



CENTER FOR THE ART
OF TRANSLATION

POETRY INSIDE OUT

Program Guide

2026

WELCOME TO POETRY INSIDE OUT!

Dear Educator,

On behalf of the Center for the Art of Translation, welcome to Poetry Inside Out, an innovative language arts curriculum that provides students with essential 21st-century skills. We present to you:

- A cross-cultural literacy program that embraces—and relies upon—the cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms and schools.
- A world literature program that treats great poets as teachers and their work as models.
- A language arts program that builds close reading skills and unlocks creativity.
- A collaborative environment of inquiry, where students gain skills to make evidence-based arguments.

You'll find that Poetry Inside Out is all of this and more.

The translation of poetry may at first seem daunting. “How could my class possibly translate a poem from Danish? How could *I* possibly translate a poem from Danish?” Not to worry. You do not need to be a translator or a poet, nor do you need to possess a mastery of another language, to bring the benefits of Poetry Inside Out to your classroom. Our curriculum materials will serve as your guide, and the Center’s staff, along with a national community of fellow Poetry Inside Out practitioners, will support you. Keep in mind: there’s no such thing as a perfect translation. Because we do not provide translations of the great poems you will rely on—you may read Matsuo Bashō in Japanese, Anna Akhmatova in Russian, David Huerta in Spanish—your students must create their own original translations and defend their choices as they unfold. By embarking on this practice (it will be slow at first, but have patience!), your students will make new discoveries about how language works, and about the full range of expression available to them as readers, writers, speakers, poets, thinkers, and citizens.

Whether you are trying out Poetry Inside Out for the first time or are already deeply familiar with the program, we thank you for devoting your energy and class time to this transformative work. “Transformative work” may sound high-minded, but we believe it wholeheartedly: when Poetry Inside Out is integrated into your classroom, students learn about language and literature, and they see themselves differently. They discover that their experiences and opinions and ideas are valuable, and they find that they can do something of consequence they may never have imagined they could do: translate great poetry into English. Students see each other differently as well, and you may find yourself seeing your students differently, too.

Wishing you a good journey,



Michael Holtmann Executive Director, Center for the Art of Translation

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS POETRY INSIDE OUT?

Poetry Inside Out (PIO) is a language arts curriculum that celebrates classroom diversity and builds literacy skills by teaching students to translate great poetry from around the world. Poetry Inside Out offers students the opportunity to acquaint themselves with masterworks—and to learn them inside and out. It also helps students build a natural appreciation for other people’s skills and experiences.

Why translation? Why poetry? Translation is the closest form of reading, and poetry is the most precise and expressive use of language. Students who participate in Poetry Inside Out come to understand how close reading heightens comprehension, precise writing enhances communication, and attentive listening builds new knowledge. Students acquire these skills by translating poetry written by world-renowned poets. By practicing the art of translation, students become familiar with the building blocks of language and the full range of expression available to them as readers, writers, speakers, poets, thinkers, and citizens.

"Words in a poem, unlike everyday language, have more than one meaning. You need to pay attention to the context in order to find the meaning of the words and the meaning of the poem."

- 6th Grade Poetry Inside Out Participant

Poetry Inside Out bridges cultures through language. Poetry Inside Out is a cross-cultural literacy program that showcases and honors student diversity. In San Francisco, for example, more than 29% of students speak a language other than English at home, and over 80% identify as being a member of an ethnic group other than Caucasian: how can these differences energize a classroom? Drawing on the cultural and linguistic experiences that students bring with them to school every day, Poetry Inside Out generates a dynamic and collaborative learning environment. Students’ translations often reflect their profound responses to language, society, and one another’s personal experiences.

In the words of one participant, Poetry Inside Out puts “ourselves and our hearts on paper.”

At its heart, Poetry Inside Out is about collaboration and inquiry. Poetry Inside Out is built around activities that require and cultivate dialogue, listening, collaboration, and a careful consideration of meaning. In addition to developing highly transferrable skills—implementing Poetry Inside Out can enhance classroom discussions about history, current events, English, and geography, among many other subjects—over time you will find that the program generates a community of inquiry. Students naturally want to know more, discover more, and experiment more, changing the culture of the classroom.

