

SYNOPSIS

Fishing for Lightning: The spark of poetry is a collection of short essays that focus on the style, techniques and compositions of notable Australian poets. Initially published as weekly columns in the Weekend Australian, Sarah Holland-Batt's essays demystify and explain various forms of poetry, along with a multitude of literary devices used by poets to make sense of the human experience. By sharing with readers how to understand and appreciate poetry, this collection is both accessible and highly engaging.

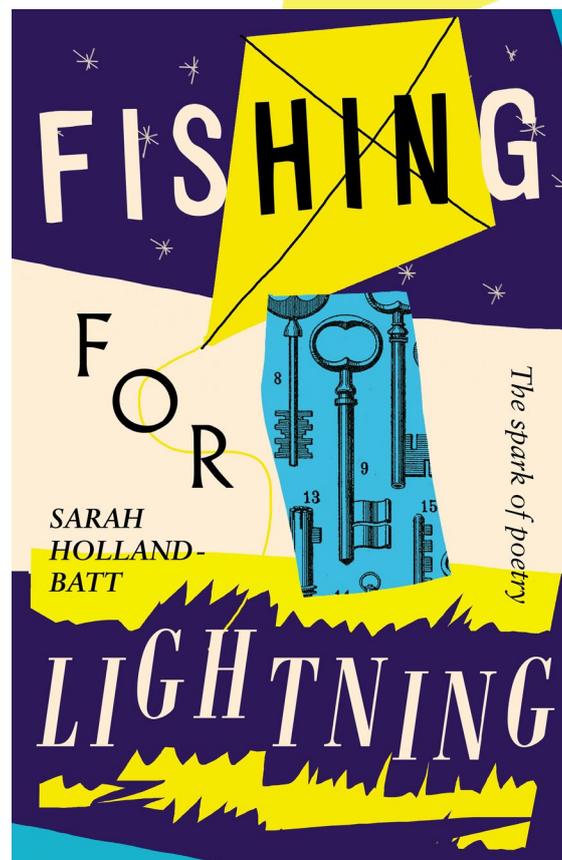
THEMES (include but not limited to)

- Colonisation; Empire-building; Dispossession of First Nations people
- Migration; Diaspora; Identity
- Landscapes; Environment
- Art; Music
- Science; Mathematics
- Politics
- Satire
- Death; Mortality; Grief
- Daily Life

WRITING STYLE

Each essay focuses on a particular poet's most recent book, with an introduction to their work, together with a selected poem from this collection. The oeuvres of influential poets' writing and the historical background to the works contextualise each column, with poetic forms and devices explained with erudition. Sarah Holland-Batt's love for poetry is infectious, and her insights offer a conduit between intellectual analysis and readers who may have previously balked at poetry. Indeed, the entries scaffold new understandings and offer readers the space and impetus to slow down and pay attention. In a secondary school setting, *Fishing for Lightning* is relevant to teachers and students alike, and is especially applicable to the Senior Years English curriculum.

Fishing for Lightning: The spark of poetry by Sarah Holland-Batt



BOOK DETAILS

C-format paperback | 978 0 7022 6337 8
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Holland-Batt is an award-winning poet, editor and critic, and an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at QUT. Her poetry collections *Aria* (UQP, 2008) and *The Hazards* (UQP, 2015) were recipients of a number of national, prestigious literary awards. She is the recipient of a Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship, the W.G. Walker Memorial Fulbright Scholarship, residencies at Yaddo and MacDowell colonies in the United States, the Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship, an Asialink Literature residency in Japan, and an Australia Council Literature Residency at the B.R. Whiting Studio in Rome, among other honours.

Teachers' notes prepared by Christina Wheeler, who is a practising teacher librarian with a background in the Australian curriculum (English).

USING THE TEXT

The following **Study Notes** provide suggestions for implementing the ideas presented in *Fishing for Lightning* inside the classroom. Many of these activities are easily adaptable to each of the essays and poems within the text.

Teachers are advised to read the essays and accompanying poems before introducing the related concepts to students. Many of the columns include quotes or theses about poetry that can be supported (or refuted) through robust discussion within the classroom, depending on content and context.

At times, you may prefer students to firstly read, enjoy and analyse the poems before unpacking the essays' explanations. At others, it may be more fitting to use Sarah Holland-Batt's insights as a launch pad for the conversations that ensue. Either way, it is prudent to curate a glossary of the metalanguage used in the text to give students a suitable vocabulary to use when discussing poetry.

Finally, there is much scope for students to create their own poetry, modifying the ideas and influences from the essays to undertake their own writing.

STUDY NOTES

General

- Why is 'fishing for lightning ... a perfect metaphor for what readers of poetry do' (p.1)?
- Discuss Auden's comment that 'poetry makes nothing happen' (p.3). What is seen as a virtue of this literary form?
- Discuss how poetry both denotes and connotes the poet's ideas (pp.3–4).
- What are the commonalities between poetry and music (p.5)?
- Using a poem of your choice from *Fishing for Lightning*, discuss Archibald MacLeish's dictum: 'A poem should not mean / But be' (p.11).
- There are several elegies included in *Fishing for Lightning*. Choose two or more to compare (see index).

STUDY NOTES

General

- Discuss the idea that 'knowing how to impress the empty future is a tough task' (p.23). Which poets, in your opinion, have successfully achieved this? How?
- Sarah Holland-Batt cites some of her favourite poetic lines in her essays, such as those by Emily Dickinson (pp.28, 94, 244–245). As you explore poetry, curate your own personal favourites.
- Using evidence to support your thinking, discuss the following statement: 'Paradoxically, the pressures imposed by forms can be liberating' (p.49).
- Choose a poetic style, poet and poem on which to write your own column suitable for inclusion in *Fishing for Lightning*.
- With reference to her elaboration, discuss Gertrude Stein's declaration: 'There is no such thing as repetition' (p.134).
- Respond to the following by Sarah Holland-Batt (p.151):

'One of the joys of reading a poem for the first time lies in deciphering just who is speaking to us, and why. Poetry comes as a voice from the void ... a seafarer's message in a bottle tossed into the ocean, found by its reader years or centuries later. Reading a poem is a search for the seafarer's identity: an act of tracing the voice back to its source.'

- How has your approach to reading poetry changed after reading *Fishing for Lightning*? What advice would you give someone who is just beginning to 'pay attention to poetry' (p.1)?

Responding & Creating (selected essays and poems)

World Poetry Day: On Judith Beveridge

- What is meant by the term 'nuances of language'? How do poets 'exploit' these (p.5)?
- How does reading poetry help us to 'rediscover the pleasures of analogue reading' (p.6)? