

INTRODUCTION TO POEMS IN TRANSLATION



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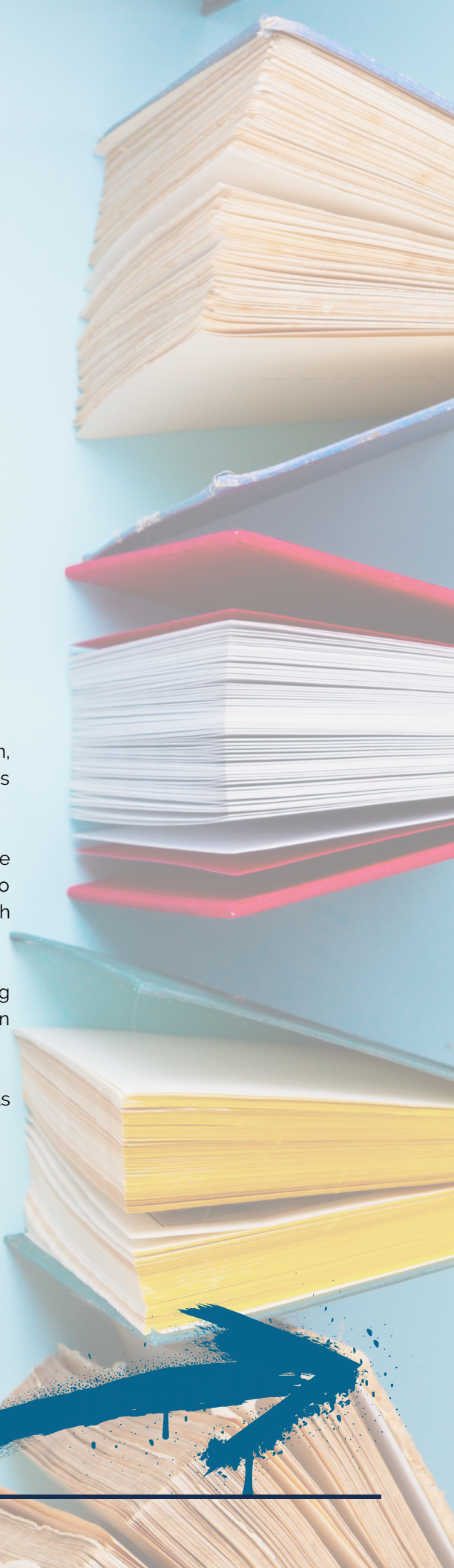
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Outcomes

The goals for this lesson are:

- a) To build students' confidence in their powers of perception, especially regarding the recognition of tone and the shapes of poems (lines and stanzas).
- b) To introduce students to the complexities of translation — the varying judgments a translator must make in trying to remain faithful to the original language, while creating a rhythmic, meaningful and rich version of the work in English.
- c) To compare different translations of the same poem, honing students' critical thinking skills (especially in regard to nuanced shifts in poetry).
- d) Throughout, for students to make their own choices as much as possible and to read poems aloud.

Lesson by Cari Barbour (Arcadia High School, Arcadia, CA), Tim Munson (Hyde School, Woodstock, CT), Arthur Oberheim (Veterans Memorial High School, Peabody, MA) and Brian Shea (Andover High School, Andover, MA)

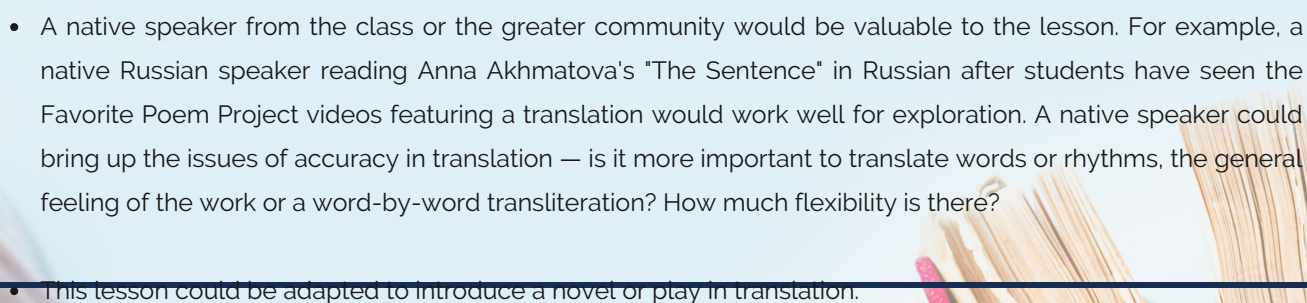




Ideas and Methodologies

- **Opening activity:** Show Glaisma Perez-Silva's reading in Spanish of "Ay, Ay, Ay de la Grifa Negra" from the Favorite Poem Project video. Directive: observe tone, and shifts. Students write briefly on the tone of the piece in their notebooks. (No discussion yet).
- Watch the same clip again. This time, give students a copy of the poem text in Spanish, but with the stanza breaks removed. They indicate where they think the stanza breaks occur, based on the reading they see and hear.
- Hand out copies of the true poem in Spanish (properly formatted). Students can compare their efforts with the original. (Ideally, students will have been at least partially successful. This may build their confidence as readers of and listeners to poetry and also show that at least part of poetry-reading is intuitive, and not contingent on reasoned comprehension).
- Move from the previous activity into a greater exploration of translated materials. Ideally, students will have several choices (e.g. Neruda, Dante, Haiku) and break into small groups to examine several translations of the same work(s) or passages. They should note differences, translators' varied choices — and consider the effects. Even without knowing the original language, do they have a sense of which translation they prefer? Explain.
- Students, after the group study, reconvene and present their findings to the group. Members of the group read aloud the different translations and elaborate, pointing to specific words and phrases, on the differences. Q&A from class and the teacher.
- Any large group discussion as necessary, for instance, a discussion of a specific poetic technique or two translators' different choices regarding form, and how that changes our readings.
- Show the entire Favorite Poem Video segment featuring "Ay, Ay, Ay de la Grifa Negra" and some of the other Favorite Poem videos in which people read poems in languages other than English, along with English translations of the poems.

Additional Ideas:

- A native speaker from the class or the greater community would be valuable to the lesson. For example, a native Russian speaker reading Anna Akhmatova's "The Sentence" in Russian after students have seen the Favorite Poem Project videos featuring a translation would work well for exploration. A native speaker could bring up the issues of accuracy in translation — is it more important to translate words or rhythms, the general feeling of the work or a word-by-word transliteration? How much flexibility is there?
 - This lesson could be adapted to introduce a novel or play in translation.
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Lesson Resources

Favorite Poem Project Videos:

"Ay, Ay, Ay de la Grifa Negra" by Julia de Burgos

"Piececitos" by Gabriela Mistral

from "Gitanjali" by Rabindranath Tagore

"The lower leaves of trees" by Sone No Yoshitada

"The Way of the Water-Hyacinth" by Zawgee
A print copy of the de Burgos poem (in Spanish)

Sets of two or more translations of the same poem or work, such as:

A Neruda poem

A section from Goethe's *Faust* (Kaufmann, others)

A section from Dante's *Inferno* (Pinsky, others)

Haiku (The Dover thrift edition offers multiple translations of the same pieces)

A section from *Beowulf*, *The Iliad*, *The Aeneid*, *The Odyssey*, etc.



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