

TURKEY LESSON PLAN OUTLINE

TITLE

Nazim Hikmet and Turkish Literature in the 20th century

AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION

For two weeks in the summer of 2015, I traveled around Turkey with other American educators on a study tour sponsored by the Turkish Cultural Foundation and World Affairs Councils of America. The purpose of this study tour was to bring back positive images of Turkey – its history, people, and culture. As I reflected on this task, I considered how the complexity and beauty of Turkish culture could be introduced to students through a contemporary poet – Nazim Hikmet. By studying Hikmet and his writing, students will learn more about 20th century Turkey and hear a voice that, once considered radical, is now revered as one of Turkey’s greatest poets.

The essential questions of this lesson: *How does the poet’s use of free verse, imagery, and social realism enable him to address the Turkish culture and social issues in his own time?*

LEVEL

This lesson is most appropriate for secondary school World Literature. In order to complete the essay assignment, students will need the skills of close reading and text-based writing.

OBJECTIVES

Knowledge – Students will:

- Identify examples of free verse, imagery, and social realism in Nazim Hikmet’s poems.
- Identify key events in 20th century Turkish history.
- Discover references to Turkish culture in a 20th century poem.

Attitude – Students will:

- Appreciate the complexity of Turkish culture.
- Appreciate the uniqueness of Nazim Hikmet’s poetry.

Skills – Students will:

- Speak and write with clarity, precision, and confidence about Turkish culture and history.
- Speak and write with clarity, precision, and confidence about Nazim Hikmet’s poetry.

CONNECTIONS TO Pennsylvania English Language Arts STANDARDS

CC.1.3.11–12.B

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author’s implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.

CC.1.3.11–12.G

Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

CC.1.3.11–12.J

Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college- and career-readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

CC.1.4.11–12.A

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately.

CC.1.4.11–12.E

Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of composition.

- Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.
- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms of the discipline in which they are writing.

CC.1.4.11–12.S

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and literary nonfiction.

TIME

This unit is organized for two weeks of classes. The close reading of the text should take place in the first week. The second week of class can be used for re-reading and text-based writing.

MATERIALS

Hikmet, Nâzım, and Randy Blasing. *Poems of Nazim Hikmet* ; Transl. from the Turkish by Randy Blasing & Mutlu Konuk. New York: Persea, 1994.

BACKGROUND ESSAY

For a complete biography, teachers should consult the Introduction to *Poems of Nazim Hikmet*.

Nazim Hikmet lived from 1902 to 1963. Born into Ottoman Turkey, his father served as government official. As a young man, Hikmet joined the Turkish War of Independence and met the iconic founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In the 1920s, Nazim Hikmet visited Russia and took an interest in the Russian Revolution and Marxist Thought. He was imprisoned in the 1930s and 1940s for his political activism and political writing. After being released from prison in 1950, he escape to Russia. Persecuted by the Turkish government during the Cold War, Nazim Hikmet is now revered by the Turkish nation as one of their greatest poets.

Regarding the style of Hikmet's poems, Elizabeth Nolte writes:

"Known as the 'romantic communist,' Hikmet spent years in prison or in exile during which time he composed countless pieces, including the epic poem *Human Landscapes*. While he produced plays, a novel, and a memoir, Hikmet's legacy in world literature is as *Turkey's leading modern poet*. His poetry, which was revolutionary for its **free verse**, **imagery**, and **social realism**, has been translated into numerous languages and still garners a considerable international following" (from "Turkey's Literary Legacy in World Literature" by Elizabeth Nolte)

By studying these poems, students will learn more about these elements of poetry – free verse, imagery, and social realism – as well as learn more about 20th century Turkish history.

PROCEDURES

Student will read the Introduction and ten selected poems by *Poems of Nazim Hikmet* – "About My Poetry," "Regarding Art," "Letter To My Wife," "Istanbul House of Detention," "Since I Was Thrown Inside," "On Living," "It's This Way," "Some Advice To Those Who Will Serve Time In Prison," and "Last Will and Testament." The students are first assigned this reading of the poems for homework. Teachers may choose to select other poems from the collection.

In the next class, the students will be asked to respond to the first two poems with the following question: "What image does Nazim Hikmet use to describe his poetry?" The answer is "a honey pot." Students will discover this example of imagery.

Regarding the second poem, the instructor will ask: "what images are used by Nazim Hikmet to describe art?" and "Does Nazim Hikmet seem to admire high art and high culture?" The students will discover that Hikmet admires "wings made of steel," music played on copper, iron, and wood, "masterly spider webs at the corner of my room." This poem is illustrating social realism, a poetic and artistic movement that emphasizes working-class life.

Once we establish that Hikmet is a poet of ordinary people, the instructor will give a brief lecture on Turkish history and important events in the life of Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963) – life in the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish War of Independence and the person of Ataturk, and the Russian Revolution. These historical factors influenced Hikmet's thinking and writing. The instructor may also share some photos of Istanbul to give students images of Hikmet's country.

After learning of Hikmet's imprisonment in the 1930s and 1940s, students will review "Istanbul House of Detention." The instructor will ask, "How is this poem an example of free verse?"

Finally, after presenting Nazim Hikmet's escape to Russia in 1950, students will discuss "Last Will and Testament" written in 1953.

After reading and discussing these ten poems, students will choose one poem for a literary close reading essay assignment. The first draft of the essay will serve as formative

assessment. Once the instructor provides feedback and further guidance, the students will submit the final copy of their essay for summative assessment, the final grade.

ASSESSMENT

Essay: Literary Close Reading. Poems of Nazim Hikmet

Students must choose a single poem and “close read” it: i.e. describe how the text uses the tools of poetry to create meaning. Students must also consider the social, historical, generic, and biographical aspects of this text.

The main skills this assignment fosters are

- a) coming up with an interpretation of a poem
- b) using specific textual details to support that interpretation
- c) structuring an essay
- d) using vocabulary specific to poetic interpretation (free verse, imagery, social realism)

It is necessary to first establish what the poem “means.” This is more difficult than it sounds and will require not only that one reads the poem several times but that one thinks very carefully about how all of the poem’s elements work together to create this “meaning.” Therefore, the essay’s thesis must make a statement both about the meaning of the poem and the role of poetic forms, Turkish history, and bibliographical aspects of Nazim Hikmet in creating that meaning.

SOURCES

Hikmet, Nâzım, and Randy Blasing. *Poems of Nazim Hikmet* ; Transl. from the Turkish by Randy Blasing & Mutlu Konuk. New York: Persea, 1994.