

The Iceberg in the Classroom: A Lesson Framework for Teaching Language, Culture, and Poetry

Aida McLeod

This article is in four sections. It begins with a consideration of culture's relation to language. This leads to an outline of a lesson framework with steps for revealing the hidden cultural meanings to be found in a poem. Next comes a practical section with two examples illustrating how to apply the lesson framework to a suitable poem. The article concludes with suggestions for how to choose poems for your "language, culture, and poetry" lessons.

CULTURE'S RELATION TO LANGUAGE

Are you conscious of your culture? Are you conscious of other cultures? What about your students: how much of the culture (or cultures, plural) behind the English language (their object of study) do they know? How much of it can they comprehend in listening and reading? How much of it can they actively deploy in speaking and writing?

More to the point: how much of the cultural substrate would they *really* need to know, and be able to use, in order to function successfully in an Anglophone environment? Your answer to this question will determine how you frame your lessons.

Cultural competence comes in both passive and active forms. Passive cultural knowledge

means that the learner is able to recognize and understand cultural backgrounds. Active cultural knowledge means the learner is able to meaningfully quote and use at least *some* cultural references in everyday conversation and professional discourse, both oral and written.

My own answer to the above question ("How much do they need?") is that it varies. There is a spectrum, a continuum, stretching from zero cultural knowledge (both passive and active) to full proficiency in "using" the culture. The way you frame your lessons—their objectives, the relevant resources, the steps and stages and "moves," the tasks, and the feedback—is necessarily defined by where on the spectrum your students are coming from (their starting level of proficiency) and by where on the spectrum you want to take them (the target level of proficiency).

Of course, no one ever achieves full proficiency in comprehending and "using" a culture, be it their own or someone else's. This is partly because any culture at any particular time is far too vast for any individual consciousness to grasp in its entirety. It is also partly because the cultures that are the bedrock of the Anglophone world (for instance) are not static: they are in constant flux and unpredictable evolution.

The cultural bedrock is not like solid rock but more like a slow-flowing stream of molten lava. It moves and changes, depositing, through time, stratum upon stratum of sedimented material that not even a lifetime of study could penetrate. An English teacher who has studied a lot and who reads a lot might still “know” only 0.01 percent of Anglophone culture. They might be able to quote bits of Shakespeare plays but know little about Chaucer’s wit or the names of characters in Dickens or the themes of free will, disobedience to law, and redemption in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

Furthermore, the explosive impact of accelerating sociotechnical change makes it impossible to keep up with contemporary cultural attitudes, beliefs, and values. Once upon a time, scholars dreamed of corralling the whole culture into a tangible set of canonical works: the 51-volume *Harvard Classics* project comes to mind, as does the Britannica *Great Books of the Western World* in 54 volumes. These efforts, though worthy and well-intentioned, were always quixotic. Today, we as teachers do not need to worry about embracing the totality, but we do need to take some of the parts into account.

We have to abandon hopes of teaching the whole cultural package and focus instead on judiciously picking and choosing a limited set of bits and pieces. It means realizing we are free to practice synecdoche (taking the part for the whole) but without having to assume or claim that our chosen part sums up the whole. The microcosm of our cultural selection can never truly reflect the structure of the whole culture as macrocosm since culture is, anyway, a great collection of raw material with no definite structure. However, if we can help students to grasp even a small grain or gem or nugget of the

culture, via a poetry analysis lesson, we will have achieved something worthwhile.

Language and culture are inseparable: this is surely a truism. As stated by the authors of the OECD’s 2012 book *Languages in a Global World: Learning for Better Cultural Understanding*, “Since culture and language are inextricably intertwined, learning a language necessitates familiarising oneself with a culture” (Della Chiesa *et al.* 2012, 26). However, as Bryant (2017) points out, culture is an iceberg: “About 90 percent of the iceberg is below the water. The same idea relates to culture.”

