



# National Poetry Day in Scotland

Thursday 3 October 2013

## 'Water' Poem



Teaching  
Resources:  
Primary  
Schools

'Rudan  
a nì uisge'  
by Maoilios  
Caimbeul  
'Think of  
a flood'  
by Jackie  
Kay

'Rudan a nì uisge' by Maoilios Caimbeul  
'Think of a flood' by Jackie Kay

## The poets and their work

### Maoilios Caimbeul (b. 1944)

Maoilios Caimbeul (Myles Campbell) is a poet, novelist and teacher, working mainly in Scottish Gaelic and living on the Isle of Skye. Born on Skye at Staffin, he served with the Merchant Navy before studying Celtic and History at the University of Edinburgh, and became a teacher of Gaelic in schools in Gairloch and on Skye.

His recent collections of poetry include *Saoghal ur* (2003); *Breac-a'-Mhuiltain* (2007), a selected poems 1974 – 2006 in Scottish Gaelic with Gaelige linear translations; and *The two sides of the pass / Dà thaobh a' bhealaich*, with Mark Goodwin (2009). The poem sequence 'Tìr a' Gheallaidh' was published in his autobiographical *Island Conversion: The Transition of a Gaelic Poet from Sceptic to Believer*, co-authored with Margaret Campbell (2011); his lifelong interest in religion and the interface between science / philosophy and religion has intensified with his recent conversion to Christianity. He has also published seven novels for young people in Gaelic as well as a novel for adults, *Teas* (2010).

Awards include the An Comunn Gàidhealach National Mod Bardic Crown in 2002. He has been Honorary Bard of Comunn Gàidhlig Inbhir Nis / Gaelic Society of Inverness since 2012.

### Jackie Kay (b. 1961)

Jackie Kay was born in Edinburgh in 1961 to a Scottish mother and a Nigerian father. She was adopted by a white couple at birth and was brought up in Glasgow, studying at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and at Stirling University. Her first collection, *The Adoption Papers* (1991), deals with an adopted child's search for a cultural identity, and won the Saltire Society Scottish First Book of the Year Award.

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She has since published seven further collections, including two books of poems for children, *The Frog Who Dreamed She Was an Opera Singer* (1998), and *Red, Cherry Red* (2008); *The Lamplighter* (2008), a dramatised poem which explores the Atlantic slave trade; and most recently *Fiere* (2011), whose title poem pays homage to Burns. Her novel *Trumpet* (1998) won the Guardian Fiction Prize, and she has written three books of short stories, most recently *Reality, Reality* (2012). *Red Dust Road* (2010) is a memoir about meeting her Nigerian birth father.

She lives in Manchester and is Professor of Creative Writing at Newcastle University. In 2006, she was awarded an MBE for services to literature.

## The Poem

'Rudan a nì uisge' was published in Maoilios Caimbeul's collection *Saoghal Ur* (2003), and also in *Dreuchd An Fhigheadair / The Weaver's Task: A Gaelic sampler*, edited and introduced by Crisdean MhicGhilleBhàin / Christopher Whyte (2007), where it appears beside 'Think of a flood', Jackie Kay's English 'response' to it, which was commissioned for this book.

"Unlike other bi-lingual collections, the Gaelic poems are not 'translated': rather, poets with no knowledge of Gaelic have responded to literal translations, giving life to the dialogue of Scottish poetry in both languages."

[www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk](http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk)

"Jackie Kay comes up with a rhythmically compelling water poem which children will love and repeat, but whose disturbing energy speaks to adults as well." (Christopher Whyte)

The Gaelic title 'Rudan a nì uisge' means literally 'Trifle of the matter of water'.

## Reading The Poem – Notes And Questions >

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*The questions can be answered with reference to either the Gaelic or the English poem.*

Each verse of the poem is about something to do with water. Which verse is about:

- the human body
- cleaning
- dirt
- food
- health
- plants
- the water cycle
- work

Does the poem rhyme?

Does it rhyme the same way all the way through?

Which is your favourite rhyme in the poem. Why?

Compare the titles in English and in Gaelic.

What differences and similarities do you notice?

Which words from the Gaelic title are repeated in the poem itself, and where?

Which words from the English title are repeated in the poem itself, and where?

In the first line of the poems, there are the nouns 'tuil' / 'flood' and 'tobar' / 'well'. Which other nouns can you find in the poem relating to water?

Choose one verse of the poem, and make a drawing to illustrate it.

