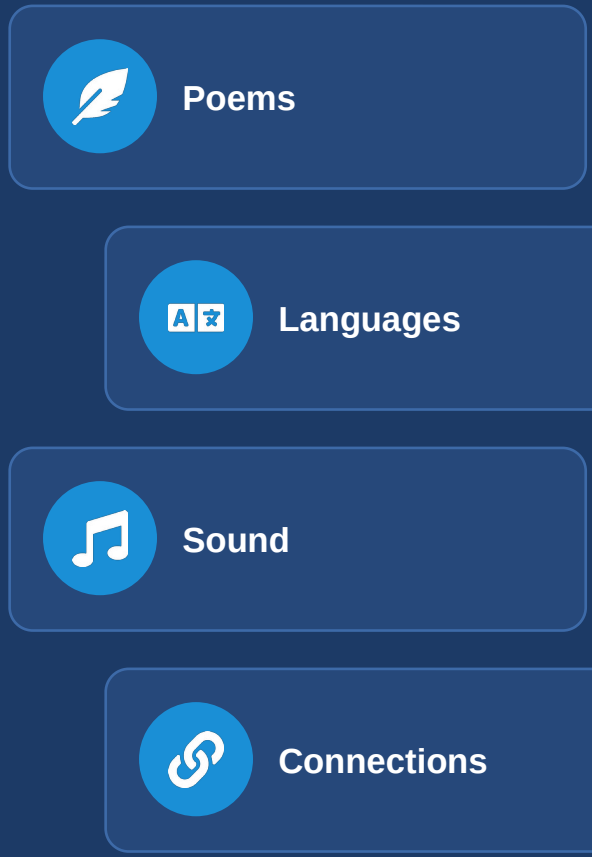
NBE3U Stories Now, Lesson 5

Poems Now

Contemporary poetry and the power of language



Today's goals

We are learning…

- To read contemporary poems closely.
- To explore words that carry particular significance.

I can…

- Use strategies to explore unfamiliar words.
- Explain why a poet uses an Indigenous-language word.
- Analyse one poetic device and its effect.
- Connect a poem to my novel.

Today's plan

Time	What we're doing	You will…
0–8 min	**Hook**	Discuss
8–30 min	**Read**	Listen and annotate
30–50 min	**Word work**	Explore
50–65 min	**Devices**	Analyse
65–75 min	**Connect**	Write

A word that carries more

Is there a word in a language you know that doesn't translate well into English? What does it carry that English loses?

Sentence starters

“In my family we say ___, which means more than…”

“English doesn't have a word for…”

“I can't think of one, but…”

How it works

- Pairs: 3 minutes.
- Sharing is optional; a word from a book or song works too.

Big idea

Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit poets often bring their languages into English poems: Cree, Anishinaabemowin, Michif, Inuktitut words that resist translation. Reading these poems asks us to notice what a word carries, and what it means for a poet to reclaim a language once punished in schools.

Sky Dancer



Louise Bernice Halfe – Sky Dancer was raised on Saddle Lake and attended Blue Quills Residential School. She is known for bringing Cree into her English poems.

In 2021 she became Canada's Parliamentary Poet Laureate, the first from an Indigenous community.

Read the poems

For each teacher-chosen poem:

1. Listen once, eyes closed or on the page.
2. Read again; annotate words, images, breaks.
3. Circle any word you don't know.
4. Note one line that stays with you.

Strategies for words



Context

What do the lines around it suggest?



Notes

Glossary, footnote, author's note.



Community dictionaries

Made with speakers.



Author's words

Interviews about language.

Word work

On page 1, in pairs:

1. List six words or phrases.
2. Name the strategy you used for each.
3. Write the meaning and the source.
4. Why did the poet choose it, untranslated or translated?

Translated or not?

Translated

- Welcomes outside readers.
- Explains.
- Can flatten meaning.

Left untranslated

- Says: this language is alive.
- Not everything is for everyone.
- Readers must work and respect.

Poetry tools

line break	Where a line ends; it creates pause and emphasis. *A break before a key word.*
white space	Empty space on the page. *Silence, absence, breath.*
code-switching	Moving between languages. *Cree and English in one poem.*

Analyse and connect

On page 2:

1. Find an example of each device.
2. Explain its effect.
3. Connect one poem to your novel.
4. Use evidence from both.

Languages in literature

Sanaaq

Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk's novel, one of the first written in Inuktitut (published 1984; English 2014).

Sky Dancer

Halfe weaves Cree into English poems.

Prizes

The Indigenous Voices Awards include works in Indigenous languages.

Check yourself

Be honest. This helps you choose what to work on next.

Success criteria	Not yet	Almost	Got it
I can use strategies to explore unfamiliar words.			
I can explain why a poet uses an Indigenous-language word.			
I can analyse one poetic device and its effect.			
I can connect a poem to my novel.			

Exit ticket

1. One word you explored, and your strategy.

2. Why a poet might leave a word untranslated.

3. A connection between a poem and your novel.

Next class: Circle Meeting 1.

Teacher reveal

Poems now: key points

Code-switching: Moving between languages in one text; Halfe, for example, is known for weaving Cree into her English poems.

Untranslated words: Leaving a word untranslated can say: this language is alive, it belongs here, and not everything is for outsiders.

Strategies: Context clues, a glossary or note, a community-made dictionary, the author's own explanations; never guess and never invent.

Devices: Line breaks, repetition, images of the body and land, white space and silence.

Connections: Language loss and reclamation appear across the course: Zitkála-Šá, Johnson's mission school story, and many novels.