This echoes the Iceberg Model of Culture proposed in 1976 by Edward T. Hall, the pioneer of intercultural communication (ICC) studies, and also an earlier “iceberg model” by Herman (1970), although Herman was referring more to the culture of organizations than to the cultures of whole peoples. In Figure 1 for reference is Hall’s Iceberg Model. Note that this diagram is not in Hall’s book, but later scholars have drawn it up based on his text.

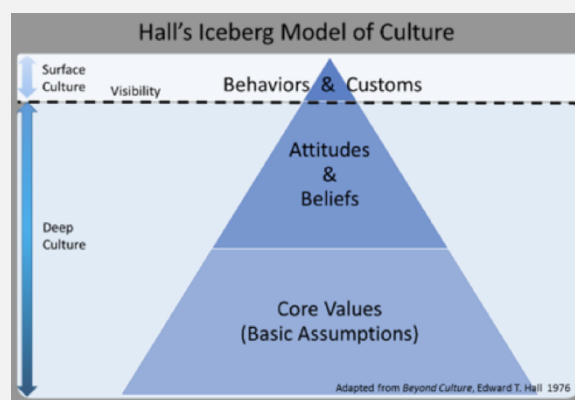


Figure 1. A representation of Hall's (1976) Iceberg Model of Culture

Hall was strongly influenced by Freud’s ideas, and his [Hall’s] model of culture

mirrors Freud's theory of the structure of the mind in three levels: the conscious, the pre-conscious, and the unconscious, which Freud set out at the end of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1900) and further elaborated in *The Unconscious* (Freud 1915). Just as most of the human mind is unconscious (in Freud's theory), so most of culture is unconscious (according to Hall's model). Hall's work is nearly 50 years old, and other scholars have developed more elaborate schemas and models to explain the workings of human cultures (see Kluckhohn and Strodbeck 1961; Rokeach 1979; Schwartz 1992; Hills 2002), but for our purposes as language teachers, Hall's iceberg model is conveniently simple to apply.

WHY USE A POEM?

A poem is in many ways better than a novel or even a short story for our purpose, which is the elucidation of cultural connections in English language lessons. That is because many poems are bite-sized yet rich in meaning and reference and implicit cultural significance. To put it succinctly: a poem is a little iceberg.

This article goes on to present two worked examples to illustrate a simple iceberg framework for English lessons that use the visible part—the words—of a source text to make at least *part* of the underlying cultural invisibles visible; in other words, to let students dive under the surface and glimpse *some of* what lies beneath.

The iceberg method is not exactly like trying to psychoanalyse the text as a “symptom” of its underlying culture, but it does owe something to the ideas of Freud and the post-Freudian lineage. It encourages the learner to make inferences from the silences of the text, its structured absences, what it leaves unsaid, and its points of self-

contradiction and strategic or open ambiguity. It looks for the poem's unconscious, the cultural meanings and implications that are not presented on the surface as clear literal statements.

The iceberg method does not focus on teaching the students a repertoire of poetic concepts and literary terms like rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, and so on. We are not teaching an English literature course as in a university English Department, where studying the text is an end in itself. Our process is to use the text as a means to an end: to help students strengthen and deepen their language skills in English by connecting these explicitly—consciously—to the cultural dimension.

THE ICEBERG LESSON FRAMEWORK AND TEACHING METHOD

The iceberg lesson framework takes the form of a structured series of questions—what the French philosophers call a “problematic.” It uses these questions to animate a Socratic style discussion in the classroom.

The learning objective of the iceberg lesson is intercultural comprehension and communication: i.e., to bring students first to perceive and then to discuss the submerged part of the iceberg. This work is intercultural in that it brings the students to engage closely with a cultural context that is necessarily foreign to their own. Note the difference between “multicultural” and “intercultural.” “Multicultural” relates to varied cultural groups existing independently of one another, whereas “intercultural” refers to something occurring between different cultures (see Schriefer 2016).

For reference, Figure 2 shows Hall's model again, simplified to focus on a literary text as the visible cultural form.

