

Somali Ethnic Studies Lesson Plan Lesson 9, Unit 2

Somali Poetry: Past and Present

Grade Level: 9-12

Subjects: History / Ethnic Studies / English Language Arts

Duration: 2 Class Periods

Learning Objective:

Students will analyze and interpret the significance of Somali poetry, exploring its historical context, cultural relevance, and contemporary expressions, while creating their own poetic works inspired by Somali traditions.

Essential Question:

How does Somali poetry reflect the cultural identity and history of the Somali people, and how does it influence Somali communities in the diaspora today?

Standards:

- **History**

Context, Change, and Continuity: Ask historical questions about context, change, and continuity in order to identify and analyze dominant and non-dominant narratives about the past.

Benchmark: U.S. History Era 6: Migration, Imperialism and Inequality – Identify patterns, intersections and causes of stratification (including racial, class, gender, citizenship status, and/or religion) that lead to social inequalities. Identify their impact on both individuals and groups in the United States and across the world. **(9.4.19.12)**

- **Ethnic Studies**

Identity: Analyze the ways power and language construct the social identities of race, religion, geography, ethnicity, and gender. Apply these understanding to one's own social identities and other groups living in Minnesota, centering on those whose stories and histories have been marginalized, erased, or ignored.

Benchmark: Analyze how the definitions, identifications, and understanding of racial and ethnic groups have changed over time as a result of politics. **(9.5.23.1)**

- **English Language Arts**

Writing (W6) Write narratives, poetry and other creative texts with details and effective technique to express ideas.

Benchmark: Model use of structural elements of mentor texts in written narratives, poetry or other creative text. **(9.2.6.2)**

Materials Needed:

- Lesson plan slides.
- Projector and screen for presentations
- Copies of Abdi Farah’s “More Than Heroes” poem. (See Day #2 lesson plan)
- Copies of “I Am From” poetry template. (See Day #2 lesson plan)
- Access to the TPT 26-min. piece, “Somalia: A Nation of Poets”
- Writing materials (notebooks, pens)
- Art supplies (optional for creative expression)

Lesson Outline:

Day 1: Introduction to Somali Poetry

Note: “DOK” throughout refers to Dept of Knowledge questions (Level 1: recall; Level 2: skills and concepts; Level 3: strategic thinking; Level 4: extended thinking)

Estimated Time	Content	Materials
10 mins.	Introduction (“Ignite”) Share the idea that Somali is a “Nation of Poets” and that this lesson and the next will explore WHY.	Slide #1
DOK 4	Share the Essential Question: “How does Somali poetry reflect the cultural identity and history of the Somali people, and how does it influence Somali communities in the diaspora today?” Have students read the Learning Targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● I can identify the essential elements of Somali poetry.	Slide #2 Slide #3

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can explain how these elements are important to the idea of a poem in Somali oral history. • I can identify contemporary expressions of Somali poetry. • I can create my own poetic works inspired by Somali traditions. <p>To introduce the concept of Somali poetry across the ages, show just the first couple of minutes of the video, “Somalia: A Nation of Poets.”</p>	<p>Slide #4: Share just the first two minutes of <u>“Somalia: A Nation of Poets”</u></p>
<p>10 mins. DOK 1</p>	<p>Turn and Talk: Ask students to think of types of poetry they have already studied... (they might come up with “concrete” poetry, written in the shape of an object that is often the subject of the poem; or sonnets – famously written in iambic pentameter by Shakespeare; or spoken word, a poetry form that was popularized by poetry slams in the 1980s-1990s.)</p> <p>Share with the larger group the types of poetry students name.</p> <p>Note the classification of Somali poetry into:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Tix” (traditional forms) and 2. “Tiraab” (prose). <p><i>(“Tix” refers to poetry (verse), which adheres to strict rules of meter, alliteration, and rhythm, while “Tiraab” refers to prose, which lacks a structured rhythm or specific poetic devices. The fundamental difference lies in structure and rhythm.)</i></p>	<p>Differentiation via student pairings.</p> <p>Slides #5-#6</p>
<p>10 mins. DOK 2 DOK 3</p>	<p>Historical Significance (“Chunk”) Examine contributions of classical (Tix) poets like <u>Raage Ugaas</u> and Sayyid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan.</p> <p>Discuss the role of poetry in resistance against colonialism. Have them think about WHEN Somali became a written language (1972) and how the use of poetry may have helped the resistance movements.</p> <p>Ask students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we mean by resistance? (Who? Against what? When? Why? How?) • Can you name some recent examples? (e.g. the “Singing Resistance” to ICE in Minneapolis.) 	<p>Slide #8 with embedded <u>Tik Tok</u> on Hassan (1.35 mins.)</p>

<p>DOK 4</p> <p>DOK 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can poetry be used as a form of resistance? (Examples could include the Beat Poets of the Viet Nam era.) • What are poetry's strengths as a form of resistance? 	
<p>10 mins.</p> <p>DOK 3</p>	<p>Types of Somali Poetry (“Chew”)</p> <p>Explain differences between <u>maanso</u> (serious poems) with known authors, requiring verbatim recitation, and dealing with themes like history or ethics.</p> <p><u>Here is an example of the Maanso poem “Bitter and Sweet” read in English.</u></p> <p>Ask students to give examples of poets they might put in this category from their studies (Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, etc.)</p> <p><u>Hees</u> (6.5 mins.) (lighter, sung poems) often anonymous or by known singers, sung with music and focusing on love or daily life. The <u>Somali National anthem</u> would be considered an example of Hees.</p>	<p>Slide #9</p>
<p>10 mins.</p>	<p>The Gabay Genre</p> <p>Explore “gabay” poetry as a means of expressing celebration, grief, and political/social commentary.</p> <p><u>Here is an example of a gabay poem</u> (recited in English) about the defeat of the Dervishes in trying to unite Somalia*.</p> <p><i>(The Dervish Movement and its Goals:</i></p> <p><i>Led by the Sayyid Mohammed Abdullah Hassan, also known as the "Mad Mullah" by the British, the Dervish movement aimed to establish an independent Islamic state with a Sufi doctrine as its foundation. They declared the colonial administrations as their enemies and sought to remove all foreign influence from the Horn of Africa.</i></p> <p><i>The Conflict and Defeat</i></p>	<p>Slide #10</p>

<p>DOK 2</p> <p>DOK 3</p>	<p><i>The Dervishes successfully fought off four British expeditions and forced the colonial powers to retreat to the coastal areas for a time, using effective guerrilla warfare tactics.</i></p> <p><i>The movement was finally defeated in 1920 when the British, after the end of World War I, launched a decisive, combined-arms offensive using a new weapon: air power.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>British forces, led by the Royal Air Force, bombed the Dervish forts and capital at Taleh in the first-ever aerial bombardment in sub-Saharan Africa.</i> ● <i>The Dervish fighters were demoralized and their strongholds destroyed.</i> ● <i>Mohammed Abdullah Hassan managed to escape the bombing but died shortly after, in 1921, from influenza.</i> <p><i>His death and the military defeat led to the collapse and end of the Dervish movement, allowing the British to take full control of the British Somaliland protectorate.)</i></p> <p><i>Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan is a nationalist to Somalis and a “Mad Mullah” in the eyes of colonizers. (Note that this topic is included in Unit 1.)</i></p> <p>Ask students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What stood out to you about this translated Gabay poem? What political messages are being expressed? ● Can you think of any poems or songs that recount political history in the U.S.? (They may mention “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” or “Ohio” about the Kent State killings in the late 1960s, or Queen Ifrica’s “I Can’t Breathe” which tackles police violence.) 	
<p>5 mins.</p> <p>DOK 4</p>	<p>Exit Ticket (“Review”)</p> <p>Ask students to write 2-3 ideas about the role of Somali poetry. Why has it been so important over the ages?</p>	

Formative Assessment:

- Participation in discussions via “Do Your Part” rubric, which can include a formative assessment based on students’ thinking/writing on exit ticket.

Extension/Differentiation:

Advanced: Have students consider Somali poetry versus American music. Most students may gravitate to popular music. This can get complicated due to coarse or challenging language. If the conversation goes that direction, ask: What is the difference between music that is a product of a corporation meant to make money vs. music that challenges and informs – that may be part of a resistance movement? Do they see that difference in their own lives and preferences? This may provide an effective essay topic.

Day 2: Somali Poetry in the U.S. and Creative Expression

Materials:

- [Slide deck](#)
- Copies of [Abdi Farah's "More Than Heroes" poem](#)
- Copies of ["I Am From" poem template](#)

Note: "DOK" throughout refers to Dept of Knowledge questions (Level 1: recall; Level 2: skills and concepts; Level 3: strategic thinking; Level 4: extended thinking)

Estimated Time	Content	Material
15 mins.	<p>Somali Poetry in the U.S. ("Ignite")</p> <p>Share thoughts from the previous day's exit tickets on the role of poetry in Somalia. Remind students that Somali has only been a written language since 1972 – likely within the lives of their parents and grandparents.</p> <p>Large Group Discussion: Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who can name a Somali American poet? • Who can name a Somali poet? <p>Remind the students that these poets may be in their families.</p> <p>Ask:</p> <p>DOK 2 Why is it worth knowing about the poetry?</p> <p>DOK 3 What can we gain if we value the poems and poets?</p> <p>DOK 4 What is the difference between knowing something and valuing something?</p> <p>Discuss the impact of Somali refugees on poetry in the U.S. since the 1990s. Highlight the work of figures like Said Salah Ahmed and initiatives like Ka Joog. Share about another minute (from minute 2-3) in the "Somalia: A Nation of Poets" video.</p> <p>DOK 3 Ask: How is Somali poetry like hip hop or rap? How is it different?</p> <p>DOK 4 Are the similarities more important than the differences? Or the other way around?</p> <p>Consider doing a choral reading of Abdi Farah's "More Than Heroes" poem. (A good place to start is to have students read the poem on their own, coding it by:</p>	<p>Slide #4</p> <p>Copies of "More Than Heroes" by Abdi Farah</p> <p>Differentiation via words and phrases highlighted and group recitation.</p>

<p>DOK 3</p> <p>DOK 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Circling words or phrases that confuse them. ● Underlining phrases that they like. Aim for 3-5 underlinings from each student. <p>Discuss any areas of confusion. (For example, that “Al Shabab” means “the youth” in Arabic and that it’s the largest group among several armed Somali organizations started with the goal of toppling Somalia’s U.N.-backed Transitional Federal Government.)</p> <p>Then read the poem together, with the teacher reading all the lines and students joining in on the lines they have underlined.</p> <p>Ask whether the choral reading produced more insights about the poem?</p> <p>Is there a difference between reading a poem and listening to one? How about lyrics of a song. How does the sound change the meaning?</p>	
<p>5 mins.</p> <p>DOK 1</p> <p>DOK 2</p>	<p>Cultural Impact and Recognition (“Chunk”)</p> <p>Explore how poets like Hodan Ugas (a Minneapolis resident now) address challenges faced by Somalis in the diaspora.</p> <p>Ask students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What concerns Hodan? ● Do you share any of her concerns? 	<p>Listen to “Somalia: A Nation of Poets” from 11.12 to 13 mins.</p>
<p>20 mins.</p> <p>DOK 3</p>	<p>Poetry Workshop: “I Am From” (“Chew”)</p> <p>Using the poem template, have student volunteers read the two examples of the poem from the back page. (Try also to share a personal example.)</p> <p>Ask what they notice? (Maybe the visual language, maybe how commonplace the specific details are, maybe the last sentences where some analysis of the “whys” behind the details are shared.)</p> <p>Have them work individually to see how far they can get on their own version, then pair students to help each other by sharing what they have.</p>	<p>Copies of “I Am From” poem template</p>

10 mins.	<p>Sharing and Discussion (“Review”)</p> <p>Ask if anyone has finished and would be willing to share their poem. (If not, they can consider it homework and finish it overnight.)</p> <p>In the shared poems, see if they can identify themes and emotions expressed in the work.</p>	
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Assessment:

- Participation in discussions and reflections.
- Engagement during video viewing and sharing sessions.
- Completion of “I Am From” poem and support to partner writer.
- “Do Your Part” rubric.

Extension Ideas:

- **Intermediate:** Have students write an email to Hodan. Write an email to the next generation about what is being learned. What would you want them to know and why?
- **Intermediate:** Write a short essay or poem in which students imagine another community, another cultural group in the world (maybe even their own!). Imagine if events forced these people to flee – to be refugees? What do you think they should protect in their community? How would poetry help them to protect what should be saved for a next generation who will never know the land of the parents, their ancestors?
- **Advanced:** Have students view “How Somali Women Used Baraanbur to Change History” and answer the essential question: “How does Somali poetry reflect the cultural identity and history of the Somali people, and how does it influence Somali communities in the diaspora today?”
- **Advanced:** Consider holding a Poetry Slam with students’ original works or with their memorized works of other Somali poets.