

## International Conversation Cafe

Lifestyle Topic: Poetry

Poetry is written, read, and loved throughout the world, in many languages. The United Nations declared a World Poetry Day in 1999, to be observed annually on March 21<sup>st</sup>. Here is the declaration stated by the UN.

Poetry reaffirms our common humanity by revealing to us that individuals, everywhere in the world, share the same questions and feelings. Poetry is the mainstay of oral tradition and, over centuries, can communicate the innermost values of diverse cultures.

Restate the declaration in your own words.

The poet Galway Kinnell described it this way, "To me, poetry is someone standing up, so to speak, and saying, with as little concealment as possible, what is it for him or her to be on earth at this moment."

*How would you describe or define poetry?*

*How does it differ from other forms of literature?*

*Is poetry important in your culture?*

*How did you first encounter poetry?*

*Do you think that reading poetry is important? Why?*

*Each person should take a moment to look up one or two poems on their phone.*

- 1. A personal favorite*
- 2. A poem which was written by an iconic poet either from your home country or written in your first language.*

Go around the circle and after each person reads their first poem of choice. If the poem is long, please choose two or three paragraphs from it to read. If the poem was originally written in the reader's first language, please read part or all (if it is short) in that language before reading it in English. The group may choose questions from the prompts below to discuss the poem. After a short discussion, move on to the next poem.

Questions to discuss after reading a poem:

- What do you notice in this poem? What stood out to you?*
- What image, sound, or phrase do you enjoy the most?*
- What do you think the poem is about?*
- What do you find elusive or difficult to understand?*
- How does this poem intersect with your life or your background?*
- How is this poem altered by the translation?*
- Whom would you give this poem to, and why?*

If you would like to try out the process before finding your own poems, here is one to start you off:

### **Remembering**

by Rainer Maria Rilke

And you wait, are awaiting the one thing  
that will infinitely increase your life;  
the powerful, the uncommon,  
the awakening of stones,  
depths turned towards you.

Dimly there gleams in the bookcase  
the volumes in gold and brown;  
and you think of the lands journeyed through,  
of pictures, of the apparel  
of women lost again.

And you know all at once: That was it.  
You arise, and before you stands  
a bygone year's  
anguish and form and prayer.