an awareness of modern art, artists, and the role of titles for artworks
- Synthesize information from reading the piece and listening to classmates' presentations

Assessment

- Reading comprehension
- Discussion participation
- Individual or group presentation

Approximate Grade Level

High school students

University students

Materials Needed

from *Brancusi v. United States* by Tatiana Niculescu (tr. by Amanda L. Andrei and Codin Andrei)

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/drama/brancusi-v-united-states-tatiana-niculescu/>

"But Is It Art?" Constantin Brancusi vs. the United States

https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2014/07/24/but-is-it-art-constantin-brancusi-vs-the-united-states/

A-level: Constantin Brancusi, Bird in Space (Video by SmartHistory)

<https://smarthistory.org/constantin-brancusi-bird-in-space-2/>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (60 minutes)

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

Lesson One

Warm up (15 minutes)

Project a picture of the sculpture “Bird in Space” by Constantin Brâncuși. Without providing any information about it, ask students to think about the following questions and then discuss ideas as a class.

- Do you think this is art? Why or why not?
- If it were exhibited in a gallery, what would you title it?

After students have some responses, provide background information on the artwork by either watching the video “A-level: Constantin Brancusi, Bird in Space” or reading the article “But is it art? Constantin Brancusi vs the United States,” or summarizing the information in a short lecture. (Links to these resources are listed in Materials Needed above.)

Then ask students to discuss the following questions with a partner or small group, before reconvening for a whole class discussion.

- Were you surprised by the sculpture’s title? Why or why not?
- Did the title help you interpret the artwork? Does a title give artwork meaning?

Reading (40 minutes)

Introduce the main reading: the literary text from the drama section of the Summer 2023 edition of *Asymptote* from *Brancusi v. United States* by Tatiana Niculescu (tr. by Amanda L. Andrei and Codin Andrei).

Students read Scene One aloud with a partner from the beginning until the tour guide says, “I don’t know you. I don’t know anything!”

After reading, students discuss the following questions with their partner:

- What information does the text give about Brâncuși’s younger years?
- What do you think about the tour guide’s presentation and interaction with visitors?
- Did John’s request surprise or confuse you? What do you think his motives might be?
- What do you think will happen next?

Students read the remainder of Scene One and all of Scene Two individually. As they read, they should mark topics that they are curious about (e.g., names, titles of artworks, places, untranslated words).

After students finish reading, make a list of topics students were curious about on the whiteboard. The list is likely to include some of the topics in the bulleted list below.

Assign homework (5 minutes)

Assign students, individually or in groups, to research one of these topics and to prepare a short presentation (about 4-5 minutes) for the next class. To guide their research and presentation preparation, students can use the following matrix as a guide.

Topic	Reference to the topic in the text	Information about the topic from research (Cite sources)	Relevance of this information to the literary text
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List of possible presentation topics:

- The spelling of Brâncuși's name / untranslated words in the text / the translator's note (published alongside the piece in Asymptote)
- Constantin Brâncuși
- Brâncuși memorial house / Brâncuși's studio in Paris
- The Ecorché, The bust of Alexandru Davila, Târgu Jiu: The Table of Silence, The Kiss Gate, The Infinite Column (sculptures by Brâncuși)
- Oltenia (region of Romania)
- Milarepa (Tibetan wise man)
- Amadeo Modigliani (painter, sculptor)
- Auguste Rodin (sculptor)
- Edward Steichen (photographer)
- Marcel Duchamp (painter, sculptor)
- Brancusi v. United States (court case)
- Other relevant topics of interest to the students

Lesson Two

Student Presentations (60 minutes)

Students deliver their presentations to the class. Listeners should take notes of information as they listen. The notes will be used to complete the homework activity, and students may use the above matrix as a notetaking tool, if needed.

Homework

After the presentations, students use their notes to aid their participation in an online discussion board activity with their classmates. They should post two answers and at least one thoughtful reply to another student's answer. Answers should synthesize information from reading the piece and listening to classmates' presentations. Highlight particularly insightful comments in the next class.

- One of the translators said, "... I hope to bring attention to Romanian as an underrepresented language and Romanian culture as a rich source of craftsmanship and good humor." Do you think the translation is successful in this regard? Why or why not? What have you learned about Romania?
- Do you think the change in setting from Scene 1 to Scene 2 is significant? Why or why not? What are the effects of using different times and places?
- What do you think about John's character? Is there anything more you would like to know about him? About the museum guide? Marthe? Why do you think these details are not included in the text?
- What are some connections between the real-life artists who appear as characters in this play (Brâncuși, Modigliani, Rodin, Steichen, Duchamp)? What influences between different arts and cultures can be seen in the text?
- Why do you think the author chose to write drama (as opposed to an essay, fiction, or poetry)? What ideas about art and culture do you think this piece draws attention to?

- How did the information from your classmates' presentations affect your interest or enjoyment of the piece? What is the significance of the title? Does it aid the audience's interpretation or understanding? Why do you think so?

Water Imagery and the Female ‘Self’

***The Sea Bed* by Solange Rodriguez Pappa, translated by Victor Meadowcroft**

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/the-sea-bed-solange-rodriguez-pappe/>

In these lessons, students will explore the connotations of water imagery in two texts in relation to ideas of female identity. In the first lesson, they will begin to examine *The Sea Bed* by Solange Rodriguez Pappa, evaluating the ways in which the author uses water imagery to both undermine narrative progression and create a dreamlike atmosphere. In the second lesson, they will connect previous learning to ideas of female selfhood. They will then compare *The Sea Bed* with an extract from *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, drawing on themes of female oppression and liberation. They will complete the lesson by writing a comparative essay evaluating the use of water imagery in both texts.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lessons, students should be able to:

- Identify metaphors and imagery
- Make inferences about texts and female identity
- Examine a text’s imagery for meaning
- Compare two literary texts

Assessment

Comprehension Questions

Class Discussion

Essay Question

Approximate Grade Level

High School Students

University Students

Materials Needed

The Sea Bed by Solange Rodriguez Pappa. (tr. by Victor Meadowcroft)

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/the-sea-bed-solange-rodriguez-pappe/>

The Awakening by Kate Chopin

<https://www.katechopin.org/the-awakening-text/>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (60 minutes)

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

Lesson One

Warm up (5 minutes)

As students enter the classroom, display an image of the sea (vast and calm) on the board. Ask students to write down what the image evokes for them. How does it make them feel?

Collect feedback on the board.

Reading and Analysis (50 minutes)

Introduce the text to students and read aloud as a class.

Ask students to create a timeline of events in the story. How significant is the story's cyclical structure?

Plenary (5 minutes)

Agree on a class timeline of events, capturing students' ideas on the board. Save a copy for the next lesson.

Lesson Two

Warm up (10 minutes)

Recap learning from the previous learning by reminding students of the timeline.

Display the following quotations on the board:

"The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river." Virginia Woolf

"I am haunted by waters. It may be that I'm too dry in myself, too English, or it may be simply that I'm susceptible to beauty, but I do not feel truly at ease on this earth unless there's a river nearby. "When it hurts," wrote the Polish poet Czeslaw Miłosz, "we return to the banks of certain rivers," and I take comfort in his words, for there's a river I've returned to over and again, in sickness and in health, in grief, in desolation and in joy." Olivia Laing

"I wanted somehow to get beneath the surface of the daily world, as a sleeper shrugs off the ordinary air and crests towards dreams." Olivia Laing

Discuss the quotations as a class. What do the students think they mean? How might they be connected with *The Sea Bed*?

Independent Analysis (25 minutes)

Students answer the following questions independently about the story:

- Look at the quote: *Dinora rejected the idea of wearing a life jacket, launching herself into the water to illustrate her bravery.* What does the verb 'launching' tell us about her relationship to the water?

- Examine the structure of the paragraph beginning *She swam out a little*. Why does the writer intersperse descriptions of her movements in the water with her thoughts?
- Look at the quote: *As she swam in the mist like just one more of them, she became aware of her lover losing dimensions behind her*. How does the writer use sibilance to create foreshadowing?
- Look at the quote: *'The stuffing in the duvet turned to liquid, and then the thickness of the mattress gave way, submerging her. Without intending to, she had entered the sea of night.'* What effect does the sea metaphor have?

Reading and Class Discussion (20 minutes)

Give students the following extract from *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin:

The water of the Gulf stretched out . . . to the end of the story.

