

# Power and Conflict Poetry

This poetry task works alongside the Partition of India poem, to help students discuss power and conflict in history. They will explore poetry within this genre, as well as three other poetic genres:

ekphrastic

epic

performance

Students will be given prompts to help them generate their own poetry and hopefully share with each other in the classroom.

## Group discussion

What different types of conflict can you think of?

How would you define conflict?

How is power related to conflict?

How would you define power?

Give examples of power and conflict in real life?

Can you think of examples of power and conflict on a national and international scale?

Discuss some of your personal experiences with power and conflict?

How can conflict be resolved?

## Poem analysis

Analyse the conflict poems, Inkerman Charm, and War by Khalil Gibran.

How do these poems explore power and conflict?

Which aspects of power and conflict do they focus on?

Which language techniques are used?

- How do these contribute to the effectiveness of the poems exploration of power and conflict?

What are your general thoughts about these poems?

How would you arrange a performance or public reading of these poems?

- Is there one that would work best for this purpose?

# Power and Conflict Poetry (continued)

## Inkerman Charm

From cheerless watches on the dank cold ground  
Startled, ye felt a foe on every side;  
With mist and gloom and deaths encompassed round,  
With even to perish in the light denied.  
And that same season of our genial ease,  
It was your very agony of strife;  
While each of these our golden moments sees  
With you the ebbing of some noble life.  
Mid dark ravines, by precipices vast,  
Did there and here your dreadful conflict sway;  
No Sabbath day's light work to quell at last  
The fearful odds of that unequal fray.  
Oh "hope" of England, only not "forlorn,"  
Because ye never your own hopes resigned,  
But in worst case, beleaguered, overborne,  
Did help in God and in your own selves find.  
-November 5th 1854

## War – Kahlil Gibran

One night a feast was held in the palace, and there came a man and prostrated himself before the prince, and all the feasters looked upon him; and they saw that one of his eyes was out and that the empty socket bled. And the prince inquired of him, "What has befallen you?" And the man replied, "O prince, I am by profession a thief, and this night, because there was no moon, I went to rob the money-changer's shop, and as I climbed in through the window I made a mistake and entered the weaver's shop, and in the dark I ran into the weaver's loom and my eye was plucked out. And now, O prince, I ask for justice upon the weaver."

Then the prince sent for the weaver and he came, and it was decreed that one of his eyes should be plucked out.

"O prince," said the weaver, "the decree is just. It is right that one of my eyes be taken. And yet, alas! both are necessary to me in order that I may see the two sides of the cloth that I weave. But I have a neighbour, a cobbler, who has also two eyes, and in his trade both eyes are not necessary."

Then the prince sent for the cobbler. And he came. And they took out one of the cobbler's two eyes.

And justice was satisfied.



# Ekphrastic Poems

Ekphrastic poems are descriptive poems, often describing works of art, images or situations. Here are some examples of ekphrastic poetry.

## It is a Living Coral

William Carlos Williams

a trouble

archaically fettered  
to produce

E Pluribus Unum an  
island

in the sea a Capitol  
surmounted

by Armed Liberty—  
painting

sculpture straddled by  
a dome

eight million pounds  
in weight

iron plates constructed  
to expand

and contract with  
variations

of temperature  
the folding

and unfolding of a lily.  
And Congress

authorized and the  
Commission

was entrusted was  
entrusted!

a sculptured group  
Mars

in Roman mail placing  
a wreath

of laurel on the brow  
of Washington

Commerce Minerva  
Thomas

Jefferson John Hancock  
at

the table Mrs. Motte  
presenting

Indian burning arrows  
to Generals

Marion and Lee to fire  
her mansion

and dislodge the British—  
this scaleless

jumble is superb

and accurate in its  
expression

of the thing they  
would destroy—

Baptism of Poca-  
hontas

with a little card  
hanging

under it to tell  
the persons

in the picture.

