

Poetry – Reading List

This unit of work will look at nine poems on the theme of journeys. Students will be asked to compare a named poem to another poem from the anthology. The assessment task will be shared with schools in exam week, at the request of our EM schools.

Here are some resources you may find useful in preparing to teach the unit of work.

Poetry Tradition

Here is the opening of Homer’s *Odyssey*:

Tell me, Muse, the story of that resourceful man who was driven to wander far and wide after he had sacked the holy citadel of Troy. He saw the cities of many people and he learnt their ways. He suffered great anguish on the high seas in his struggles to preserve his life and bring his comrades home. But he failed to save those comrades, in spite of all his efforts. It was their own transgression that brought them to their doom, for in their folly they devoured the oxen of Hyperion the Sun-god and he saw to it that they would never return. Tell us this story, goddess daughter to Zeus, beginning at whatever point you will.

Questions to discuss:

- 1) What kind of man is Odysseus?
- 2) What happened during his travels?
- 3) What complications occurred?
- 4) What are the key components of oral poetry?

Wordsworth and Coleridge on poetry:

<http://bishnupurhighschool.weebly.com/uploads/2/6/9/3/26937489/r. l. brett a. r. j ones lyrical ballads willia.pdf>

P. B. Shelley’s ‘A defense of poetry’: <https://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/A-Defense-of-Poetry.pdf>

Christopher Ricks ‘The force of poetry’:

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-force-of-poetry-9780198183266?cc=gb&lang=en&>

Simon Armitage’s lectures as the Professor of Poetry at Oxford:

<http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/poetry-simon-armitage>

Ruth Padel’s *52 ways of looking at a poem* provides an excellent overview of contemporary British poetry. ISBN: 978-0-099-42915-9

Poetry beyond the classroom

Poetry by Heart

A national competition for students to memorise poetry; the website has lots of useful teacher resources too: <http://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/>

Apples and Snakes

A spoken word and poetry performance initiative: <http://www.applesandsnakes.org/>

Poetry Slam

Spoken word performance; there are resources on the US and UK site that might be helpful: <http://slam.poetrysociety.org.uk/> ; <http://poetryslam.com>

‘Journeys’ Poetry Anthology

Grace Nichols, ‘Wherever I Hang’

1. Grace Nichols’ biography: <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/grace-nichols>
(Nichols comments on the way in which she delights in the craft of word-play: ‘I like the battle with the words and the language – I enjoy the game of playing with things til I’m happy with it.’)
2. Explore ideas around multiculturalism and the use of dialect. Benjamin Zephaniah’s poem ‘The British’ provides a good exploration of both, though does not explicitly link to journeys. <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-british/>
3. David Crystal is one of the most preeminent linguists. Explore his work on dialect here: <http://www.davidcrystal.com/?id=2877>
4. History on immigration and the windrush can be found here: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/citizenship/brave_new_world/immigration.htm ; http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/uk/2002/race/short_history_of_immigration.stm ;
5. Some inflammatory views against immigration from the Empire: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVcWVjNOCFA>

W. H. Auden, ‘The Night Mail’

1. Read more information about Auden here: <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/w-h-auden> and here: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/w-h-auden>
2. Watch the documentary about the night mail train: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7SD6qt0EFI>
3. More music by Benjamin Britten: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vbvhU22uAM>
4. Consider other poems about train travel, that would provide further comparison. For example, Philip Larkin’s ‘The Whitsun Weddings’, Wilfred Owen’s ‘The Send-off’ or ‘Adlestrop’ by Edward Thomas. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/nov/14/top10s.railway.poems>

Wallace Willis, ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot’

1. Read more about Wallace Willis here: <https://www.travelok.com/rhythm-and-routes/artists/wallace-willis>
2. Inspired by the Old Testament tale of Elijah who was taken to heaven on a chariot: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Kings+2%3A1-14&version=NIV>
3. C19th spiritual songs sung by black slaves in the American South: <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihms.200197495/>
4. Religious folksongs and spirituals: <https://www.britannica.com/art/spiritual>
5. Some more songs with biblical allusions: <http://www.songfacts.com/category-songs-with-biblical-references.php>
6. The narrative of Solomon Northup, made famous in the film *Twelve Years a Slave*: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/northup.html>

7. Read about the controversy of this song being used by the English rugby team:
<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/rugby-world-cup-why-its-time-for-england-to-stop-singing-swing-low-sweet-chariot-10505568.html>

Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Canterbury Tales'