"This is how it happens...when you read some poems...a rainbow comes out of your head...you climb up to the top of the rainbow and slide down into your imagination."

- 4th Grade Poetry Inside Out Participant

POETRY INSIDE OUT: THE CURRICULUM

FUNDAMENTALS

In essence, Poetry Inside Out consists of three fundamental objectives that define the scope of the program. By implementing Poetry Inside Out, students will:

1. **TRANSLATE POETRY.** Again: translation is the closest form of reading. By practicing the art of translation, students come to a deeper understanding of the ways in which language works. Poetry is especially rich to translate because it requires a keen attention to vocabulary, poetic form, syntax, grammar, rhythm, sound, and other nuances of both the source and the target language. Each word in a poem has a relationship to another word, phrase, or stanza. By moving back and forth between one language and another, and by considering the whole poem against its individual words and phrases, the translator builds an original version of the text. Translation makes it evident that meaning is not found only by deciphering individual words, but by unraveling the entire vision of a poem.

“When I translate a poem I look for what the author is trying to tell us, but you have to figure it out. You need to look at all the words and what they mean. It’s like a riddle.”

- 4th Grade Poetry Inside Out Participant

2. **TALK AND LISTEN.** Talking and listening are essential to Poetry Inside Out. By talking and listening students acquire the ability to communicate ideas, positions, perspectives, and knowledge; in the same sense, students listen to learn. This emphasis on talking and listening is the foundation for building meaningful collaborations.
3. **COLLABORATE.** The combination of talking, careful listening, and doing something of consequence—translating a great poem is significant!—creates a positive learning environment that values and supports collaboration. Again, Poetry Inside Out helps students build a natural appreciation for one another’s skills and experiences.

KEY PRACTICES

Poetry Inside Out emphasizes the process rather than the product. We often refer to Poetry Inside Out as a “practice.” With that in mind, we strongly encourage teachers and students to:

1. **READ ALOUD.** Reading poems and translations aloud is empowering. Even when a language is completely unfamiliar, reading it out loud gives a sense of sound, structure, and rhythm. Poets often use words because of how they sound. Students are encouraged to read poems and translations aloud—even and perhaps especially when they are in progress—
—as a whole class and in small groups as often as possible. This is something translators do all the time.
2. **FOCUS ON DEPTH RATHER THAN BREADTH.** Poetry Inside Out encourages a gradual, cumulative approach to learning. Teachers are encouraged to go slow: completing a translation of a single poem may take several class sessions. It is better to go deep, taking all the time needed to understand a word, idea, image, or sense: this is what we mean by “close reading.” Attempting to cover as much material as possible can diminish the process and weaken the outcome.
3. **ENGAGE WITH THE WORK.** Allow for conversations to emerge. Tangents can be explored. This is where rich discussions and discoveries take place. Poets often use words that don’t traditionally go together, or they write to create a mood or effect. Students are encouraged to contribute their own ideas about how to transfer meaning into a new language. This is where Poetry Inside Out’s “productive struggle” takes place: an interpretation requires taking a position, and a translation requires difficult choices to be made. Each student draws upon imagination, existing wisdom, linguistic and cultural knowledge, and personal experience. All experiences are relevant.
4. **PRESENT AND DEFEND NEW WORK.** As students complete their translations, it is especially enriching for it to be shared and made public. Individual or group translations can be read in front of the class, or they can be presented as part of an anthology or multimedia project. The idea is for students to make public what they’ve learned, to gain mastery and apply it. Ideally, students will see themselves as masters of their languages, as poets, as world citizens.
5. **REPEAT!** An essential practice of all art forms is repetition. This is not only important when learning a craft or skill, it is an essential practice for learning in general. Mastering a skill or task requires practice and repetition.

WHAT ACTIVATES THE POWER OF PIO

Commitment to Multilingualism and Translanguaging Pedagogies

Translanguaging is defined as multilingual people recruiting all their linguistic resources, forming an “integrated system”. A belief that bilingual people are not made up of two monolingual systems, nor are languages separate systems inside a learner’s head.

Asset or Resource-Orientation

A commitment to the belief that students always make sense, even if it seems strange or “wrong.” Students possess linguistic, cultural, and intellectual assets that they recruit in meaning-making.

Practitioner Inquiry

An intentional stance of systematic inquiry by teachers using their classrooms as settings to study their practice and students' learning.

Classroom Culture characterized by:

Special Listening:

Special listening is defined as, “More than just listening with one’s ears – that is, taking in what someone else is saying. It means listening with ears, eyes, mind, one’s history, culture, languages, and actively and interactively trying to see “behind” what the person is saying.”

Relational Practices & Storytelling:

Norms, Opening & Closing (e.g., Appreciations), Stories/Storytelling and Connections.

Productive Classroom Discussions

WHAT IS A PRODUCTIVE CLASSROOM DISCUSSION?

- Everyone can hear and understand what is being said.
- Every single student is part of the conversation.
- The conversation is focused, coherent, rigorous, and leads to deep understanding.
- Students are motivated to participate; they feel as if they have a stake in the conversation.
- Conversation is not just for good talkers; everyone has a right and responsibility to contribute.
- Teachers guide students in new ways of talking, reasoning, and collaborating with one another.

TRANSLATION CIRCLES

The following protocol outlines the steps students go through during the process of translating a poem using a Poem Page. Before beginning this process, teachers should prepare by focusing on a number of items:

- Participant structures: During this process students work in groups of four. Time is given to carefully constructing these groups, considering factors such as individual levels of fluency (in both English and LI languages), individual literacy levels, and languages spoken. This last item is considered as it relates to the poems that will be translated, dispersing native speakers of particular languages evenly in the groupings.
- Translate first: Before beginning any translation, the teacher translates the poem first, asking the following questions:
 - Which words, phrases, and elements of this particular poem will be a challenge for my students? How will I address these challenges?
 - Who in my class is, or is familiar with, a native speaker of the language of this poem?
 - What are the specific elements of this poem, poet, or language that I would like to focus on? Do I intend to incorporate them into a larger unit or lesson? If so, how?
 - What did I find particularly interesting about this poem and translation?

Teachers will also complete the, “Reflecting and Finding Meaning” worksheet, and be prepared to contribute to the whole class discussion it will generate.

We encourage teachers to follow this sequence for each poem translated in class.

1. BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH THE POEM

- Students review the Poem Page as a class, identifying the key parts, including the name of the poet, his or her country of origin, the dates he or she lived, the language of the poem, the poetic form, and the poet's biography.
- Volunteers are asked to read the poem aloud to the whole class. Anyone who is willing can read the poem aloud. If possible, teachers start with someone who speaks the language of the poem.
- During this process students are asked to listen to the line breaks and music of the poem identifying what stands out.
- As a class, the poet's biography is read aloud. Students underline or highlight sentences or phrases that jump out as they may be helpful in the translation process.

2. TRANSLATE THE POEM - PHRASE BY PHRASE

- The class is now broken into groups of four. When possible, the spoken language strengths of the group members are balanced.
- Students then begin their translations by working in pairs.
- Students are reminded that sometimes when you translate a poem from one language to another, you need to add small words like the, it, etc. They are encouraged to be on the lookout for where those words might be needed.

3. SHARE AND REVISE - MAKE IT FLOW

- Student pairs come back together as groups of four to share their translations.
- As a group of four, students construct a single translation. This is when they make decisions about whether or not to follow the form, rhyme scheme, and music of the original poem.

4. DEFEND YOUR TRANSLATION - REFLECT AND FIND MEANING

- As a class, students discuss the following:
 - Possible interpretations of the poem.
 - Words or phrases that were particularly difficult to translate, and why.
 - Individual and group translation choices.
 - What of the original poem was lost in the translation process. What was kept? Gained?

POEM PAGES


“Poem Pages” contain the essential materials necessary for translation. Each poem that is part of the Poetry Inside Out curriculum consists of a dedicated set of pages that contain:

- The poem in its original language
- A portrait of the poet or an image related to the poem
- A brief biography of the poet – The information contained in the biography can provide key information into the poems meaning and aid in translation
- A “Translator’s Glossary”
- “Phrase by Phrase” and “Make It Flow” translation workbook pages
- The “Reflecting and Finding the Meaning” page, which offers questions that aid in the deeper exploration of a student’s or the group’s translation
- And a page that offers “Background Information,” general information about the poet, the poem’s original language, and the poem’s form, as well as other details that can provide important context for teachers looking to teach the poem.

Poetry Inside Out Matsuo Bashō

MATSUO BASHŌ
JAPAN (1644–1694)

LANGUAGE: JAPANESE



古池や
Furu ike ya
蛙飛
kawazu
水の水の音
tobikōmu mizu no oto

Matsuo Bashō was born in Japan in 1644. Introduced to poetry at a young age, he became a well-known poet and teacher. He later renounced the social, urban literary circles—choosing instead to wander throughout the country, to gain inspiration for his writing. Traveling alone off the beaten path in medieval Japan was regarded as immensely dangerous, and at first Bashō expected to simply die in the middle of nowhere or be killed by bandits. As his travels continued, however, he met many friends and grew to enjoy the changing scenery and the seasons. Bashō was one of the earliest (some say the first) to write *haiku*—a type of poem comprised of just seventeen syllables. He is internationally appreciated as one of the greatest poets of all time.

Source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matsuo_Bashō

Center for the Art of Translation Poetry Inside Out Based on not copy without

The poem in its original language

The first step in any translation is to read the poem aloud. When possible, both a native speaker of the language and a non-native speaker read the poem aloud.

A portrait of the poet or an image related to the poem

The image gives greater context to the poem by providing a visual cue into the identity and personality of the poet. In the case where there is no known poet or image available, the portrait will be replaced with an image related to the poem itself

A brief biography of the poet

The biography focuses on those elements of the poet's life that relate to the featured poem, thereby aiding in the translation process.

Poetry Inside Out Matsuo Bashō

TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSARY			
CHARACTER	ROMAJI	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
古	furu (adj.)	lived long	old, ancient, venerable
池	ike (n.)	pool	pond, lagoon
蛙	kawazu (n.)	a small web-footed water animal	frog
水	mizu (n.)	liquid of rain	water
音	no (possess.)	letter and symbol that signifies ownership—belonging to	's
音	otoko (n.)	sound of spattered water	splash, ploop, ker plunk
音	tobikomu (v.)	move suddenly downward	flies into, dives, plunges, jumps, leaps
飛び込			
む	ya (interj.)	expressing surprise	Wow! Alert! Pay attention! Look at this!

Center for the Art of Translation Poetry Inside Out Based on not copy without

A “Translator’s Glossary”

Each glossary is comprised of the following three components:

- The word in the originating language (if it is a character-based language, another column will be added with the romanization)
- The definition of the word as it is used in the poem
- A set of possible or suggested synonyms. If students find other words that they feel are better in conveying the intended meaning of the poem they are encouraged to use them.

Used in combination, all three components provide the keys necessary to solve the puzzle that is the translation.

Poetry Inside Out Matsuo Bashō

NAME: DATE:

PHRASE BY PHRASE

Furu ike ya _____

kawazu tobikomu _____

mizu no oto _____

Center for the Art of Translation poetryinsideout released not copy without

“Phrase by Phrase” workbook page

During the first phase of a translation students work in pairs, generating a “phrase by phrase” translation. This is often a quirky version which makes little or no sense. Students are reminded that sometimes when translating a poem from one language to another, they may need to add small words like the, it, etc.

Poetry Inside Out Matsuo Bashō

NAME: DATE:

MAKE IT FLOW

•FORM: Do you want your translation to follow the same form? Will it have the same number of lines and stanzas?
 •SOUND: Which sounds stand out to you in the original? Will your translation sound similar? Is that important to you?
 •SYNTAX: This means the word order. Word order changes across languages so you may need to rearrange words so that the poem “flows” in English. Read your translation aloud. Does it sound natural to you? Read it aloud as a group. What do your group members think?

Remember that you can't possibly capture every aspect of the original language, and you can't avoid adding something in the new language

“Make It Flow” workbook page

In the final phase of translation, groups of four students collaborate, blending their two “phrase by phrase” translations into one final version.

Poetry Inside Out Matsuo Bashō

Reflecting and FINDING THE MEANING

Group Member Names: _____ Date: _____

Pick a scribe for the group, and work together to answer the questions.

What are the best parts of this translation, and why do you think they are good?

What elements of the original poem did you lose in the translation?
What did you manage to keep?

Did you achieve something new with your translation, and if so,
does it make sense in the poem or not?

Center for the Art of Translation Poetry Inside Out Please do not copy without

“Reflecting and Finding the Meaning” workbook page

This page offers questions that aid in the deeper exploration of a student’s or the group’s translation. Time is given to have each group present and defend their respective translations. This can lead to a group deciding to revise their translation. If so, they are given time to do so, presenting and defending their revisions once completed.

Poetry Inside Out Matsuo Bashō

INTERESTING THINGS TO KNOW...

About Matsuo Bashō

- In the seventeenth century, two masters arose who elevated haiku and gave it new popularity. They were Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) and Bashōin Onibusō (1661–1738). Both the imperial government and Shinto religious headquarters called Matsuo Bashō one hundred years after his death because he raised the haiku from a playful game of wits to sublime poetry. He continues to be revered as a saint of poetry in Japan, and is one name from classical Japanese literature that is familiar throughout the world.

Fun Facts about the Country and the Language

- Japanese (日本語) is a language spoken by over 125 million people in Japan and in Japanese immigrant communities. It is a member of the Japonic (or Japanese-Ryukyuan) language family that has a number of proposed relationships with other languages, none of which has gained wide acceptance among historical linguists.
- The Japanese language is written with a combination of three scripts: Chinese characters called *kanji* (漢字) and two syllabic (phonetic) scripts made of modified Chinese characters—*hiragana* (ひらがな or 平仮名) and *katakana* (カタカナ or 片仮名).
- The Latin alphabet, *romaji*, is also often used in modern Japanese, especially for company names and logos, advertising, and for Japanese text entered into a computer. *Rōmaji* numbers are generally used for numbers, but traditional Sino-Japanese numerals are also commonplace.

About *Haiku*

- Haiku* (俳句 haikai verse) is a very short form of Japanese poetry typically characterized by three qualities:
 - The juxtaposition of two images or ideas and a *kiriji* (“cutting word”) between them. This “cutting word” is a kind of verbal punctuation mark that signals the moment of separation and colors the manner in which the juxtaposed elements are related.
 - Seventeen or (syllable sounds, also known as *morae*), in three phrases of 5, 7, and 5 or respectively. Any one of the three phrases may end with the *kiriji*.
 - A *kigo* (seasonal reference), usually drawn from a *saijū*, a list of words that are divided into the four seasons and the new year, as well as categories that include the heavens, the earth, humanity, animals, and plants.

Sources:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matsuo_Bashō
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_language
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haiku>

Center for the Art of Translation Poetry Inside Out Please do not copy without permission.

“Background Information” page

This page accompanies some poems. It provides general information about the poet, the poem’s original language, and the poem’s form, as well as other details that can provide important context for teachers looking to teach the poem. It is intended as supplemental material, provided to the teacher to augment the lesson. It should not be handed out to students.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR THE ART OF TRANSLATION



The Center for the Art of Translation (CAT) is a San Francisco-based nonprofit that champions literary translation and the translators who bring underrepresented global writers to English-language readers. CAT builds a vibrant cross-cultural community through its award-winning publisher Two Lines Press, dynamic events that connect readers and translators, and the educational program Poetry Inside Out, which brings poetry translation into classrooms.

For more information about the Center for the Art of Translation's education program, visit catranslation.org/education/.