



INTERNATIONAL  
WRITING PROGRAM

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**Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Poetry and Plays**

Week 4: Foundation Video – Transcript

>>[text on screen: Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Poetry and Plays]

>>[text on screen] Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Poetry and Plays. Week 4: Introduction.

>>[text on screen: We are proud to bring you the perspectives of authors from around the world and trust that you will find their perspectives valuable. Because some of the contributing authors are nonnative speakers of English, we suggest that you turn on video captions. You can turn on captions by clicking the “cc” button at the bottom right of the video.]

>>[text on screen: Glossary of Terms on Week 4 Page.]

>>During our class videos, you may hear our poets and playwrights use terms that are new to you. We've created a list of key terms and definitions that you can refer to at any point during our video lectures. This list is available on the videos and readings class page where you can read it or download it as a PDF. If you would like to find and review these terms while you watch each class video, you can stop this video, go back to the videos and readings class page, and download the PDF. There you can play this video and each of the following class videos. If you have any questions about these terms, we encourage you to ask your teaching team in the weekly class discussions.

>>Welcome back. We are still in Block B and this is Week 4, and the theme this week is connecting and expressing identities, a continuation of last week. We're looking at how communities may be leveraged to support or repress expression as personal and cultural identities. And the craft topics are, for this week, experimental structures. Right now we're asking ourselves, what happens when we dismiss traditional structures? Where do we go from there? What do we, how do we re-envision the structure of a new play that's in an experimental form? Part of this has to do with what is the form, and what is the topic of the form, and who is the person, the writer, and who is the community that that writer is writing for and trying to reach. One example of this is like throwing out the old ways of thinking of beginning, middle, and end. Old ways of looking at protagonists as a hero and someone we want to identify with. And also old ways of even thinking about how a structure works. So one example of this is when Brecht took on the, moved from Aristotelian thinking into epic thinking, no longer wanting to think about the protagonist as someone we wanna identify with, but looking at corrupt humans in a corrupt time. Not everyone was heroic. So, and for example, *Mother Courage*, as a way to survive the war, he looks at 12 years, and each scene is a different year. So 12 scenes and 12 years in order to follow her arc across the Thirty Years' War.

>>Well, in a similar fashion, if you dispense with the traditional elements of making a poem, meter, or rhyme, traditional forms, then you are in a whole new world, and how to make sense out of all of that. W.H. Auden famously said that only D.H. Lawrence seemed to have the ear to be able to

dispense with traditional forms and write free verse. But over the last century or so, we have seen in any number of literary traditions, consummate poets taking their cues from avant-garde movements in their time from different ways of thinking about the world and creating new forms, nonce forms. I'm thinking particularly of Garcia Lorca who wrote a wonderful book of poems during his nearly year-long visit to New York, called *A Poet in New York*, and he's got a poem called "The King of Harlem," which begins:

"With a spoon  
he scooped out crocodiles' eyes and whacked monkeys' backsides.  
With a spoon.

"The fire of forever slept in the flints  
and beetles drunk on anis  
forgot the village moss.

"The old mushroom-covered man  
went to where the blacks wept  
while the king's spoon crackled  
and tanks of putrid water arrived."

Now you might not quite understand what all is going on there, even as you are kind of amazed by the amped-up language, the different images and metaphors that he will create. But just the repetition of that word spoon. "With a spoon, with a spoon." And then the king's spoon. You realize that he's creating a form in which the repetition of a single word can begin to hold the poem together. So this week we'll be looking at ways in which you can take traditional forms and then blow them up and start anew. And once you have begun to imagine yourself in a new structural realm, you've created new parameters for the poem, you wanna think about how you can make that poem hang together. So much of writing is experimental, whether you're working in traditional or open forms. And that's the great freedom of the form, the great freedom of writing: to see where the language will take you. Onward.

>>[text on screen: This program was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the U.S Department of State and by the University of Iowa.]

>>[logos on screen: American Flag, Department of State, University of Iowa]