



National Poetry Day in Scotland

Thursday 3 October 2013

'Water' Poem



Teaching
Resources:
Secondary
Schools

'The Travel Guide to the Country of Your Birth'
by Kapka Kassabova

The Poet and Her Work

Kapka Kassabova (1973–)

Kapka Kassabova was born in Sofia, Bulgaria, and at the end of the Cold War her family emigrated first to Britain, then to New Zealand. After twelve years and several books published in New Zealand, she moved to Edinburgh in 2005.

Her first poetry collection, *All Roads Lead to the Sea*, won a NZ Montana Award for best first poetry book. Her first novel, *Reconnaissance*, won a Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Asia-Pacific, and she was twice named NZ Cathay Pacific travel writer of the year for her travel journalism. Two further poetry books are jointly published by Auckland University Press and Bloodaxe: *Someone Else's Life* (2003) and *Geography for the Lost* (2007).

In 2008 she published the darkly comic travel memoir *Street Without a Name: Childhood and other misadventures in Bulgaria* (Portobello), and in 2011 *Twelve Minutes of Love: A tango story* (Portobello).

She lives in the Scottish Highlands.

Clive James has written of her work: 'In the suitcase that she has mentally lived out of since she was a little girl, Kapka Kassabova has brought the turbulent memories of 20th century European history with her to New Zealand, where she recollects bad dreams in comparative tranquillity, and always with the phrasing of a born musician.'

The Poem

The poem is taken from the collection *Geography for the Lost* (2007).

Reading The Poem – Notes And Questions >



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Reading The Poem – Notes And Questions

Before reading Kapka Kassabova's biography, try to guess which country this poem is about – some of the place-names give you clues.

The poem mentions a sea, a river and a mountain range – what are they?

Some lines in the poem offer a purely factual description of the country, while others try to make it sound as attractive as possible. Looking at lines 2 to 10, which are factual, and which are attractive? Where else might you come across this mix of descriptions?

From the descriptions in ll.2–10, what is your impression of the country?
Is it somewhere you would like to visit?
Why?

How does the last line affect your understanding of the poem?
What do you think it means to 'live inside mirrors'?
Why do you think the people in this country might live like this?

The word 'I' is never used in the poem, but the position of the speaker of the poem is revealed to some extent in the title and the last line. What can you say about them?

Discussion

Discuss what you know about Bulgaria. Think about place-names, geographical features, history, language, sportsmen, artists, and so on.

Have you visited Bulgaria?
If so, describe your impressions of the country.

If you were to write a similar poem about Scotland, what geographical features of the country would you include? Think about lakes and rivers, hills and mountains, towns and cities, beaches and cliffs, and so on.

Research >

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SCOTTISH POETRY LIBRARY
SECONDARY SCHOOLS TEACHING RESOURCES



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Using maps or an atlas, follow the route of the River Danube from source to sea.

- Which countries does it flow through?
- Which cities does it flow through?
- What are its main tributaries?
- Find out its name in the languages of the countries it flows through.
- Find out about the kind of vessels which sail on it.

The poem tells us that Bulgaria 'has over 300 natural lakes'. Scotland too has hundreds of natural lakes, usually called 'lochs', but it also has man-made lakes, or reservoirs, used for drinking water.

The Scottish Water education resource on Pipe Networks at www.scottishwater.co.uk has information on how reservoirs work (see Resource sheets 1 and 2), as well as what happens to water we have used (see Resource sheet 4).

Find out about the lochs nearest to your school. Are they natural, or man-made?

Where does the water in your school come from?

How does it get to your school?

Where is the waste water from your school treated?

Where does it go once it has been treated?

Creative Activity

Write a version of this poem about Scotland. Try to make it a mix of fact and attraction. For example, your line 5 might read

occupies the northern part of mainland Britain

while you could adapt line 7 to read

offers gorgeous shell beaches, breathtaking mountains
and romantic castles

Think carefully about the last line, and use it to highlight something you think is a problem in Scotland.

Further Reading and Links >

NPD poem posters, teaching resources & films:

www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk

Explore Scottish Water's education materials:

www.scottishwater.co.uk



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Further Reading and Links

Books

Kassabova, Kapka: *Geography for the Lost* (Taset: Bloodaxe, 2007)

Kassabova, Kapka: *Street Without a Name: Childhood and other misadventures in Bulgaria* (London: Portobello Books, 2008)

Taylor, John: *Into the Heart of European Poetry* (New Brunswick, London: Transaction, 2008); includes an essay on Kapka Kassabova, 'My Life as Someone Else's'

Websites

www.spl.org.uk/poetry/poets/kapka-kassabova

Biography, Poems (including 'The Travel Guide to the Country of Your Birth'), In the Library, Links

www.kapka-kassabova.com

<http://sounds.bl.uk/Arts-literature-and-performance/Between-two-worlds-poetry-and-translation/024M-C1340X0034XX-0000V0>

Kapka Kassabova reading her poems, including 'The Travel Guide to the Country of Your Birth', which begins 19.40 minutes in

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kapka_Kassabova

www.clivejames.com/poetry/kassabova

www.edinburghworldwritersconference.org/national-literature/a-living-nation-of-writers-readers-and-kindred-spirits-kapka-kassabova-on-the-ewwc

Interview with Kapka Kassabova, 2013

www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17202996

The BBC's profile of Bulgaria

4.

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SECONDARY SCHOOLS TEACHING RESOURCES



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