

Poetryclass Fresh ideas for learning from The Poetry Society

Making poetry with my mother

By Kate Brackley
Teacher Trailblazer
Kingston Grammar School

The lesson plan uses Letitia Chan's 'Making Glutinous Dumplings with My Mother', a winning poem in the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2016.

These activities can be used as a single lesson, or over a series of lessons. The aim is for students to explore an unfamiliar or 'unseen' poem, using the activities to build their levels of knowledge and analysis.



KS4

Topics at a glance

- Imagery
- Structure
- Form

KS5

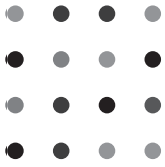
Getting started

Pair work

Give the students the title of the poem with "glutinous dumplings" removed. Give pairs one minute to discuss which words may be missing from the title and why. Share with a second pair and between the two pairings choose the 'most likely' answer.

Whole class discussion

What does the fact that the speaker is making something with her mother suggest about their relationship? Introduce the missing words from the title. Why has the poet chosen this title? Do particular types of dumplings have symbolic or cultural meanings for the class?



Reading the poem

Read the poem slowly, ensuring that you are reading to the end of a sentence rather than the end of the line as this will affect the sound of the poem. Remember that it should sound like a stream of consciousness - like we are 'listening in' to the thoughts of the speaker.

After the first reading

Students should individually complete an inference grid (Resource 1).

Drawing together

Students collate their thoughts on the poem using the FLIRTY table (Resource 2).

Developing understanding

Use the 'Bloom's Cards' (Resource 3) to develop your student's understanding of the layers of meaning within the poem. The 'hint' cards (Resource 4) may be helpful.

The 6 stages can be approached in a number of ways depending on group size and the differentiation that may be required.

- The group can be divided into smaller groups who work through the 6 cards together, 'levelling up' as they complete each card.
- The first two to three activities can be completed as a whole class group to introduce the students to the poem before they approach the last three to four cards themselves in smaller groups.
- The class could be divided into pairs and given a card to focus on before feeding back to the whole class.

Plenary

Revisit the inference grid and review whether students would make any changes to what they know and assume about the poem. Can they now answer any of the questions they had at the beginning? Do they have more questions?



Enter the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award

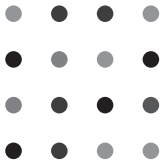
Cyrus's poem was a winner of the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2016. Now your students are writing their own poetry they can enter the competition themselves.

The Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award is the most prestigious award for writers aged 11-17. It is an annual competition that welcomes poems on any theme and entry is completely free.

Since it began in 1998, the Award has kickstarted the career of some of today's most exciting new voices. Past winners include Sarah Howe, Helen Mort, Jay Bernard and Caroline Bird.

Winners receive a fantastic range of prizes, including mentoring, a residential Arvon writing course, Poetry Society membership and books. The Poetry Society also continues to support winners' development with performance, publication and internship opportunities.

Find out more and enter your students' work at foleyoungpoets.org



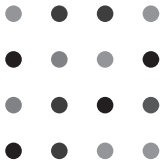
Teacher notes

Teacher Notes

- Focus the discussion on how the poet uses structure to reflect the structure of memory – creating the effect of a stream of consciousness.
- Note the use of free verse as an overall structure – within this, the use of enjambment and caesura, varied sentence lengths and punctuation allowing the reader to feel like they are eavesdropping on the poet’s thoughts and following their memories.
- What images within the poem trigger other thoughts and feelings for the poet, as with our own natural thoughts?
- Note also the cyclical structure of the poem, beginning and ending with the mutual act of cooking in the kitchen shared by the two women.
- Ask the students to consider why the poet has used the setting of a kitchen.
- We are introduced to the poet’s mother through a distorted image – viewing her through the steam of the kitchen – why is this significant?

- Could the “balls of sesame” and the “bigger folds of dough” be a metaphor for her and her mother? Perhaps introducing the theme of inheritance/heritage or the theme of deception or secrets.
- There are interesting adjectives used to describe the mother’s “pale cracked” palms – think about what this may suggest about her and how the poet views her.
- Draw the students attention towards the contrast between the mother’s and daughter’s nails. In particular the second image of the acrylic nails covering the mother’s own short, small ones.
- How might the “dust” relate to the theme of inheritance/heritage?
- The “crevices” of the poet’s mouth are yet another image that suggests something hidden – how might this link to our own impressions of the mother?
- Notice the mother’s reaction to her daughter’s speed when making the dumplings – what do you think this signifies?
- Discuss the effect of the use of taboo language – why is it important that it has been used?





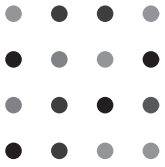
Worksheet 1 Inference grid

What questions do I have about the poem?

What can I guess about the poem?

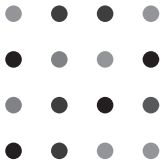
What do I definitely know about the poem?