Ask students to highlight the water metaphors and imagery that can be found in the extract. (Possible answers: the personification of the sea; simile *coiled like serpents*; portrayal of the water as a lover, *the touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace*.)

Briefly discuss the representation of female identity in the extract. What is happening here? (Allude to the idea of female escape and liberation).

Ask students to look over their notes for both texts. Can they find any similarities?

Homework Assignment: Essay (5 minutes)

For homework students will write an essay answering the following question:

Compare how the female protagonists in *The Sea Bed* and *The Awakening* are connected to water.

Further Reading:

The Waves by Virginia Woolf

To the River: A Journey Beneath the Surface by Olivia Laing

Using Imagery to Evoke Time

Three Poems by Muhammad al-Maghut, translated by Nina Youkhanna and Elliott Colla <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/fiction/the-sea-bed-solange-rodriguez-pappe/>

In this lesson, students will explore the relationship between the theme of time and the poet's use of imagery. They will examine 'Human Surplus' by Muhammad al-Maghut, exploring the ways in which the poem's imagery creates temporal meaning. They will begin to connect this to the form and tone of the poem. In the following lesson, they will analyse 'Tattoo' and 'Man on the Sidewalk', drawing on themes of time, history, and loss. They will complete the lesson by creating a simile bank to use in their own creative writing.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lessons, students should be able to:

- Identify poetic techniques in a poem
- Analyse a poem for poetic devices
- Make inferences about a poem's meaning
- Write an original poem

Assessment

Independent Reading
Comprehension Questions
Creative Writing

Approximate Grade Level

High School Students

Materials Needed

Three Poems by Muhammad al-Maghut. (tr. by Nina Youkhanna and Elliott Colla)
<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/three-poems-muhammad-al-maghut/>

Approximate Length

Lesson One (60 minutes)

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

Lesson One

Warm up (10 minutes)

Introduce the poet and poem by reading the bio and the first paragraph of the translator's note to the class.

Write the title 'Prose Poetry' on the board. What do students think a prose poem is? How might it be different from other poetic forms? Why might a poet choose this form?

Ask students for their feedback. Collect ideas on the board.

Independent Reading (20 minutes)

Read 'Human Surplus' out loud as a class.

Students then reread independently, making notes on the second reading.

Display the following questions on the board to guide their notation:

- Look at the title of the poem. How does this establish the tone of the poem?
- Highlight similes and metaphors and comment on their effects
- Highlight contrasting imagery and comment on its effects

Students read the second paragraph of the translator's note, returning to the poem to add to their notes.

Class Analysis (20 minutes)

Students share their notes as part of a whole-class analysis. Guide the analysis using the following prompts:

- How does the simile 'those years that swell before me / Like the sea before the pelican' render time?
- What is the effect of the sibilance in line 7? (Wasted)
- The poetic persona's future is compared with a childish image of a 'duck . . . on a school blackboard'. What does this juxtaposition create? (Focus on temporality of past and future)
- Look at the temporal juxtaposition of 'coming generation' and 'old mouth'. Where does this place the poetic persona?

Plenary (10 minutes)

Students use the whole-class analysis to answer the following question: How does the poet use time to create a feeling of loss?

Lesson Two (60 minutes)

Warm up (15 minutes)

Recap learning from previous lesson. Ask students to share their answers from the plenary. Collect their answers on the board.

Reading (20 minutes)

Introduce 'Tattoo' and 'Man on the Sidewalk'. As students read, ask them to make notes about time / regret / love. They should highlight relevant examples in the poems and comment on them. Students then highlight any similes they feel drawn towards.

Class Discussion (20 minutes)

On 'Tattoo': How does the poet use time to connect history and politics?

On 'Man on the Sidewalk': How do the poet's descriptions of their beloved elicit a sorrowful tone? Ask students whether these are conventional descriptions and interrogate the poet's intention in using them.

Assign Independent Writing Task for Homework (5 minutes)

Students will use the similes they highlighted and attempt to create their own using 'concrete imagery' (see translator's note). They then use these similes to write an original prose poem.

FEEDBACK

Thanks for taking the time to read our Summer 2023 Educator's Guide. We hope you found it useful and engaging.

Have questions, comments, critiques, or testimonials?

Please leave your feedback at <http://tinyurl.com/asymptote4edu>. We look forward to hearing from you!

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