1. Biography of Chaucer: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Geoffrey-Chaucer>
2. Read the General Prologue in the original middle English, using an interlinear translation: <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/gp-par.htm>
3. Further critical reading on the General Prologue and *The Canterbury Tales* as a text: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-canterbury-tales-by-geoffrey-chaucer>
4. Podcasts on Chaucer's writing:
<http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/gsearch/geoffrey%2Bchaucer%2Bthe%2Bcanterbury%2Btales>
5. Read one of the more accessible tales, such as the Wife of Bath, The Miller, The Pardoner or the Merchant's Tale to add to your knowledge of the General Prologue.
https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=GoowBgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=the+canterbury+tales&ots=qVxjsgXJX9&sig=Cn5aaC_GUOoLhgoCtIouL1Wvl_Q#v=onepage&q=the%20canterbury%20tales&f=false
6. Further reading on Medieval astrology:
<https://woodwalkers.wordpress.com/2013/02/13/astrology-in-the-middle-ages/> ;
<http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item107717.html>
7. Look at other pilgrimages and how those journeys would inspire different types of poetry. For example, a journey to Mecca (haj) would cover different terrain and may have different types of characters. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zgymxnb> ;
<http://www.readersdigest.ca/travel/world/10-incredible-pilgrimages-around-world/10/> ; <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/top-10/pilgrimages-sacred-journeys/>
8. David Crystal explores the importance of the poem in the development of Middle English: <http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item132935.html> ;
<https://www.bl.uk/medieval-literature/articles/middle-english>
9. An animated summary and analysis:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yA2su9wy2y0>



Chaucer's General
Prologue - Rudy Spra

10. Chaucer's General Prologue by Rudy Spraycar

Patience Agbabi, 'Telling Tales'

1. Biography of Patience Agbabi: <https://poetryarchive.org/poet/patience-agbabi/>
2. Read an interview with Patience Agbabi about 'Telling Tales':
<https://www.newsshopper.co.uk/news/11526578.poet-and-performer-patience-agbabi-reveals-how-shes-telling-tales-on-gravesend/>
3. Guardian article about Agbabi's reboot of 'The Canterbury Tales':
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/23/funky-chaucer-reboot-patience-agbabi-canterbury-tales>
4. Watch Patience Agbabi performing 'Prologue (Grime mix)':
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U-ozgjZfjQ>

5. Watch Patience Agbabi in conversation at a 'Writers Make Worlds' event in the English Faculty, University of Oxford: <https://writersmakeworlds.com/patience-agbabi/>

John Milton, 'Paradise Lost'

1. Biography of John Milton: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/john-milton>
2. Read Milton's preface to *Paradise Lost*, where he outlines his purpose for writing: <http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item126660.html>
3. Read Book 1 of *Paradise Lost* to understand the context of the prologue: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/45718>
4. British Library resources on *Paradise Lost*: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/john-milton-paradise-lost>
5. British Library images of *Paradise Lost*: https://imagesonline.bl.uk/?service=search&action=do_quick_search&language=en&q=john+milton
6. BBC documentary on *Paradise Lost*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j_itIVgOk
7. Philip Pullman's introduction to the Oxford edition of the poem.



Philip Pullman's
Introduction to Paradi

Robert Frost, 'The Road Not Taken'

1. Readings of the poem: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/44272> , <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUaQgRiJukA>
2. Further information about Robert Frost and a reading of 'Stopping by woods on a snowy evening', which complements this poem well. <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/robert-frost?gclid=CPWWnZjYxNICFZIWowodcuEG7Q>
3. Some critical views on the poem can be found here, including common misconceptions: http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/frost/road.htm
4. Read other poems about paths that diverge, such as Emily Dickinson's 'Our journey had advanced' or Rudyard Kipling's 'The way through the woods'.
5. Documentary on the poet (black and white): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9jbV7knSH4>
6. Commentary on the biography and controversy of the poet: <http://harvardmagazine.com/2014/01/extracting-the-woodchuck>
7. A short video on misconceptions in the poem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSxjxhrwg5s>
8. A reflection of Edward Thomas's response to the poem which was written to mock his indecisiveness: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jul/29/robert-frost-edward-thomas-poetry>

Simon Armitage, ‘My Father Thought It’

1. Information about the poet can be found here:
<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/simon-armitage?gclid=CMqEs7PzxNICFdQaGwodCjoDrw> ;
<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/simon-armitage>
2. A brief analysis of the poem can be found here:
<http://www.sheerpoetry.co.uk/gcse/simon-armitage/simon-armitage/my-father-thought-it-bloody-queer>
3. On body piercing in the 1970s:
http://www.fashionencyclopedia.com/fashion_costume_culture/Modern-World-Part-II-1961-1979/Body-Piercing.html
4. Armitage’s thoughts on his upbringing and poetry:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/bradford/culture/words/2005/simon_armitage_pictures_britain.shtml
5. *Guardian* interview of Armitage on poetry:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvFcbdyQoA>

Jackie Kay, ‘Gap Year’

1. Biography and selection of Jackie Kay’s poems:
<https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poet/jackie-kay/>
2. BBC biography of Jackie Kay:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/3FJFCroIVngBJkTDB5Z855S/jackie-kay>
3. Guardian articles written by Jackie Kay:
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/jackie-kay>
4. Exploration of key ideas and themes of ‘Gap Year’ here:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z29pv4j/revision/1>
5. An annotated copy of the poem ‘Gap Year’:
<https://mrssutherlandenglish.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/gap-year-annotated.pdf>
6. Watch an interview with Jackie Kay on the importance of poetry:
<https://childrens.poetryarchive.org/interviews/an-interview-with-jackie-kay/>

Poetry Comparison

These sites provide some guidance on the principles of comparison in poetry and literature more broadly.

<http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-write-comparative-analysis>



emag article on
comparison.pdf

English and Media Centre ‘Comparing Literary Texts’