

# Poetry 2012: The Written World



## Resources for Teachers

Country: Kuwait

Poet: Saadiyah Mufarreh

Poem: My Dreams Often Humble  
Themselves (extract)

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## About this Resource

Activities in this resource are aimed at pupils in upper secondary school (S4–S6).

This resource

*helps pupils to develop an understanding of the complexities of language through the study of a range of texts*

*provides learners with the opportunity to analyse and evaluate texts*

*provides learners with the opportunity to create and produce texts*

from SQA's 'Key points for English'

[www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/45672.html](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/45672.html)

(accessed 21 May 2012)

The 'Discussion' topic also offers material which may be useful for considering "contemporary moral questions" in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies, with regard to the place of women in Middle Eastern societies, and issues surrounding clothing.

# My Dreams Often Humble Themselves (extract)

1

I want nothing more than wings  
or my soul to cease yearning for flight.

2

I want to cry out with all my might  
without waiting for any question.

3

I want to free myself from everything that keeps my tears  
from their deferred goal  
or their final dot on the line.

4

I want to sing  
without being obliged to compose words,  
improvise a tune,  
or raise my voice.

5

I want an earth  
whose map I can draw  
in accordance with the topography of my face,  
cleaving its rivers and seas  
by way of my tears.

6

I want another earth  
I can conceal in my chest  
whenever I want to leave the house  
without an *abya*.

7

I want a tree that sings,  
a sparrow that makes a truce with the wind,  
a sea that writes its memoirs each dawn,  
and a passport that is accepted at all airports.

Saddiah Muffareh

# My Dreams Often Humble Themselves (continued)

from *Banipal: Magazine of Modern Arab Literature*, no. 43  
(London, 2012);  
translated from the Arabic by Allison Blecker  
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The original poem is taken from the author's selected works,  
*Mashyatu al-Auza (Walk of the Goose)* (Beirut: Arab Scientific  
Publishers, and Kuwait: Dar Masma, 2009)

The complete poem runs to 25 verses.

Note:

“abya” is a loose black robe worn by Muslim women which  
covers the whole body.

## *The Poet & Her Work*

Saadiah Mufarreh is a poet, critic and journalist, and works as arts  
editor of the Kuwaiti daily newspaper *Al-Qabas*. She graduated  
from Kuwait University in Arabic Language and Education in  
1987, and has published eight collections of poetry.

# Reading the poem

## Verse by verse

- 1 This verse states a wish, and then an alternative wish. Why do you think an alternative wish is needed?
- 2 What is the difference between crying out in response to a question, and crying out “without waiting for any question”?
- 3 What might be the “goal” of “my tears”? Why is it “deferred”?
- 4 What do you think such a song would sound like?
- 5 This verse describes “an earth / whose map” accords with the poet’s face. Why do you think the poet wants this?
- 6 This verse describes “another earth”, to be hidden within the poet’s chest. Why do you think the poet wants this?
- 7 There are four images here – a tree, a sparrow, a sea and a passport. In what ways (if any) are they connected?

## Overall

- Each verse begins “I want...”. Based on these wishes, what sort of person is the “I” of the poem?
- Why do you think each verse is numbered? How would the poem be different if there were no numbers?
- How does the title relate to the poem? Think particularly of the word “humble”.
- What is the poet’s attitude towards freedom?

## Discussion

The poem mentions a garment worn by Muslim women, the *abaya*. The wearing of the *hijab* or veil has been much debated in Europe recently, with a ban in place in France.

- Why do you think there are laws in place that dictate what a woman can and cannot wear?
- What is the difference between a law which forces women to wear certain clothes in public (for example in Muslim countries) and a law which forces them not to wear certain clothes in public (for example in France)?
- To what extent should people be able to choose what they wear in public, even if others take offence at their choices?

## Research Activity

Find out about Kuwait:

- where it is
- which Empire it was part of from the 17th to 19th centuries
- which Empire it became part of in 1899
- what important find was made there in 1937
- when it became independent
- what major event took place there in 1990, which soon came to involve the UK?
- the position of women is in Kuwaiti society
- the position of immigrants in Kuwaiti society

# Creative Activity

Write your own poem based on 'My Dreams Often Humble Themselves'.

First, use each verse as the starting point for a verse of your own:

- 1 If you had wings, where would you fly?
- 2 If you cried out "without waiting for any question", what would the world hear?
- 3 What do you want to free yourself from?
- 4 Where would you like to sing in this way? Who would you like to hear you?
- 5 If the earth was like "the topography of [your] face", what kind of landscapes would we see?
- 6 What other earth would you like to "conceal in [your] chest"?
- 7 Describe the sound of the "tree that sings"?  
Think of a place where you've seen the sea.  
What does this sea write about in "its memoirs each dawn"?

- Now reread each verse, and rewrite them – cutting, amending or adding material as you see fit.
- You might select one of your verses, and develop it into a poem, forgetting about the rest; or you might combine images and phrases from a number of verses in a new way to make a new poem.
- With regard to how your poem relates to Saadiah Muffareh's poem, use the principal of "link and shift" – link your own poem to it in some way, but shift away from it in others.

# Weblinks & Further Reading

The poem 'My Dreams Often Humble Themselves', representing Kuwait, is part of The Written World – a collaboration between the Scottish Poetry Library and BBC radio to broadcast a poem from every single nation competing in London 2012.

[www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/my-dreams-often-humble-themselves](http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/my-dreams-often-humble-themselves)

'My Dreams Often Humble Themselves' on the SPL website

[www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/about/projects-partners/written-world](http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/about/projects-partners/written-world)

Other poems selected for The Written World

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

Magazine of modern Arab literature

[www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14644252](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14644252)

Kuwait country profile

[www.guardian.co.uk/world/kuwait](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/kuwait)

Recent news articles featuring Kuwait

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*This is one of twelve resources, written by Ken Cockburn for the Scottish Poetry Library's project The Written World, May 2012.*

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

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