

THE FREMANTLE PRESS ANTHOLOGY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN POETRY

JOHN KINSELLA AND TRACY RYAN

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CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia; Sustainability

ABOUT THE BOOK

The *Fremantle Press Anthology of Western Australian Poetry* is a comprehensive survey of the state's poets from the 19th century to today. Edited and with an insightful and illuminating introduction by John Kinsella and Tracy Ryan, this watershed volume features work from 134 poets, bringing together poems from the city and the regions, the coast and the interior, war poems, peace poems, personal poems and public poems – poems that have contributed to and defined the way that Western Australians see themselves. In sweep and diversity, it offers much for the poetry reader in general in this showcase of talent from the west.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

John Kinsella is the author of many books of poetry, fiction and criticism. He has also written for the stage. He is a frequent collaborator with other poets, critics, fictionalists, artists, musicians, labourers, activists and friends. John Kinsella is a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University, and Professor of Literature and Sustainability at Curtin University.

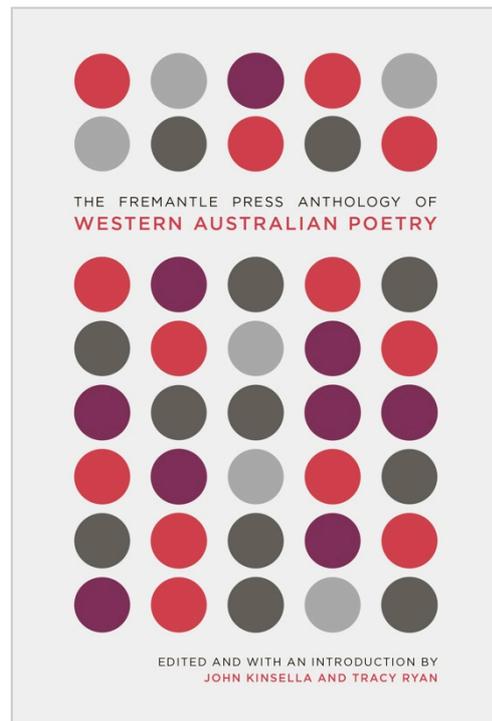
Tracy Ryan has published four novels and eight books of poetry. She has twice received the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for poetry. Her other awards include the *Australian Book Review's* Peter Porter Poetry Prize, and the *Times Literary Supplement's* Poems on the Underground Competition. Tracy Ryan has a strong interest in languages and translation.

AN APPROACH TO TEACHING THIS TEXT

As an anthology, this text reaches across a cultural history of Western Australia to highlight the manner in which poetry has changed. As such, it allows for discussions of various poetic forms as well as a broader conversation about shifting cultural norms. The opportunities for teaching creative writing in the classroom through this text are wonderfully rich and varied.

Ideally, any approach to this text would be placed within the context of its construction – the concept of collecting and recording culture through the anthology form. The introductory essay speaks to this process (pp. 18–19). Topics for discussion might include:

1. What are the choices that the editors made in this collection? What was actively included/excluded? How do these choices reflect an understanding of Western Australian poetry as a specific cultural form?
2. Can you create a definition of Western Australian poetry, based on the collected works?
3. What is important, for instance, about the inclusion of Indigenous poets? What is important about the use of colonial newspapers in finding poems? What is important about including contemporary free verse/experimental poetry?



In reading, these broader ideas will support a more detailed understanding of how the poetic form has shifted across time, and how we might respond to the shift as demonstrating a specific culture. It also allows for recognition of the difference in poetic forms in the anthology.

THE CREATIVE APPROACH – POESIS

The structure of the anthology opens up many possibilities for critical discussion and analysis. But it also offers the possibility of creative response, which represents an engaging and imaginative point of entry to the wider ideas in text. For example, analysing different poetic forms offers the possibility of generating specific creative responses.

This requires some awareness of poesis – the mode of expression taken up by poetry – as distinct from expression in prose. Highlight poesis as a mode both through the effect it has of demanding the reader be involved in imagining and interpreting, and through the specific techniques it employs. For junior students, things like **rhyme, rhythm, and verse form**. For middle-school students, those as well as things like **sustained figurative language (extended metaphors), enjambment, imagery**. For senior students, those as well as more complex techniques like **metre, syntax and parataxis, alliteration, assonance and chiasmus**. Through this, illustrate that poetry needs to be read in a different way to prose – it gives much more freedom for interpretation, as it is often **polysemic**, holding different ideas or meanings in concert.