Don't write the verse on it, but show it to others, and see if they can guess which verse you are writing about.

Now find a good place on your sheet to write down the verse.

### Discussion >

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#### 1. From the poem

Choose any stanza from the poem (except the last one), and do what it tells you – think about that verse's subject. For example, if you choose verse 3:

smaoinich air craobhan 's feur 's air lusan,  
chan fhàsadh iad idir gun frasan is fliuichead;

Think how the grass, trees and plants know  
They need the cloud-bursts of rain to grow

You could

- name some of the plants you know
- describe how they look when they are dry and when they are wet
- talk about why plants need water to grow
- talk about any times you have watered plants
- describe how it feels when you are out in the rain

#### 2. Using Water

Discuss the different ways you have used or come across water in, say, the past 24 hours. Think about water

- in your home – drinking, washing, cooking, and so on
- at school
- as rain – including puddles
- in rivers or burns
- in the sea

Make a list of the objects you have used to deal with water, for example

- a glass or a bottle to drink from
- an umbrella or a waterproof jacket to keep dry in the rain
- a towel to dry yourself after you've washed and so on.

Water is necessary for us to live, but we have to use it carefully.

- Think of the ways we need water to stay alive.
- Think of the ways water can be dangerous.

**Continued >**

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### 2. Research

Using Resource Sheet 1 from the Scottish Water education resource on Save It at [www.scottishwater.co.uk](http://www.scottishwater.co.uk), write a sentence about water in these eight different images, thinking both about using and saving water. For example,

for the first picture you could write,  
This is a bath full of water, to clean myself  
but I can take a shower instead.

and for the third picture you could write  
This is a tap I turn on to have water to drink  
then I turn it off tight to make sure it doesn't drip

### 3. Survey

Undertake a Water Use Survey, as outlined in the Scottish Water resource Water in the Home (Activity 1) at [www.scottishwater.co.uk](http://www.scottishwater.co.uk)

"A survey at school could be done by dividing the class into groups and setting various tasks... Some groups could interview specific staff members, for example: janitor – cook – child – nursery teacher."

## Creative Activity

Write a poem about the way you use water.

You could write couplets – two-line stanzas – each about a different topic, such as

- drinking water
- using water to wash
- playing with water
- cooking with water
- rain-water
- burns, rivers and lochs
- sea-water
- water experienced through your five senses

**Continued >**

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Or you could think about repeating certain things in each stanza. For example, each stanza could

- rhyme
- be in the first person – 'I drink a tumblerful of water at break-time...'
- be a question and answer – 'Why do I need to drink so much water? / So my body doesn't dry up like a dry stick'
- have a 'do' and a 'don't line, for example – 'Make sure at the beach you have water to hand / But don't leave plastic bottles littering the sand'
- start with the same word or phrase, for example 'The water is...' or 'We use water to...' or 'Can you hear the water...'

## Further Reading and Links

### Books

MhicGhilleBhàin, Crisdean / Whyte, Christopher (ed.):  
*Dreuchd An Fhigheadair / The Weaver's Task: a Gaelic Sampler*  
(Edinburgh: Scottish Poetry Library, 2007)

Caimbeul, Maoilios: *Saoghal Ur* (Callendar: Diehard, 2003)

Kay, Jackie: *Fiere* (Tarsnet: Bloodaxe Books, 2011)

### Websites

[www.spl.org.uk/poetry/poets/maoilios-caimbeul](http://www.spl.org.uk/poetry/poets/maoilios-caimbeul)

Biography, Poems, Further Reading, In the Library, Links

[www.maoilioscaimbeul.co.uk](http://www.maoilioscaimbeul.co.uk)

[www.spl.org.uk/poetry/poets/jackie-kay](http://www.spl.org.uk/poetry/poets/jackie-kay)

Biography, Poems, Further Reading, In the Library, Links

<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/jackie-kay>

[www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=5682](http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=5682)

[www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00mr8yj/profiles/jackie-kay](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00mr8yj/profiles/jackie-kay)

[www.drb.ie/essays/brave-new-words](http://www.drb.ie/essays/brave-new-words)

A lengthy review of *Dreuchd An Fhigheadair / The Weaver's Task*  
by Peter Mackay

[www.scottishwater.co.uk/savewater](http://www.scottishwater.co.uk/savewater)

NPD poem posters, teaching resources & films:

[www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk](http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk)

Explore Scottish Water's education materials:

[www.scottishwater.co.uk](http://www.scottishwater.co.uk)

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