

# Poetry 2012: The Written World



## Resources for Teachers

Country: Saint Lucia

Poet: Derek Walcott

Poem: 'This page is a cloud...'

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# About this Resource

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

## **Developing global citizens within Curriculum for Excellence**

These resources, featuring poems from around the world, can help realise certain key principles within this document, including

- *enabling learners to appreciate the values and opinions of others with particular reference to environments and cultures*
- *motivating learners to engage in local, national and global issues*
- *promoting the concept of shared humanity*
- *actively engaging [learners] in exploring a variety of traditions and cultures from around the world*

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' and 'Creative Activity' topics below may also be relevant to Geography, in the context of "[bringing] together the natural and social sciences".

# 'This page is a cloud...'

This page is a cloud between whose fraying edges  
a headland with mountains appears brokenly  
then is hidden again until what emerges  
from the now cloudless blue is the grooved sea  
and the whole self-naming island, its ochre verges,  
its shadow-plunged valleys and a coiled road  
threading the fishing villages, the white, silent surges  
of combers along the coast, where a line of gulls has arrowed  
into the widening harbour of a town with no noise,  
its streets growing closer like print you can now read,  
two cruise ships, schooners, a tug, ancestral canoes,  
as a cloud slowly covers the page and it goes  
white again and the book comes to a close.

Derek Walcott

from *White Egrets* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010)

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Notes: The poem, untitled but numbered '54', is the final poem in the collection *White Egrets*.

## The Poet & His Work

Derek Walcott was born in 1930 in Saint Lucia. His father died when he and his twin brother were young, and they were raised by their mother who ran a Methodist school on the predominantly Catholic island. A playwright as well as a poet, Walcott moved to Trinidad in the 1950s, where he founded the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, and also taught for many years in the US at Boston University. His *Collected Poems 1948–1984* was published in 1986, while *Omeros*, an ambitious work reimagining the Trojan War in a Caribbean setting, appeared in 1990. Walcott was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. *White Egrets* is his fourteenth collection of poems, and won the T.S. Eliot Prize in 2011.

## Reading the Poem

- Read the poem aloud. Are there any sections you stumble over, or does it flow well? How would you describe its rhythms and rhymes?
- The poem can be separated into two parts – an opening and closing ‘frame’, and the central ‘image’. Where does the ‘image’ begin and end? What does the ‘frame’ consist of, and what does it add to the poem?
- The poem is a portrait of an island, probably Saint Lucia, where Walcott was born. What do you learn about the island?
- The poem presents images, but denies them any sound (‘the white, silent surges’ in l.7, and ‘a town with no noise’ in l.9). Why do you think the poet insists on this silence?
- Why do you think there are no people in the poem?

## Reading the poem

(continued)

- *White Egrets* was published in 2010, the year in which the poet turned 80. Does the poem contain any indications that it is written by an old man?
- What is the dominant colour of the poem? How does this affect your reading of it?
- How would you describe the way the poet uses rhyme in the poem? Look at the way he uses full rhymes, visual rhymes and half-rhymes.
- Now *measure* the poem, that is count its verses, lines, beats, syllables, sentences. Are its measures regular or irregular? How does this affect the way you consider the images which the poem presents?

## Discussion

- Talk about islands you have visited, and how you have got there. What are their main natural features – hills, rivers, forests, moors, deserts, and so on? What are their main man-made features – harbours, towns, defensive features, gardens and so on?
- If you live by the coast, describe the different kinds of boats you see passing, or at anchor in harbour.
- If you have visited a Caribbean island, what would you say are the main differences between it and Scotland? Think about your senses – so as well as sights and colours, think about sounds, smells, tastes and textures.

# Research Activity

Write a short biographical essay on Derek Walcott (about 500 words).

Draw your information from a range of sources.

- There is material by and about Walcott on some of the webpages listed below at *Further Reading & Weblinks*, which themselves have links to other sites.
- You can also use printed sources, such as Walcott's own books, or general reference works such as *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (2006).

Write your essay in four sections:

- a summary of Derek Walcott's life to date – where he has lived, the jobs he has done, and so on
- a summary of his publications, and the awards he has received
- “in his own words” – quote from his poems or essays, or from interviews he has given, to highlight important aspects of his life and work
- “the critical reception” – choose one or two quotes written by reviewers or critics, and say how and why you think these sum up his achievements.

# Creative Activity

Write a poem which is a portrait of a place you know well. It could be an island, as in Derek Walcott's poem, or an inland place. (You can include sounds and people too if you like!)

Make some notes before you start, about such things as

- nearby hills or mountains
- buildings, whether residential, industrial, cultural or religious
- transport – ships, motor vehicles, bicycles, planes, foot
- what's farmed locally – crops and livestock
- birds and other creatures
- sounds and colours

Then use your notes to help write your poem.

- Begin and end your poem with clouds – which clear to reveal an image of the place, and then return and cover it.
- Write the poem as a single sentence, to create the sense that everything is connected. (Rhyme can also help create that interconnectedness, but concentrate on your images first, and then consider if and how rhyme might strengthen their impact.)
- Look at the place from a distance, and describe the landscape's main features – is it by the sea, overlooked by mountains, surrounded by farmland, ringed by motorways?
- Gradually come closer, as if you were zooming in with a camera, and describe it in more detail – large buildings for instance, or squares or parks where people gather. Think too about any sounds that are becoming audible.
- Finally, focus on a specific detail which is somehow typical of the place – something everyday and undramatic.
- Read the poem aloud – does it work in terms of sound and rhythm?

## Further Reading & Weblinks

The poem 'This page is a cloud...', representing Saint Lucia, 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/about/projects-partners/written-world](http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/about/projects-partners/written-world)

All the poems selected for The Written World – to find that for Saint Lucia, click on Saint Lucia on the map, or on the 'South America' icon below the map

[www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/)

Walcott won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992

[www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/derek-walcott](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/derek-walcott)

Biography, extensive bibliography and several poems

[www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/24/white-egrets-derek-walcott-ts-eliot-prize](http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/24/white-egrets-derek-walcott-ts-eliot-prize)

Three poems from *White Egrets*

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country\\_profiles/1210491.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1210491.stm)

Saint Lucia country profile

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

Recent news articles about Saint Lucia

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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)