It climbs

it runs, it is Geo.  
Shoup

of Idaho it wears  
a beard

it fetches naked  
Indian

women from a river  
Trumbull

Varnum Henderson  
Frances

Willard's corset is  
absurd—

Banks White Columbus  
stretched

in bed men felling trees

The Hon. Michael  
C. Kerr

onetime Speaker of  
the House

of Representatives  
Perry

in a rowboat on Lake  
Erie

changing ships the  
dead

among the wreckage  
sickly green





# Ekphrastic Poems (continued)

## Decoy Gang War Victim

Carmen Gimenez Smith

Just a tick ago, the actor was a Roman candle  
shot to the sky, smudged by rain's helter-  
skelter. His motivation was: he's a stooge  
on L.A.'s sodden turnpike, so we have "to make" art. Got  
to rezone and react. The world the bare wall to  
his bullet. Got to rile up the populace, to fortify  
the arsenal. Once in a while, repopulate and penetrate,  
paint a list of incitement onto the walls.

An elder told him that to overturn the city, one must  
surrender body/belongings to the one explosive  
spectacle of truth, making it ongoing. Pay attention.  
To overturn the city, not just the scraps but fervor itself.  
Not just the wan broadcast of indignation but  
IRL incursions into the workhouses and  
poorhouses to inflame the thousand points of light.  
A lean surge, departure pinks both ends of him.  
He's the nth layer folded into the stand's nerve.



## Bronzes

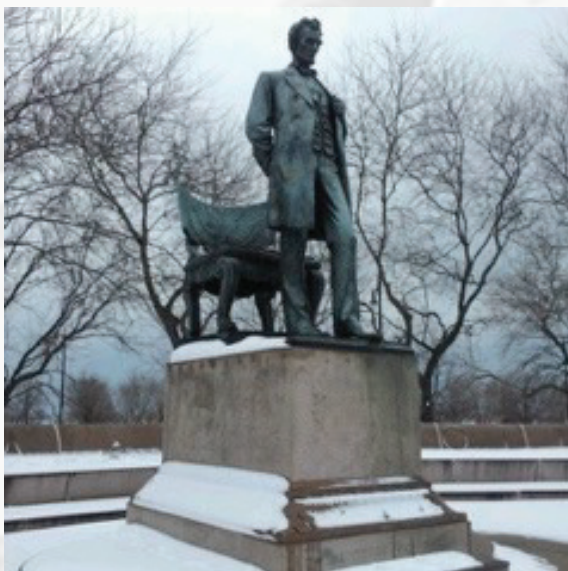
Carl Sandburg

I

The bronze General Grant riding a bronze horse in Lincoln Park  
Shrivels in the sun by day when the motor cars whirr by in long  
processions going somewhere to keep appointment for dinner  
and matineés and buying and selling  
Though in the dusk and nightfall when high waves are piling  
On the slabs of the promenade along the lake shore near by  
I have seen the general dare the combers come closer  
And make to ride his bronze horse out into the hoofs and guns of  
the storm.

II

I cross Lincoln Park on a winter night when the snow is falling.  
Lincoln in bronze stands among the white lines of snow, his  
bronze forehead meeting soft echoes of the newsies crying  
forty thousand men are dead along the Yser, his bronze ears  
listening to the mumbled roar of the city at his bronze feet.  
A lithe Indian on a bronze pony, Shakespeare seated with long  
legs in bronze, Garibaldi in a bronze cape, they hold places in  
the cold, lonely snow to-night on their pedestals and so they  
will hold them past midnight and into the dawn.





# If artwork could speak, what would it say?

Now have a go at writing your own ekphrastic poems based on the artwork below and using the questions as prompts:

## Image A

- How does this image depict conflict?
- Describe what he is wearing
- Describe his injuries?
- What do you think may have caused his injury?
- Describe his facial expression
- Describe the look in his eyes
- Imagine what he may be looking at
- Describe where he might like to be



Image A

## Image B

- Who are they?
- What are they ready for?
- Where might they be going?
- How are they dressed?
- How would you describe their stance?
- What are they hoping for?
- What are they fighting for?
- Describe the power/conflict visible in this image.



Image B

NATIONAL  
**ARMY**  
MUSEUM



# If artwork could speak, what would it say?

## Image C

- Where is this soldier?
- Describe their environment
- Describe what they're wearing
- Describe the feeling of the painting
- How do you think the soldier is feeling?
- Where do you think they are going?
- Describe the power/conflict depicted in this painting.

When you have your prompts, read them out and highlight any words or descriptions that particularly stand out.

Delete any words that feel superfluous to what you want to say.

Examine the text that you are left with. Are there opportunities to use alliteration, assonance, an rhyme to draw attention to any of these words or phrases you have written?

If you read what you have out aloud, do you get a sense of a particular rhythm or metre? If so, how might you develop this within your poem?

If you are unsure, you might want to go back to some of the poems you ready earlier, to see what kinds of effects the poet used to make their meaning.

Remember, poets draft and re-draft their poems many times to create their best version. Don't be afraid to experiment with what you have written; you can always add things back in that you delete and re-order lines and verses until you are happy with it.

Happy writing!





# Historic Epic Poetry

Epic poetry is the oldest form of poetry, and an ancient form of storytelling.

It is a long narrative poem, and often tells of a great heroic character, who must overcome obstacles to achieve their goal, there is normally an inspirational muse, or friend who supports them.

Epic poems can be written as prose or with a rhyming scheme of your choice.

The oldest known example is the Epic of Gilgamesh written in 1800BCE, thought to be about an actual Mesopotamian King. Some other famous examples include, Homer's The Iliad, Dante's Divine Comedy and Ramayan by Valmiki.

The Partition of India poem is a poetic retelling of a major historical event. Have a go at writing your own version of a historic epic poem.

- First decide on the history you want to retell and write down the key events or points you want to mention.
- Take each point and describe it in detail, think about what happened, who was affected, how they were affected, their possible reactions.
- Include the use of poetic devices, you may want to literally retell the history using a rhyming scheme, or be more metaphorical, using natural or artistic imagery.

## Excerpt of The Iliad by Homer

Of Peleus' son, Achilles, sing, O Muse,  
The vengeance, deep and deadly; whence to Greece  
Unnumbered ills arose; which many a soul  
Of mighty warriors to the viewless shades  
Untimely sent; they on the battle plain  
Unburied lay, a prey to rav'ning dogs,  
And carrion birds; but so had Jove decreed,  
From that sad day when first in wordy war,  
The mighty Agamemnon, King of men,  
Confronted stood by Peleus' godlike son.  
Say then, what God the fatal strife provok'd?  
Jove's and Latona's son; he, filled with wrath  
Against the King, with deadly pestilence  
The camp afflicted,—and the people died,—  
For Chryses' sake, his priest, whom Atreus' son  
With scorn dismiss'd, when to the Grecian ships  
He came, his captive daughter to redeem,  
With costly ransom charg'd; and in his hand  
The sacred fillet of his God he bore,  
And golden staff; to all he sued, but chief  
To Atreus' sons, twin captains of the host:  
"Ye sons of Atreus, and ye well-greav'd Greeks,  
May the great Gods, who on Olympus dwell,  
Grant you yon hostile city to destroy,  
And home return in safety; but my child  
Restore, I pray; her proffer'd ransom take,  
And in his priest, the Lord of Light revere."  
Then through the ranks assenting murmurs ran,  
The priest to rev'rence, and the ransom take:  
Not so Atrides; he, with haughty mien,  
And bitter speech, the trembling sire address'd:  
"Old man, I warn thee, that beside our ships  
I find thee not, or ling'ring now, or back  
Returning; lest thou prove of small avail  
Thy golden staff, and fillet of thy God.  
Her I release not, till her youth be fled;  
Within my walls, in Argos, far from home,  
Her lot is cast, domestic cares to ply,  
And share a master's bed. For thee, begone!  
Incense me not, lest ill betide thee now!"



# Historic Epic Poetry (continued)

## Excerpt from *Divine Comedy: Paradiso* by Dante Alighieri

Translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The glory of Him who moveth everything  
Doth penetrate the universe, and shine  
In one part more and in another less.  
Within that heaven which most his light receives  
Was I, and things beheld which to repeat  
Nor knows, nor can, who from above descends;  
Because in drawing near to its desire  
Our intellect ingulphs itself so far,  
That after it the memory cannot go.  
Truly whatever of the holy realm  
I had the power to treasure in my mind  
Shall now become the subject of my song.  
O good Apollo, for this last emprise  
Make of me such a vessel of thy power  
As giving the beloved laurel asks!  
One summit of Parnassus hitherto  
Has been enough for me, but now with both  
I needs must enter the arena left.  
Enter into my bosom, thou, and breathe  
As at the time when Marsyas thou didst draw  
Out of the scabbard of those limbs of his.  
O power divine, lend'st thou thyself to me  
So that the shadow of the blessed realm  
Stamped in my brain I can make manifest,  
Thou'lt see me come unto thy darling tree,  
And crown myself thereafter with those leaves  
Of which the theme and thou shall make me worthy.  
So seldom, Father, do we gather them  
For triumph or of Caesar or of Poet,  
(The fault and shame of human inclinations,  
That the Peneian foliage should bring forth  
Joy to the joyous Delphic deity,  
When any one it makes to thirst for it.  
A little spark is followed by great flame;  
Perchance with better voices after me  
Shall prayer be made that Cyrrha may respond!  
To mortal men by passages diverse  
Uprises the world's lamp; but by that one  
Which circles four uniteth with three crosses,  
With better course and with a better star  
Conjoined it issues, and the mundane wax  
Tempers and stamps more after its own fashion.  
Almost that passage had made morning there  
And evening here, and there was wholly white  
That hemisphere, and black the other part,  
When Beatrice towards the left-hand side  
I saw turned round, and gazing at the sun;  
Never did eagle fasten so upon it!