(*The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* is a good resource with an online component:

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272>)

1. Compare a poem from the first part of the collection, illustrating colonial forms, and one from the latter part, illustrating contemporary technique. (Dorham Doolette's 'The Ballade of Cottesloe Beach' (p. 109) and David Brook's 'The Pines, Cottesloe' (p. 256) make a good pairing.) Discuss how the poetic form has shifted, and what techniques have disappeared/emerged as dominant. What does this change in our reading?
2. Demonstrate polysemy through a close reading, pitched at the appropriate level. Miriam Wei Wei Lo's 'Don't Call Me Grandma' (p. 318), for example, is about both the grandmother and the grandchildren, their relationship, their experiences of the space. Ask students in groups to come up with a list of the possible meanings/ideas/themes within the poem. Discuss whether these ideas are in conflict, exist in concert, and what either option lends to the poem.

DESIGNING CREATIVE EXERCISES

Moving from these analytical and critical discussions gives a strong basis for instigating creative response. Tie all exercises to a specific poetic example, and support with analysis. Focus on a primary aspect of poetic practice in designing exercises, until students are confident enough to combine multiple techniques.

Developing technique

1. Rhyme: Provide students with the first stanza of W.C. Thomas' 'The Terrace' (p. 103). In conversation, identify the rhyme, the rhythm and the scene. (Note the emphasis on importance and grandeur in the imagery.) Set students the task of writing a second and third stanza in the same rhyming style, potentially focusing on the people seen on the street. (Ask junior students to come up with possible rhyming couplets first.)
2. Concrete Form: Poetry is shaped differently on the page to any other text, and offers enormous flexibility in shape. Look at William Hart Smith's 'Razor Fish' (p. 131), and the manner in which it uses enjambment to imitate its subject. Ask students to do the same with an animal of their choice.
3. Concrete Form: Poetry also uses white space as a distinct aspect of the textual experience. Look at Edwin Greenslade Murphy's 'The Lodes that Under-lie' (p. 92) and the manner in which the final line recedes into the page. It is both humorous and pointed, speaking of a hard reality for many men in the diggings. For more senior students, look at Jackson's 'am I not?' (p. 305). This poem speaks of drawing as a process, bringing the creature into being. The same could be said of Jackson's writing, which is emphasised by her use of the short stanza, which when alone on a page is surrounded by empty space. Ask students to write a conversation between two voices, utilising questions as Jackson does, where the voices trail off into silence.

4. Form: There are no boundaries to poetic form. An instance of prose poetry, Liana Joy Christensen's 'Idiom' (p. 267), shows how it can go against expectations of verse, for example. What is the effect of this writing? How does it play with the idiom 'cracking hardy' (disguising one's discomfort)? Ask students to write a prose poem describing in detail a space they are familiar with, and the people who inhabit it.
5. Metre: Analyse the iambic heptameter in the first verse of Alfred Chandler's 'Lights Along the Mile' (p. 78). Often, the stresses on feet (paired syllables) are reversed, to play with emphasis and pace. (Count with da-DUM and DUM-da.) Give students the first line of a subsequent verse – the fifth is a good one, as all the stresses are even – and ask them to complete the couplet.
6. Free form: Compare this structured verse to any of the free form poems, more regularly found in contemporary writing. What has changed in the experience of the poem? Does the reader have to interpret more? Is the sense of a narrative altered? Ask students to describe the same scene from the first verse of Chandler's poem in free form, no rhyme, but using enjambment to create emphasis on important images.
7. Free form: Build from poetry in the collection towards wider creative exercises. Give students a poem in an unrecognisable language, and ask them to 'translate' it, based on how they interpret the sounds. This can be a very funny and silly exercise. Use this to lead into a discussion of how sound shapes meaning, and how sound functions in any of the poems in the collection.

Developing thematic awareness

Several themes emerge through the collection – Kinsella and Ryan highlight key points of focus in the introductory essay. Configuring analysis across these themes can be supported by related creative exercises investigating the same ideas from a personal perspective. The following are some examples, but several exercises above can also be adapted according to theme through the selection of relevant poems.