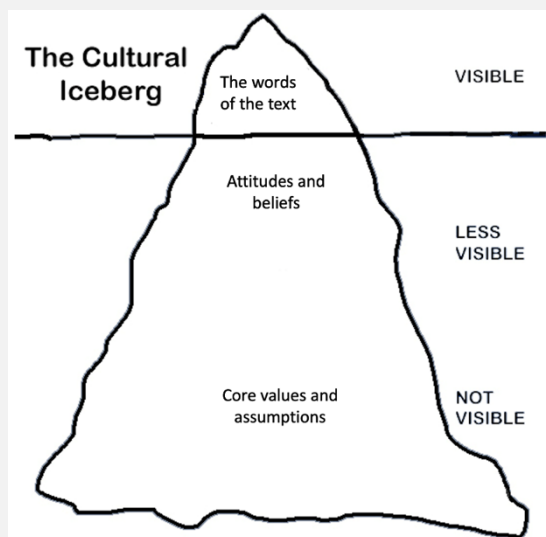


Figure 2. Hall's (1976) model, simplified to focus on a literary text

Step 1: As a preliminary step, reflect on the meaning of "culture"

Cue question: *What is culture?*

Before the lesson sequence begins, you would hand out for reading, as homework, a one-page summary of theories and definitions of culture, a questionnaire to elicit student views on what can be meant by this term, as well as what should be included within or excluded from its parameters. For example, for historical depth, you could start with Sir Edward Burnett Tylor's (1871) definition below. (There are many other definitions, easy to find and summarize in a handout.)

Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a

member of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action. (Tylor 1871, 1)

For a more advanced and enterprising student group, the following would be an appropriate homework task. Ask each student to research (for example) five definitions or concepts of culture and present them to the class with comments. This is a great opportunity for fostering critical thinking towards related theories and concepts. For instance, you could nudge students to explain and question their own culture: encourage them to see how the grand narratives about culture neglect the reality of cultural fragmentation and the importance of subcultures, which often override the dominant culture of a country.

Step 2: Analyse the visible

Cue question: *Look at the text: What do you see here?*

Hand out the selected poem text a day or two in advance of the class, including written instructions for preparatory reading and research.

This second step corresponds to Hall's first zone, the cultural makeup that is visible, with objects and items directly referred to.

Step 3: Deduce or infer implicit cultural beliefs

Cue question: *What words, lines, or references do you see in the poem that implicitly or indirectly reveal a cultural attitude or belief?*

This addresses Hall's second zone, cultural makeup that is not visible on the surface but can rise to consciousness. These are cultural

beliefs that are somewhere not too far beneath the surface, beneath Hall's waterline of invisibility but retrievable—corresponding to Freud's notion of the pre-conscious.

Step 4: Deduce or infer the hidden cultural assumptions

Cue question: *What does the text take for granted, assuming it without mentioning it or questioning it?*

This addresses Hall's third zone, cultural makeup that is deeper beneath the surface, beneath the waterline of invisibility, and not easily retrievable—requiring analysis—corresponding to Freud's notion of the unconscious.

Step 5: Pull the threads together

Cue question: *What conclusions about the cultural unconscious of the text can we agree on?*

Example: “The Crane Is My Neighbour” (1938) by John Shaw Neilson (1872–1942)

This first example sketches out a potential iceberg lesson on a text with plain vocabulary but reasonable cultural complexity.

1. The bird is my neighbour, a whimsical fellow and dim;
2. There is in the lake a nobility falling on him.
3. The bird is a noble, he turns to the sky for a theme,
4. And the ripples are thoughts coming out to the edge of a dream.
5. The bird is both ancient and excellent, sober and wise,
6. But he never could spend all the love that is sent for his eyes.