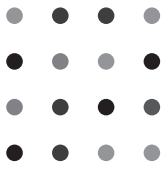
Worksheet 2 FLIRTY grid

<p>FORM What type of poem is it? Are there stanzas? Is there enjambment, caesuras, end-stopped lines?</p>	
<p>LANGUAGE Are there patterns of language? Lexical fields? Is taboo language used? Is there alliteration, assonance? What do you find interesting?</p>	
<p>IMAGERY Metaphors, similes, personification? Groups of images? Colour, nature?</p>	
<p>RHYTHM/RHYME Is rhythm and rhyme used? What for? If not, why not?</p>	
<p>-tone/THEME What are the central ideas expressed within the poem? How are the speaker's feelings being put across?</p>	
<p>YOUR OPINION Do you like/dislike the poem? Can you relate to it? Are there any images, phrases that stand out to you?</p>	



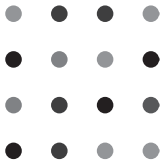
Worksheet 3 Bloom's cards

<p>Knowledge</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify the key themes of the poem.2. Based on previous knowledge of poetic structure, identify the key structural features of the poem.	<p>Comprehension</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Retell the story of the poem in a tweet.2. Describe your first impressions of both the speaker and the mother in three adjectives for each.
<p>Application</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How might the various images of the interactions between the speaker and the mother and the actions of the two male characters in the poem relate to the status of women?2. Write a list of the actions/thoughts of the mother and daughter that are stereotypically associated with women.	<p>Analysis</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Create a Venn diagram contrasting the appearance and characteristics of the speaker and the mother.2. Select two focused images from the poem (for example, the focus on the speaker and mother's nails) and write one sentence analysing what this may suggest about the characters.
<p>Synthesis</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Choose three short quotations which inform your understanding of the parent/child relationship and discuss what you can infer from these quotations about the relationship.2. Identify two areas of the poem which contradict your original thoughts on the title of the poem. How have your ideas progressed?	<p>Evaluation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Create a three-minute plan prioritising the points you would discuss in a response to this poem. Categorise these by importance.2. Spend one minute arguing for and against the statement – "The speaker dislikes spending time with their mother."



Worksheet 4 Hint cards

<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Think about the gender of the main characters. Why is this significant? How might ideas of inheritance inform our understanding of the poem? Free verse – no specified rhythm or rhyme – what could this suggest about the parent/child relationship, the speaker’s view of themselves, the nature of memory?</p>	<p>Comprehension</p> <p>A tweet should be 140 characters, including spaces. You need to assess what the most important pieces of information are within the poem. Adjective – describing word – think about how our opinion of the two characters may vary at different points of the poem.</p>
<p>Application</p> <p>Think about how the male and female characters of the poem interact with each other and what you could infer about the status of women through these actions. Are these women valued? Treated well? Stereotype - a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing:</p>	<p>Analysis</p> <p>Focused images: The contrast between the speaker’s and the mother’s nails. The ginger tumbling into the pot. The blackened teeth. The speaker’s darkened skin.</p>
<p>Synthesis</p> <p>Parent/Child Relationship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “seeing me at the airport”• “she laughed at how dark I’d gotten”• “my mother who doesn’t eat fish”• “I will keep my inglorious self from her”• “she does not know I know” <p>What do we associate with a mother and child cooking together? How does the poet challenge this assumption?</p>	<p>Evaluation</p> <p>You may wish to work through the poem, beginning with the title and then addressing key images within the poem and how these develop your original view. Remember that meaning is key in unseen poetry. Always ask yourself – ‘Why has that been used?’</p> <p>Think about the word ‘dislikes’ – how could this be interpreted?</p>



Making Glutinous Dumplings with My Mother

By Letitia Chan

A winner of the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2016

The kitchen drips with steam and in it stands my mother
whom I cannot recognize. She puts balls of sesame
inside bigger folds of dough, white in her pale cracked palms.
Under the acrylic my mother's nails are short and small,
bent as umbrella tops. Mine are naked almonds rife with milk spots.
I think of the dust that makes its way into the ball, the dead skin
of my hands. I make small nubs of dough. Sesame paste
sticks to the crevices of my mouth, sickly sweet,
and I am always surprised to see my blackened teeth.
My mother laughs at me for taking forever. Seeing me
at the airport she laughed at how dark I'd gotten.
She suggested taping my eyelids to make a double crease,
told me when I was younger that eating fish makes your eyes bigger,
my mother who doesn't eat fish. When I am a mother I will also
dry my daughter's hair at two in the morning when she is limp
from sleeplessness and tears, and I will keep my inglorious self
from her. My mother at my age is unrecognisable in a photograph,
long radish shaped face, gentler than me in a polo shirt,
wet eighties Hong Kong when she was already dating my father.
I think about how I am so easily impressed. How I allowed myself
to give for a boy who only ever looked at me once,
when I was unprepared and naked and a smaller version
of myself. She does not know I know of the years my father
was f***ing white girls in a place far away from her,
my mother whom I envy and know because I too know how
to be unwanted and androgynous, wordless in the way I am now,
in the way she goes on laughing. The ginger tumbles in the pot.
My mother pours her dumplings into it and they bubble
like bodies that have never belonged to us.