# Historic Epic Poetry (continued)

## Excerpt from *The Ramayan of Valmiki*

Translated by Ralph T.H. Griffith

Canto I. Nárada.

OM.

To sainted Nárada, prince of those  
Whose lore in words of wisdom flows.  
Whose constant care and chief delight  
Were Scripture and ascetic rite,  
The good Válmíki, first and best  
Of hermit saints, these words addressed:

“In all this world, I pray thee, who  
Is virtuous, heroic, true?

Firm in his vows, of grateful mind,  
To every creature good and kind?  
Bounteous, and holy, just, and wise,  
Alone most fair to all men's eyes?  
Devoid of envy, firm, and sage,  
Whose tranquil soul ne'er yields to rage?  
Whom, when his warrior wrath is high,  
Do Gods embattled fear and fly?

Whose noble might and gentle skill  
The triple world can guard from ill?  
Who is the best of princes, he  
Who loves his people's good to see?  
The store of bliss, the living mine  
Where brightest joys and virtues shine?  
Queen Fortune's best and dearest friend,  
Whose steps her choicest gifts attend?

Who may with Sun and Moon compare,  
With Indra, Vishu, Fire, and Air?

Grant, Saint divine, the boon I ask,  
For thee, I ween, an easy task,  
To whom the power is given to know  
If such a man breathe here below.”

Then Nárada, clear before whose eye  
The present, past, and future lie,  
Made ready answer: “Hermit, where  
Are graces found so high and rare?  
Yet listen, and my tongue shall tell  
In whom alone these virtues dwell.

From old Ikshváku's line he came,  
Known to the world by Ráma's name:  
With soul subdued, a chief of might,  
In Scripture versed, in glory bright,  
His steps in virtue's paths are bent,  
Obedient, pure, and eloquent.

In each emprise he wins success,  
And dying foes his power confess.  
Tall and broad-shouldered, strong of limb,  
Fortune has set her mark on him.  
Graced with a conch-shell's triple line,  
His throat displays the auspicious sign.

NATIONAL  
**ARMY**  
MUSEUM



# Performance Poetry

Spoken word poetry is written to be performed, it has rhythm, rhyme, and influence from musical genres such as rap, hip hop and jazz. Some well known spoken word poets include, George the Poet - 'Have you heard George's Podcast?', Benjamin Zephaniah, Alysia Harris, and Aja Monet, to name just a few.

Check out their work online to help inspire your poem and then using the tips below write your own spoken word poem;

- Choose a topic which is important to you, something you can talk about with passion and energy, you may want to stick with the historic conflict you wrote your historic epic poem about or choose something different.
- Spoken word is as much about the performance as it is about the words; it doesn't have to rhyme the whole way through, and not all the rhymes need to have the same structure. Spoken word is a very free and organic form of poetry.
- Your opening line should introduce the listener to your poem, it could be a pointed question or a dramatic statement, something that gives us an idea of what you're about to talk about. The rest of the poem is about exploring and expanding on that topic.
- Make use of wordplay and vivid description, the listener should be able to imagine all that you're talking about to enhance the performance. Wordplay helps make it fun and interesting to listen to.
- Use literary devices like repetition, alliteration, and multiple rhyming words, this helps drive home a point in a memorable way. It also adds rhythm to your poem
- Finally close your poem with the main thing you want your listeners to remember, it could even be a question you want them to think about. Something that concludes your poem and brings it to an end.