

# Turkey Lesson Plan Outline

**Title:** Turkish Protest Poetry

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**Introduction:** The concept is to utilize student knowledge of Turkish history and culture across the curriculum (we have a Global Studies and Turkish language courses), and build on it with background about Turkish protest poetry and how it helped to build momentum toward protest movements through the minds and hearts of Turkish people. This will build from social justice units throughout the year in Language Arts: the Holocaust and WWII through the *Diary of Anne Frank* and *Maus*, Stories of Social Justice through a collection of stories from around the world, looking at gender and class issues through the lens of Shakespeare's plays, and a closer look at Asian immigration and racism in the US through the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* and Angel Island poetry.

This unit can be completed without this prior knowledge, but would be stronger to include more background about WWI and II, the Ottoman Empire, and detail in using imagery, persona, and personification in poetry. Much background can be found on the TCF website. I will attach some lessons on imagery and persona/personification for background purposes.

This lesson will fit in with a culminating Language Arts unit on protest through the written word with a focus on Turkey past and present, where students will choose a creative writing genre they have worked with sometime during their middle school experience: poetry, personal essay, fiction, song lyrics, comic, or one-act play. They will write about a social justice issue they care about and would like to lend their voice in opposition to. This work will be a public performance in some way (from posting on a website to performing at the park).

**Background:** For this lesson, background about the poets/songwriters and the issues of their times are as follows:

## **Nazim Hikmet:**

Nazim Hikmet was born in 1902 in Salonika, Turkey and died in exile in a Russian hospital in 1962. A world renowned poet, playwright and novelist, Nazim brought a fresh style and voice to Turkish poetry. Using simple language, fresh images, and a musical free verse style, spoke the language of his people, especially the poor and marginalized. He was both highly patriotic and a Communist, whose work was so powerful and controversial that still his work is not allowed to be taught in public school and his body, against his dearest wishes to be buried in his homeland, still remains abroad. His poetry proves the power of words to change minds and hearts, and how much one risks to express one's beliefs through the written word.

In the context of his time, and even today, Marxist ideals were and are feared by many, and the Soviet experiment was deeply flawed, although the ideals of equality and a secular state were sound.

There is much to explore here, for students, and a look at Ottoman rule, Ataturk's vision for Turkey, WW I (especially the Treaty of Versailles) and II (the burgeoning of dictatorships in Europe and Asia), and contemporary Turkey (especially in light of Erdogan and recent protests, potential threats to democracy and secularism, and the volatile situations in Syria, Iraq, and Gaza and their effects on Turkey and the world) are fertile ground for continued exploration. For more detail on Nazim Hikmet and the history and culture of Turkey visit the TCF portal.

Regardless of his politics, Nazim was passionate about his work, and about his poems, he stated, "I want to write poems that both talk only about me and address just one other person and call out to millions, I want to write poems that talk of a single apple, of the plowed earth, of the psyche of someone getting out of prison, of the struggle of the masses for a better life, of one man's heartbreaks, I want to write about fearing and fearing death." These ideals, regardless of politics, are what speak to so many, still extremely relevant to this day.

### **Nazim Hikmet's Poems:**

#### **A Sad State Of Freedom**

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by Nazim Hikmet

You waste the attention of your eyes,  
the glittering labour of your hands,  
and knead the dough enough for dozens of loaves  
of which you'll taste not a morsel;  
you are free to slave for others--  
you are free to make the rich richer.  
The moment you're born  
they plant around you  
mills that grind lies  
lies to last you a lifetime.  
You keep thinking in your great freedom  
a finger on your temple  
free to have a free conscience.  
Your head bent as if half-cut from the nape,  
your arms long, hanging,  
your saunter about in your great freedom:  
you're free  
with the freedom of being unemployed.  
You love your country  
as the nearest, most precious thing to you.  
But one day, for example,  
they may endorse it over to America,  
and you, too, with your great freedom--

you have the freedom to become an air-base.  
You may proclaim that one must live  
not as a tool, a number or a link  
but as a human being--  
then at once they handcuff your wrists.  
You are free to be arrested, imprisoned  
and even hanged.  
There's neither an iron, wooden  
nor a tulle curtain  
in your life;  
there's no need to choose freedom:  
you are free.  
But this kind of freedom  
is a sad affair under the stars.

## **Angina Pectoris**

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by Nazim Hikmet

If half my heart is here, doctor,  
the other half is in China  
with the army flowing  
toward the Yellow River.  
And, every morning, doctor,  
every morning at sunrise my heart  
is shot in Greece.  
And every night, doctor,  
when the prisoners are asleep and the infirmary is deserted,  
my heart stops at a run-down old house  
in Istanbul.  
And then after ten years  
all I have to offer my poor people  
is this apple in my hand, doctor,  
one red apple:  
my heart.  
And that, doctor, that is the reason  
for this angina pectoris--  
not nicotine, prison, or arteriosclerosis.  
I look at the night through the bars,  
and despite the weight on my chest  
my heart still beats with the most distant stars.

## Last Will and Testament

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by Nazim Hikmet

Comrades, if I don't live to see the day  
-- I mean, if I die before freedom comes --  
take me away  
and bury me in a village cemetery in Anatolia.  
The worker Osman whom Hassan Bey ordered shot  
can lie on one side of me, and on the other side  
the martyr Aysha, who gave birth in the rye  
and died inside of forty days.  
Tractors and songs can pass below the cemetery --  
in the dawn light, new people, the smell of burnt gasoline,  
fields held in common, water in canals,  
no drought or fear of the police.  
Of course, we won't hear those songs:  
the dead lie stretched out underground  
and rot like black branches,  
deaf, dumb, and blind under the earth.  
But, I sang those songs  
before they were written,  
I smelled the burnt gasoline  
before the blueprints for the tractors were drawn.  
As for my neighbors,  
the worker Osman and the martyr Aysha,  
they felt the great longing while alive,  
maybe without even knowing it.  
Comrades, if I die before that day, I mean  
-- and it's looking more and more likely --  
bury me in a village cemetery in Anatolia,  
and if there's one handy,  
a plane tree could stand at my head,  
I wouldn't need a stone or anything.

For more of his poetry and background of his life, visit the TCF website or [http://www.best-poems.net/nazim\\_hikmet](http://www.best-poems.net/nazim_hikmet).

\*Note: Also, a fine excerpt of the poem "The Epic of Sheik Bedreddin" is in [The Poems of Nazim Hikmet](http://www.powells.com/s?kw=Poems+of+Nazim+Hikmet&class) found here; <http://www.powells.com/s?kw=Poems+of+Nazim+Hikmet&class> = I heartily recommend this book!

## **Gülten Akin:**

Gülten Akin was born in 1933 in Turkey and is Turkey's most distinguished contemporary female poet. She studied law and practiced it, worked for governmental and non-governmental organizations for the betterment of Turkey, and although her early poetry was about nature, love, and family, her more recent work is focused on social justice issues. She felt she wanted to "put into words and writing the already-existing essence and form that exists among the people, and while promoting the poem, promote the improvement of the lives and lifestyles of the people." Her poems have been widely translated and many have been made into songs.

It should be noted, that finding contemporary women poets work in translation was not an easy task, and after trying to research this work through contacts in Turkey, I found that women are gaining a voice, there is much work to be done in promoting women's poetry worldwide. I will post more information and poetry later after exploring contacts given me by TCF. For now, more information on Turkish women's issues can be found at The Mother Child Education Foundation (<http://www.empowerweb.org/global-reach/global-grantee-projects/mother-child-education-foundation-acev/>) and the Foundation for Support of Women's Work (<http://www.learningpartnership.org/fsww>).

### **Gülten Akin Poems:**

\*Find more poems here: <http://cetinbayramoglu-poetry.wordpress.com/2011/10/26/gulden-akin>

## **Stain**

Here we stand at the messiest point of our time

someone should write us, if we don't  
who will

the more silence kept, the duller became  
the fine knife we used  
to carve out raw day

where are they, the flashing miracle  
and the shining magic in every motion

one more day unseen  
one more day passed withering the grass

so we learn it was blind, as if there were  
no alley no passerby  
no one to record the passerby

they said  
lock them up, leave the key in its old place

but the truth is  
it's a shameful thing, as Camus says  
to be happy on your own

voices and other voices, where are the world's voices

the stain invaded the tissue  
saying nothing saying nothing

## Tea

1

The sound of nightingales, of ripening strawberries  
the weak morning tea  
in his hand extended towards me  
the incited ease  
but we got used to living like culprits  
where, oh, where should one hide it

Our souls which he closed we closed tightly  
touched one another (for the first time?)  
flattening out the sea vanished  
in a dream we were, if it weren't for the sound of the boats of fishermen

2

the mountains lilac-colored and dark  
kept approaching and overcame us  
we were lost we were in the lost country  
we touched  
the silence with the wing of a sparrow

we denounced  
the sky, the heavy clouds, the bay  
we denounced that which sank and vanished  
the evening, going past the old voices of the neighbors  
drew us in  
with the taste of yogurt and apple

--Translated by Suat Karantay

**Songwriters:**

I purchased several CD's while in Turkey. I will post information about these songwriters and song lyrics in English after I do more research and have them translated.

**Level:** Grade 8

**Objectives:**

- **Skills-** writing: six traits (ideas, content, organization, voice, word choice, mechanics), critical thinking (making connections 1. From the author's experiences and his/her work, and 2. from the student's own experience and the author's), close reading skills, deepening poetry writing skills particularly using imagery, voice, line breaks, and personification to create a powerful written voice and message.
- **Content-** information about Turkey past and present, the role of women in Turkish society, song lyrics as poetry, the power of poetry in protest.

**Connection to Standards:** I teach at a private school, where we do not go by the state standards. I'm sure there are many connections, easily made by public school teachers.

**Time:** This lesson could vary in length, being completed in as little as two days, if teachers want to limit the context and examples (poems and song lyrics) and use one class day for drafting poems. For a more detailed exploration, especially for those working without the ability to make connections across the curriculum, this could be a weeklong or multi-weeklong exploration. In this case, providing socio-political context of the work could take a week or more, while using the poems as examples of voice. Teaching the poetry writing skills could take two days and the drafting and revising of poems could take another week.

In my case, the poetry skills have been taught in previous units, and much of the context will be taught in previous units and across the curriculum. In this case, I plan to spend two days on this particular lesson and two+ weeks on the "Protest through the Written Word" unit explained above.

**Materials:** For this lesson, the following is needed:

- Handouts (attached)
- Writing journals and writing implements (for drafting)
- Word processors (for revisions)  
\*or you can draft on word processors directly.

**Procedures:** The following is the lesson broken down into steps.

1. Introduce the concept of protest in poetry. Use examples that students might be aware of: <http://musictodiefor.wordpress.com/50-greatest-protest-songs/> Music is a great way to make this hit home to them. We had also finished a unit on slam poetry and many of these were protest oriented. I will reconnect to that unit. Many strong poems can be found on youtube. Def Jam has some great ones (check for language).
2. Introduce Turkey and the specific protest movements you would like to discuss (see background above for sources). Our unit will be a connection across the curriculum with

Globla Studies and Turkish Language courses, so I will build on what they know about the Ottoman Empire, WW I and II, Ataturk, the military coups, and contemporary protest as they affect(ed) my poets, Nazim Hikmet, Guler Akin, and musicians (more to come when I hear from my sources).

3. Read the work aloud. Play the CD tracks.
4. Introduce the assignment:
  - a. Pick one of the poets/songwriters or a person you research from the TCF portal and write a poem in their voice (persona) and write from the point of view of an object in their world observing it.
  - b. Research the background needed for your poem using the TCF portal.
  - c. Follow the checklist and other information found in the packet (attached).
  - d. Conduct at least two peer reviews of your work.
  - e. Include at least two additional drafts of your poem, based on your reviews.
  - f. Save all of the drafts and peer reviews, and include them in a portfolio for grading.
5. I would allow two days for background/research and three days for revision/editing.
6. Share poems in small groups or whole group.
7. This will be a lesson to build toward their individual or partner protest expression as discussed above, but this lesson can stand alone.

**Assessment:** For this lesson, assessment can also vary. I will specifically assess the performance of the entire unit, including the various steps to completion by way of a portfolio, since I have already assessed the writing skills during the 8<sup>th</sup> grade year.

However, if you'd like to assess the poetry skills of using imagery and/or persona/personification in a protest poem, use the attached handouts (rubrics included) to use or make some variation on it.

**Extension Ideas:** Students can do similar work using political cartoons, short fiction, or personal essays. You could teach speechwriting using famous speeches from Ataturk as examples. You could compare and contrast speeches or styles of creative writing from several historical figures from Turkey's past and present.

**Sources:** See the Background section above for source information.

**Handouts:** See attached for the following:

- Poetry Lesson on Imagery
- Poetry Lesson on Persona and Personification
- Peer Review Handout

\*Sample poems for this lesson are in the Background section above.