Theme: Places – Rural and Urban

1. Choose a selection of poems that describe different places, and ask the students to each select one. Ask students to select key images from their chosen poem, and compile them as a class into two lists – one urban spaces, one rural. Challenge students to write their own scenes using a selection of at least five words from either list.
2. Ask students to choose a place they remember visiting as a child, and write as much as they can about it in one minute. (Guide them through this by asking them to think about the five senses in turn, and what details they associate with the place.) Examining Elizabeth Brockman's 'On Receiving From England a Bunch of Dried Wild Flowers' (p. 56), discuss the way in which she compares England and Australia through personal memory. (See also the introduction, pp. 30–33.) Ask students to create a poem in comparing the details they remembered about the place to the classroom they are sitting in.
3. Read Glen Phillip's 'Fourteen Tankas for Salt-Lake Country' (p. 189). Discuss the intimate detail in each, and the specificity of the form in writing about place. Discuss too how a narrative emerges in the series. Challenge students to write a series of their own in the same style, about their home or a place important to them, expressing their connection to that place.
4. Look at Caroline Caddy's 'Lake Grace' (p. 217). How does Caddy use form to create an intensity in the depiction of mundane life? Encourage students to write about their own mundane reality in the same style, and discuss what emerges.

Theme: History

1. Take John Boyle O'Reilly's poem 'The Gaol' (p. 66) and discuss the representation of convict incarceration that it makes. Who is the poem sympathetic with? Ask students to re-write the poem in free form, from the convict's perspective. (For senior students, set the challenge of imitating the rhyme and metre of the original.)
2. Discuss the predominance of archetypal images, stereotypes and idioms in colonial representations of Australia and the bush. Use poems like Henry Ebenezer Clay's 'Two and Two' (p. 67), and Mary Doyle's 'Perth in Morning Light' (p. 83) to illustrate. Ask students to choose one stereotype and write a story turning it into something unexpected or showing the reality behind it. Compare this writing to Mudrooroo's 'Images/Artytypes/Stereotypes' (p. 195) and discuss the political dimension to such writing as invoked in this poem.

3. Read Oscar Walters' '17 and '32' (p. 115). Ask students to research the references in the poem to the places around Perth. Ask them to choose either Blackboy Hill or Myalup, imagine it at the moment the poem refers to and describe it creatively.

Theme: Political Poetry/Activist Poetics

1. John Kinsella, a co-editor for the collection, is both a poet and an activist. (He has published extensive research speaking to this, and shares an activist and poetic blog with Tracy Ryan.) Ask students to research Kinsella's work online, and then analyse his poem 'Goat' (p. 297) in the collection in terms of the ecopolitics it embodies.
2. There are several Indigenous poets in the collection, including Mingkarlajirri, Miriny-Mirinyarra Jingkiri, Yintilypirna Kaalyamarra, Jack Davis, Alf Taylor, Sally Morgan, Kim Scott and Charmaine Papertalk-Green. Poetry offers a freedom of expression across cultures and (as is often shown here in translation) languages. Discuss the different themes and ideas that these poems give outlet to, and ask students to choose one before writing in poetic form a response to the poet.
3. Ask students to read and discuss Charmaine Papertalk-Green's 'A White Australia Mindset' (p. 291) and engage with the political message it carries. How does this poem articulate the damage caused by racism? How does writing offer victims of racism a space to represent their struggle? Encourage students to identify other circumstances wherein writing can give a voice to those underrepresented.
4. Kinsella and Ryan's introductory essay speaks to the tensions and the power of collecting Indigenous writing within the text (pp. 23–24, 43–44). Encourage students to discuss some of these aspects of engagement with culture, and what the collection represents for Indigenous culture in this light. How does poetry serve as "a tool for community, empathy, strength, illumination and healing" (p. 44)? Ask students to write a single verse depicting something essential or unavoidable about their own culture or community.
5. There are several migrant poets in the collection as well. Afeif Ismail is a Sudanese poet, playwright and human rights activist who migrated to Australia in 2003. He writes in Arabic and English. The poem 'The Empire of my Grandmother' (p. 284) has been 'transcreated' with Vivienne Glance. This suggests a translation process that involved the translator actively in the writing. Discuss the manner in which creative writing gives a reader access to the experience of another culture in reading the poem. Can writing transcend all boundaries? Debate the question in class.

ERRATUM: please note that the poem 'Wheatbelt' by Caroline Caddy, which appears on p. 219 of the anthology, is incomplete.

The poem in full can be viewed at

www.fremantlepress.com.au/products/the-fremantle-press-anthology-of-western-australian-poetry

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