

College Guild
PO Box 6448 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Poetry Club

~ The Poetry of Pablo Neruda ~

Unit 7 of 8

There is no insurmountable solitude. All paths lead to the same goal: to convey to others what we are. And we must pass through solitude and difficulty, isolation and silence in order to reach forth to the enchanted place where we can dance our clumsy dance and sing our sorrowful song – but in this dance or in this song there are fulfilled the most ancient rites of our conscience in the awareness of being human and of believing in a common destiny.

- Pablo Neruda

Pablo Neruda (born Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto, 1904-1973) was a Chilean poet and diplomat who wrote much of his work during a tense period in Latin American history. He is primarily remembered for his beautiful love poems, but he also penned many political writings and other forms of prose. Neruda originally wrote his works in Spanish, and they have since been translated into countless other languages. Gabriel García Márquez, another Latin American writer, went so far as to call Neruda “the greatest poet of the 20th century in any language.” Neruda’s poetry and other writings have greatly influenced literature and pop culture around the world, as they inspire beauty, hope, and the courage to speak one’s mind no matter the obstacles.

“Pablo Neruda” is the pen name, or **pseudonym**, that this poet chose for himself. Authors sometimes choose to publish their works under pseudonyms if their work is controversial or seen as potentially dangerous by those in power. Neruda originally chose to publish with this name because his radical political writings might have angered the Chilean government, but he later had it legally changed when he escaped his home country.

1. If you were to choose a pseudonym to publish your work under, what would it be, and why?

As mentioned above, all of Neruda’s works have been translated into other languages so they can be read around the world.

2. Do you think such translation makes a poem better or worse, and why? What are some issues that could arise in moving from one language to another?

3. *I Do Not Love You Except Because I Love You* is one of Neruda’s most famous love poems. What do you notice about its contrasts of light and dark, heat and cold?

I DO NOT LOVE YOU EXCEPT BECAUSE I LOVE YOU

*I do not love you except because I love you;
I go from loving to not loving you,
From waiting to not waiting for you
My heart moves from cold to fire.*

*I do not love you except because I love you;
I go from loving to not loving you,
From waiting to not waiting for you
My heart moves from cold to fire.*

*I love you only because it's you the one I love;
I hate you deeply, and hating you
Bend to you, and the measure of my changing love
for you
Is that I do not see you but love you blindly.*

*Maybe January light will consume
My heart with its cruel
Ray, stealing my key to true calm.*

*In this part of the story I am the one who
Dies, the only one, and I will die of love because I
love you,
Because I love you, Love, in fire and blood.*

4. What role do contradictions play in this poem, and what do they contribute to its larger message?

5. Try writing your own love poem, in whichever style you choose.

The Dead Woman appears as though it could be another love poem, but it may have more layers than that if you read it more closely.

THE DEAD WOMAN

*If suddenly you do not exist,
if suddenly you no longer live,
I shall live on.*

*I do not dare,
I do not dare to write it,
if you die.*

I shall live on.

*For where a man has no voice,
there, my voice.*

*Where blacks are beaten,
I cannot be dead.
When my brothers go to prison
I shall go with them.*

*When victory,
not my victory,
but the great victory comes,
even though I am mute I must speak;
I shall see it come even
though I am blind.*

*No, forgive me.
If you no longer live,
if you, beloved, my love,
if you have died,
all the leaves will fall in my breast,
it will rain on my soul night and day,
the snow will burn my heart,
I shall walk with frost and fire and death and
snow,
my feet will want to walk to where you are
sleeping, but
I shall stay alive,
because above all things
you wanted me indomitable,
and, my love, because you know that I am not
only a man
but all mankind.*

6. In what ways is this poem political? Is it a protest?
7. Write your own protest poem about a subject that you're passionate about.

Neruda often chose to write in green ink, which was "his personal symbol for desire and hope."

8. What little things do you do to make yourself comfortable and inspired when you prepare to write?
9. What do you feel makes your style unique, symbolic, powerful?

On the next page are two examples of **sonnets**. Sonnets come in many forms, but the most traditional ones contain 14 lines and are written in **iambic pentameter**, which means there are 10 syllables per line with the emphasis, or downbeat, on the even syllables. On the left is a traditional sonnet by (of course) Shakespeare. On the right is Neruda's sonnet, *Sonnet XVII*.