7. He bleats no instruction, he is not an arrogant drummer;
8. His gown is simplicity—blue as the smoke of the summer.
9. How patient he is as he puts out his wings for the blue!
10. His eyes are as old as the twilight, and calm as the dew.
11. The bird is my neighbour, he leaves not a claim for a sigh,
12. He moves as the guest of the sunlight—he roams in the sky.
13. The bird is a noble, he turns to the sky for a theme,
14. And the ripples are thoughts coming out to the edge of a dream.

→ For Step 1, “What is culture?”

In discussion of the homework question and the concepts of culture set out in the handout, students become aware of the dimensions of culture: general and individual. The horizontal dimension is the substrate, the general set of cultural values, beliefs, and rituals. The vertical dimension is the individual poet's intervention, the point of his insertion of himself into the horizontal axis, his position of affirmation or contention, contradiction, and contestation—often unconscious.

→ For Step 2, the visible

Class discussion of the “Crane” poem might run as follows.

Who is speaking here? A person who lives beside a lake. We are not given any direct information about the speaker, though there are some clues: there is a certain amount that we can deduce, reading between the lines. For instance, he seems to be “a total loner” because he says, “The bird is my neighbour,” as if he has only this one

neighbor: and if the crane is his only neighbor, it means he does not have any fellow humans nearby.

Speaking to whom? To himself—but knowing that others are listening. It seems that he wants us—the readers, these “others”—to understand something special and non-obvious about the bird. Why else would he write this poem? He wants us to value and appreciate the crane.

Speaking about what? Well, it is all about describing a bird. The bird is a loner as well: it has no mate or partner, no other creature is mentioned. In the world of this text, it is only the two of them, the man and the crane. He has observed this wild creature, and he puts a lot of meanings onto its appearance and behavior. He seems to want to build it up into some sort of paragon or symbol of moral virtue, as these examples suggest: Line 3: “The bird is a noble”; Line 2: “a nobility falling on him”; Line 5: “ancient and excellent, sober and wise.”

→ For Step 3, the implicit

Student discussion might run as follows.

In Line 1, the word “fellow” is unusual and revealing. Why call a bird a “fellow”? It implies familiarity: it says the bird is no stranger and is not the “other” to the man because it is billed as his “fellow.” They are the same as each other, or at least similar enough, as fellow creatures. This humanises the bird, and maybe it also “birdifies” the man, who admires the “noble” qualities of the crane as if it reflects his own qualities. There is here an unspoken attitude of humility—deference—towards the Wild, the Natural. But this attitude is not too far below the threshold of visibility: it can easily rise and be perceived on the surface of the

text without too much interpretive straining. The bird is the mirror of the man.

So, the implicit cultural belief here is the unity, the oneness, of people and nature.

→ For Step 4, the hidden

Class discussion might run as follows.

Something deeper is going on here, something that the poet does not know about or address, a deeper value or anti-value, an obscure cultural assumption that actually contradicts the surface meaning. It is the assumption, familiar in many cultures, that humans are outside of nature, at a distance from it, not really part of it, not fully “natural.” We are different from all natural beings; we don’t belong. How do we establish this from the text?

The poem is constructed in such a way that its deep (unconscious) meaning undermines its surface and subsurface (visible and less visible) meanings. To judge by all the meanings to be found in Step 2 and Step 3, the man is at one with the bird, asserting and affirming the unity of the Human and the Natural. Fine. But then, if we look closer and ask the right question, we notice a snag in this nice scene. What is the secret underlying relation between the man and the bird?

It is an asymmetric relation. In all 14 lines, the man is looking at the bird. We are never told that the bird (representing Nature) looks at the man. It is a one-way gaze, not reciprocated. For all his wish, and overt assertion, that the Human be part of Nature, the poet simultaneously reveals his subliminal (unconscious) knowledge that he is an outsider, watching at a distance a nature-creature who is not watching him

back. The crane does not know or care about the man: the man is irrelevant to him.

This is hinted at in Line 11. The crane “leaves not a claim for a sigh.” This means that the bird does not ask the human to feel any emotion about him. He never asked the man to notice him, or write a poem about him, because he does not need any of that. For the man to be writing the poem at all is his vain attempt at getting close to or back inside Nature, and it even increases his exclusion and alienation since birds (symbolic of Nature) do not write poems. It all points to the poem’s sad hidden truth: Nature is totally indifferent to Man.

→ **For Step 5, the conclusion—
finding a consensus**

Through this text, students can explore the ambiguous positioning of Nature in the surface consciousness and in the submerged unconscious of Australian general culture, wherein Nature is at the same time the dangerous enemy (with snakes, crocodiles, spiders, sharks, dingoes, floods, droughts, bushfires, feral camels and pigs and buffalo, etc.), but also a fervently desired ideal destination, the dream of getting away from it all, away from the “fetid air and gritty of the dirty dusty city,” iconically disparaged by Banjo Paterson in his “Clancy of the Overflow,” a poem that every Australian child learns in school.

**Example: “Postcard” by Beatrice
Garland (1938)**
(from *The Invention of Fireworks*, 2013).

1. I saw a muskrat nose across a pond
2. nudging the reeds apart without a sound.
3. I saw a spider touched by a note of sun
4. shake out its net, bouncing it up and down.

5. I saw a black snake slipping off the road;
6. in the doorway, pulsing, a tiny golden toad.
7. I saw a white owl, baffled by the light
8. bank silently and sheer off out of sight.
9. These things took place the day the summer went.
10. I noted them down, not knowing what they meant
11. or if anything at all had really happened.
12. Only a state of mind in which eyes, opened
13. by solitude, could see the lives that other
14. creatures made, busy and unperturbed by love
15. or hate. I pull the shutters inward, drop the bar
16. but wind and dark still forage at my door.

→ **For Step 1, the same procedure as
for “The Crane Is My Neighbour”
(above)**

→ **For Step 2, the visible**

(Note: *In what follows, I refer for convenience to a certain Mr. X.*)

In Lines 1 through 8, the poetic voice—the speaker—enumerates the creatures (four animals and one bird) that she has observed. In Line 9, we are told that all five sightings happened on the same day: the last day of summer. We are then told that she “noted them down,” likely in written notes because a mental note would not be noted “down”—just “noted.” We are given a hint at her reason for doing this: it is because she does not understand what they (the sightings) meant, so taking notes about them would be a way to capture and record them for later analysis. Nevertheless, she does immediately offer one possible interpretation (Lines 12–

15): that she only noticed these five creatures because her eyes were “opened by solitude”: in other words, being alone lets her see them clearly and understand how they live (“busy and unperturbed by love/or hate”). The poem ends with the speaker closing up the house (Line 15) and yet remaining aware of what’s going on outside: Line 16, “wind and dark.”

→ For Step 3, the implicit

Let’s start with the implications of the title. Why “Postcard”?

A postcard is a particular and special form of communication. It is sent to someone, almost always a specific individual. It has a picture on one side and space on the back for writing a message, necessarily a brief text because the card is not large (the standard size is 4 inches by 6 inches, i.e., 102 by 152 mm).

For our discussion, a postcard has two other relevant characteristics. It presupposes a mail collection and delivery service, so that implies the speaker’s inclusion in a civilization; that is, her house and the animals she sees are not located in some faraway wilderness remote from human society. This means that her isolation and solitude—a major theme in the poem—are not the external exclusion of an exile or a recluse in a cave on a mountaintop. Her aloneness is the solitude *within* human society, not outside it.

Secondly, and this is key, a postcard is open: its contents are not hidden inside an envelope. The message, the picture, the addressee’s name and address, the sender’s signature, possibly a return address, a postmark indicating the place it was sent from, and the date—all this is out in the

open for anyone to see. And yet it is (ostensibly) meant for just one person.

Since anyone writing and sending a postcard would know all this, it is clear that the sender’s intention (in the case of a postcard) is complex. She wants Mr. X (the addressee) to get the message, but she also wants others (potentially *everyone* else) to see *that* she wrote to him and also to see *what* she wrote to him. Furthermore, she wants Mr. X to know that these (unnamed) others *could have seen* the message and all its framing details. Whether or not anyone actually saw the postcard is immaterial. The speaker is marshalling her social group’s forces to exert an indirect subtle psychological pressure on her Mr. X, who is the unmentioned (unconscious) addressee of the postcard.

The poem “Postcard” fits the description. Just like a postcard, it has a picture (actually five pictures all linked together in Lines 1–8). It has a message about being alone, about love and hate and the way they cause “perturbation” of life, and about the coming of winter (possibly a symbolic, relationship-related, bleak and chilly emotional winter), with darkness and wind gusts. It also shares the defining feature of a postcard: it is open, published in a poetry book, for all the world to see.

But now we need to apply a reverse logic to catch the full implication of the title and the text. The logic goes like this: given that this poem is named and identified as a postcard, we have to deduce that it was intended for one particular addressee, as postcards (typically) are. This addressee is not named: but you may be sure he will know who he is when he reads the poem. Hello, Mr. X!

→ For Step 4, the hidden

The speaker has chosen to foreground five examples of creature-lives: the muskrat, the spider, the snake, the toad, and the owl. What do they have in common? All are busy and active, making their lives; all are doing something, even the little toad who is merely “pulsing.” And all are doing it silently. No mess, no fuss, no drama!

We could argue all day about the symbolism here. For example, does the black snake slipping off the road symbolize a mortal danger that goes away and leaves a safe road for the speaker to escape along? Does the white owl represent the speaker’s bafflement and her wish to spread her wings metaphorically and escape? Does the muskrat stand for her desire to push obstacles aside and move smoothly away?

But all such readings miss the point. The real point is that, taken collectively, all five creatures are getting on with “making their lives,” in contrast to the speaker who is just standing and looking on. She feels paralyzed, immobilized, frozen, and disconnected. This is, first of all, because she is baffled and can’t understand what these creatures of Nature mean, can’t understand what (“if anything at all”) “had really happened” (Lines 10–11). Secondly, it is because she also feels disconnected from other humans, stuck in social solitude.

The speaker at first presents as baffled and puzzled. She is thinking, “What does it all mean?” and “Did I really see these sights?” But unconsciously she identifies with the five creatures (in the unconscious psychological identification move that Freud calls *Objektbesetzung*—“cathexis,” in English, in the Strachey translation), and she has a hidden (occulted, unexpressed, repressed)

desire to be like them, busy and active and (crucially) “unperturbed by love or hate.”

The inference is that the speaker does indeed feel perturbed in her life-building precisely by love and hate, and she would like to be free of love and hate, like the five animals. So, what’s stopping her?

The answer seems to be her ambivalence towards being alone. The speaker, for instance, both loves and hates her solitude at the same time. Her solitude is what enabled her to see clearly the lives of the five animals, so it is good; and we notice that the five animals are each seen alone as well, which reinforces her identification with them. It is as if they are showing her that you can be alone and yet be getting on with building your life.

However, her solitude frightens her as well. In Line 15, she affirms her aloneness and inwardness. She sets up barricades against the world outside, which would include any love relationship: “I pull the shutters inward, drop the bar.” And yet it is not good enough: she does not feel safe alone in her shuttered house because the threatening predatory forces (represented by wind and darkness) have not stopped “foraging” outside—and actually they are right there at her very door, waiting to eat her, if she dares to venture out.

→ For Step 5, the conclusion

The “Postcard” poem, like the Shaw Neilson poem, is constructed in such a way that its deep (unconscious) meaning undermines its surface and subsurface (visible and less visible) meanings. To judge by all the meanings to be found in Step 2 and Step 3, the speaker validates the state of being alone and the clarity of vision it gives her. She appears to be resolved to hide in her closed-

up house, where she finds shelter against the winds of change and disturbance, against the darkness of the Unknown.

A careful reader will be suspicious of this surface meaning because it is laid on a bit too thickly in the poem, with the eight lines of imagery (half the poem!) of the five animals being all alone, yet these animals are building their lives very well because their solitude, the mirror of her own aloneness, keeps them unperturbed by human emotions. And right at the end, we get a small but clinching hint of doubt: the speaker is not OK alone after all, no matter how much she might have wished to remain so. Her solitude frightens her. She wants company, and she may even be willing to pay the price for it (a price denominated in units of love and hate and a dose of the consequent perturbation).

The text on its surface has us thinking that the “pure” way the animals live is the right or best way for our human speaker to live, too; however, the unconscious message—detectable but never made explicit—is that although our speaker does have the same solitude as them, unlike them she still cannot function and cannot get on with making her life. So, what does she do? *She sends a postcard.*

Finally, back to our aim of using the poem to explain something about the underlying (or submerged) culture on which the text rests. In that regard, this poem is useful because it replicates in miniature a major cultural complex, present at the back of all Anglophone cultures: the relation of the Human to Nature. The Human instance has a deep unconscious desire (unconscious because repressed) for oneness with the natural world. What a relief that would surely be, and what a saving of “affect”

(psychic energy in Freud’s terminology): no more need for posing and posturing as superior; no more need to struggle to dominate, enslave, and harness Nature. The “Postcard” poem articulates this strongly. At the same time, and practically in the same breath, it articulates the human refusal of absorption into Nature. It says, under its breath, “We cannot be like them, the Animals, though our unconscious wish to do so is strong. We need the mess of relationships, love and hate, even though they cloud the clarity of our perception.”

Thus the “Postcard” poem captures the fundamental tension between the Human and the Natural, which has been familiar since the Romantic poets and is still going strong. The poem also enacts another important fundamental tension that we can see in a culture’s internal discourse: i.e., the tension between the desire to be alone and the desire to be not-alone. This struggle between the Individual Life and its absorption into the Collective is the constant hallmark of the culture since the Middle Ages. The speaker in Beatrice Garland’s poem perfectly embodies and illustrates this deep unconscious cultural double bind (see O’Sullivan 2024).

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHOOSING POEMS

In principle, any poem rests upon or engages with its cultural substrate, so just about any poem could be used. It should be possible to prompt your students to deduce or infer the subsurface beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions underlying any poetic text. However, realistically, there are limits.

There are simple, approachable poems, and there are difficult, complex poems. Your lesson may not work if the chosen text is too obscure. For example, do not use excerpts

from Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos*: they do enact a cascade or tsunami of cultural reference, but your students will surely struggle with it and soon give up.

On the other hand, your students may welcome and relish a challenge (as long as they trust you to support them with hints and tips as they work on their group discussion). A good choice for an advanced group would be the much-loved poem "The Thought-Fox" by Ted Hughes. It has cultural depth and high complexity, but great clarity as well, so it is approachable. It should stimulate discussion about the relevance of subcultures to the totality of a culture.

Among the shorter poems by Dana Gioia, you will find many that are suitable for an iceberg framework lesson; although they are simple on the surface, they have depths that harbour a mystery, something culturally elusive (i.e., repressed from the surface) that invites iceberg analysis. The *Hudson Review* provides the text of three eminently usable texts, with recorded readings by the poet: "Beware of Things in Duplicate," "Unsaid," and "The Stars Now Rearrange Themselves" (see the link in References).

A good idea is to let the students choose the poem for cultural analysis. They may not be familiar with much poetry, but you can always stimulate them to go looking and come back with a poem that resonates with them. There are myriad poetry sites on the internet that you can point them to. The lesson may well run better, with better student engagement and less reluctance, if the study text has been decided not by the teacher but by a student.

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Bio:

Aida Koçi McLeod taught at the South East European University (Tetovë, Macedonia) for 14 years and moved to Australia a few years ago. She is an independent researcher and curriculum adviser in Queensland.