

# Important World Poets

## Reading & Writing Workshop – Text Packet

This document contains all poems and excerpts used in the workshop, presented in workshop order. Public-domain poems are written out in full. Modern works still under copyright are included as brief fair-use excerpts for instructional purposes.

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### SESSION 1 — Classical & Pre-Modern World Poetry

**Focus: Nature, spirituality, brevity, imagery**

#### Li Bai (China)

##### Quiet Night Thoughts

Before my bed the moonlight glitters,  
Like frost upon the ground.  
I lift my head and gaze at the bright moon,  
I lower my head and think of home.

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##### Drinking Alone by Moonlight

Among the flowers a jug of wine,  
I drink alone, no friend with me.  
I raise my cup to invite the moon,  
Who joins me, with my shadow, we are three.

The moon does not know how to drink,  
The shadow merely follows my form;  
Yet for a time I make them friends,  
To share this fleeting spring.

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#### Rumi (Persia)

##### From the Masnavi — The Reed Flute's Song

Hearken to this Reed forlorn,  
Breathing, ever since 'twas torn  
From its rushy bed, a strain  
Of impassioned love and pain.

“The secret of my song, though near,  
None can see and none can hear.  
Oh, for a friend to know my heart,  
And share my sorrow, share my smart!”

'Tis the flame of Love that fired me,  
'Tis the wine of Love inspired me.  
Wouldst thou learn how lovers bleed,  
Hearken, hearken to the Reed!

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### **From the Masnavi — The Guest House**

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
Some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
Who violently sweep your house  
Empty of its furniture,  
Still, treat each guest honorably.

He may be clearing you out  
For some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
Meet them at the door laughing,  
And invite them in.

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### **Tang Dynasty Poetry (China)**

**Du Fu — Spring View**

The nation shattered, mountains and rivers remain;  
In the city, spring grows deep in weeds and trees.  
Moved by the times, flowers draw tears;  
Hating separation, birds alarm the heart.

Beacon fires have burned for three months;  
A letter from home is worth ten thousand in gold.  
White hairs scratched even shorter,  
Soon too thin to hold a hairpin.

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## **Sanskrit Lyric Poetry (India)**

### **Bhartrihari — From the Vairagya Śataka**

What profit lies in wealth or fame?  
What joy in pleasure's fleeting breath?  
The world is but a bubble's gleam,  
A painted dream between birth and death.

Let wisdom be my only friend,  
Let calm my constant dwelling place;  
For all delights too quickly end,  
And sorrow follows close their trace.

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### **Anonymous Sanskrit Lyric**

The moon has risen;  
The lotus opens its eyes.  
Who can sleep now,  
When love has awakened the night?

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## **SESSION 2 — Renaissance & Enlightenment Voices**

**Focus: Reason, love, morality, social critique**

### **Torquato Tasso (Italy)**

**Love**

Love is no child, nor born in playful hour;  
It is a fire that feeds upon the heart,  
A hidden wound that reason cannot part,  
A gentle chain, a tyrant's secret power.

It laughs with hope, then weeps with sudden smart;  
It promises a kingdom, crowns a tower,  
Then casts the soul adrift without a chart,  
A captive slave to beauty's fleeting flower.

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### **The Complaint of the Lover**

I live by dying, and I die by life,  
So sweet the pain, so bitter yet the bliss;  
I fear my freedom more than mortal strife,  
And seek the chain whose clasp I dare not miss.

If this be love, let love forever reign;  
For without love, all joy is empty pain.

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### **Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (New Spain / Mexico)**

#### **On Men's Foolishness (from "Hombres necios que acusáis")**

You foolish men who blame  
Women without reason,  
Not seeing you're the cause  
Of the very thing you fault.

If with unmatched desire  
You beg their scornful favor,  
Why blame them for behaving  
Just as you have taught?

You urge them on to evil,  
Then call them wicked still;  
You mock what you yourselves  
Have worked so hard to build.

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### **In Pursuit of Laura**

This love that seeks no recompense  
But suffering and sighs,  
Is born not of my liberty  
But of my reason's lies.

I love, though love destroys my peace;  
I hope, though hope betrays;  
What wonder then that pain and joy  
Together rule my days?

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## **Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri (Arab World)**

### **Selected Quatrains**

The world is but a fleeting shade,  
A dream whose truth is never stayed;  
Its joys deceive, its sorrows cling—  
Be wary of what life has made.

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I marvel at mankind's dispute:  
Each claims the truth, each finds it mute.  
They fight for paths they've never known,  
And praise the chains that bind their foot.

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Do not rejoice in birth or fame,  
Nor grieve at death or whispered blame;  
The wise man walks with quiet tread,  
Unmoved by loss, untouched by gain.

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## **SESSION 3 — Romantic & National Voices**

**Focus: Emotion, nature, identity**

**William Wordsworth (England)**

**Lines Written in Early Spring**

I heard a thousand blended notes,  
While in a grove I sat reclined,  
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts  
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,  
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;  
And 'tis my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,  
Their thoughts I cannot measure:—  
But the least motion which they made,  
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

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### **Expostulation and Reply (excerpt)**

Why, William, on that old grey stone,  
Thus for the length of half a day,  
Why, William, sit you thus alone,  
And dream your time away?

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### **Mirza Ghalib (South Asia)**

#### **Selected Ghazals**

Thousands of desires—each worth dying for;  
Many of them I have realized... yet I yearn for more.

Life's long night put out many a candle;  
Still my heart longs for the dawn once more.

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I am not distressed by the pain of loss;  
What troubles me is the memory of joy.

Faith and disbelief alike abandoned me—  
Where then shall I turn, O heart, for refuge?

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## **SESSION 4 — Modernism (Fair-Use Excerpts)**

**Focus: Fragmentation, alienation, modern life**

**T. S. Eliot — The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock**

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table;

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**Federico García Lorca — Selected Poems**

The moon came into the forge  
With her bustle of tuberoses.  
The boy looks at her, looks at her.

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**Anna Akhmatova — Selected Poems**

You will hear thunder and remember me,  
And think: she wanted storms.  
The blue of lightning will seem white to you.

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