SONNET XVIII by William Shakespeare

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
 Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
 When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
 So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

SONNET XVII by Pablo Neruda

*I do not love you as if you were salt-rose, or
 topaz,
 or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off.
 I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,
 in secret, between the shadow and the soul.*

*I love you as the plant that never blooms
 but carries in itself the light of hidden flowers;
 thanks to your love a certain solid fragrance,
 risen from the earth, lives darkly in my body.*

*I love you without knowing how, or when, or
 from where.*

*I love you straightforwardly, without
 complexities or pride;
 so I love you because I know no other way*

*than this: where I does not exist, nor you,
 so close that your hand on my chest is my hand,
 so close that your eyes close as I fall asleep.*

10. What does Neruda's sonnet have in common with Shakespeare's sonnet – in terms of form, rhyme scheme, subject matter – and what has it altered?

11. Why might Neruda have changed up the style?

One of Neruda's most famous lines is in this couplet:

*I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,
 in secret, between the shadow and the soul.*

12. Take the second part of the second line – “between the shadow and the soul” - and use it in a new poem of your own. It can be a sonnet or not – your choice!

The poem on the next page is an example of an **ode**, which is a type of poem used to praise something or someone. In this piece, Neruda writes an ode to “hope,” which is a little abstract, but he also wrote odes to socks, cats, and other every day, concrete things.

ODE TO HOPE

*Oceanic dawn
at the center
of my life,
waves like grapes,
the sky's solitude,
you fill me
and flood
the complete sea,
the undiminished sky,
tempo
and space,
sea foam's white
battalions,
the orange earth,
the sun's
fiery waist
in agony,
so many
gifts and talents,
birds soaring into their dreams,
and the sea, the sea,
suspended
aroma,
chorus of rich, resonant salt,
and meanwhile,
we men,
touch the water,
struggling,
and hoping,
we touch the sea,
hoping.*

13. Look around the room you're in, and write an ode to something little, something simple, that makes you feel a powerful emotion.

In the next poem and in others such as *Your Feet*, Neruda employs a technique called **synecdoche**, in which a part of something – usually of the body – is used to represent a larger whole.

YOUR LAUGHTER

*Take bread away from me, if you wish,
take air away, but
do not take from me your laughter.*

*Do not take away the rose,
the lance flower that you pluck,
the water that suddenly
bursts forth in joy,
the sudden wave
of silver born in you.*

*My struggle is harsh and I come back
with eyes tired
at times from having seen
the unchanging earth,
but when your laughter enters
it rises to the sky seeking me
and it opens for me all
the doors of life.*

*My love, in the darkest
hour your laughter
opens, and if suddenly
you see my blood staining
the stones of the street,
laugh, because your laughter
will be for my hands
like a fresh sword.*

*Next to the sea in the autumn,
your laughter must raise
its foamy cascade,
and in the spring, love,
I want your laughter like
the flower I was waiting for,
the blue flower, the rose
of my echoing country.*

*Laugh at the night,
at the day, at the moon,
laugh at the twisted
streets of the island,
laugh at this clumsy
boy who loves you,
but when I open
my eyes and close them,
when my steps go,*

*when my steps return,
deny me bread, air,
light, spring,
but never your laughter
for I would die.*

14. Pick a part of the body – eyes, hands, ears, hair, anything – and write a poem in which that one part says something about the whole body and, beyond that, something about a person’s personality and way of life.

Neruda didn’t write the next poem – one of your fellow students did because Neruda inspired him!

TIME AND LIFE

by Axochi L.

*Time and life
I rode them bareback
Since those terrible twos
And the troubled teens
Jumpin’ erected school fences
Hiding under bridges
Gallopin’ wildly into streets
Disregarding rules
Trampling cornstalks
Early years
Under the influence of peers
Time and life, out of control.*

*Time and life
I’ve seized them
With my poetic soul
Through rusted out bars
Neruda offered a bridle
With which to guide them
Paz provided the saddle
To comfort my journey.
I gallop respectfully
Onto those paths
Established by modern society.
I control this mustang
With love. I guide this pinto
With patience. I feed them
Apples of hope and sweet
Grains of liberty.*

15. Looking back at the poems you’ve just read, and then looking at Axochi’s poem, what similarities do you see between them?
16. What influences on style and subject matter do you see in Axochi’s poem that could have come from Neruda’s work?
17. What elements of Axochi’s poem are truly original?
18. Take another look at the quotation of Neruda’s at the top of this unit, and write a poem that “convey[s] to others what you are.” This poem doesn’t have to sound like a Neruda poem – it should sound like you!

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes