

Somali Poetry: Past and Present

Somalia: A Nation of Poets



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?

Learning Targets

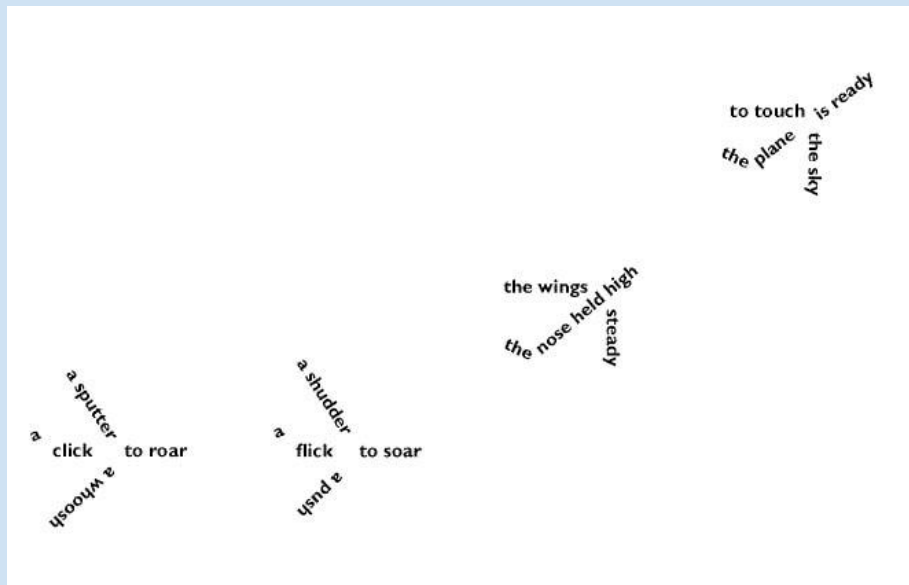


- I can analyze and interpret the **significance** of Somali poetry.
- I can explain the **historical context** of Somali poetry.
- I can discuss the **cultural relevance** of Somali poetry.
- I can identify **contemporary expressions** of Somali poetry.
- I can create my own poetic works inspired by Somali traditions.

“Somalia, a Nation of Poets”

<https://www.pbs.org/video/tpt-co-productions-somalia-nation-poets/>

Types of Poetry



Concrete

If We Must Die!

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, let it not be like hogs
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us, though dead!

Oh, kinsman! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us still be brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting back!
—Claude McKay.

Sonnet

More Types of Poetry

Perfect tool for writing on the fly

Evolution from quills to fountains, ballpoints to rollerballs

No touchscreen or keyboard can replicate the satisfaction of writing by hand

Acrostic

An old silent pond . . .

*A frog jumps into the pond,
splash! Silence again.*

Haiku (by Matsuo Bashō)

Introduction to Somali Poetry

Somali language as an oral tradition is classified into two main categories:

1. **“Tix”**: pronounced as (Tih) includes various traditional forms of chanted verse, such as the *gabay*, *jiifto*, *geeraar*, and *buraambur*.
2. **“Tiraab”**: Tiraab means prose. This category includes everyday conversational speech (*hadal*), idioms (*sarbeeb*), proverbs (*maahmaah*), and traditional storytelling.

Historical Significance

- Classical poets include Raage Ugaas and Sayyid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan.
- Poetry used for **resistance** against foreign colonization in the early 20th century.
- Somali poetry is metrical and alliterative.



Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan

Types of Somali Poetry

- Poems fall into two categories: **maanso** and **hees**.
- **Maanso**: Serious poems by named authors that often present arguments (e.g., gabay).
- **Hees**: Lighter, sung poems often with musical accompaniment, including work and dance songs.



Clockwise from top left: Gaarriye, Hadrawi, Warsan and K'naan

The Gabay Genre

- The most popular Somali poetic genre, it is used as a means to express both **celebration and grief**.
- **Political & Social Commentary:** Rallying against colonialism, criticizing, injustices, and delivering news
- **Conflict resolution and negotiation**
- **Personal expression** such as praise, boosting, laments.

Somali Poetry in the U.S.

- Refugees brought poetry traditions to the U.S. in the 1990s.
- Notable figures like Said Salah Ahmed promoted Somali poetry in Minnesota.
- Late 2000s: gang violence affected Somali youth.
- Abdi Farah (Abdi Phenomenal) founded Ka Joog (“stay away from it”) to change the narrative and engage youth through poetry.



Abdi Farah (Abdi Phenomenal)

Cultural Impact and Recognition

- Poets like Hodan Ugas and [Ayan Moaden](#) address diaspora challenges in English.
- Participation in the film [Somalia: A Nation of Poets](#).
- Importance of poetry in social justice and cultural identity.



Hodan Ugas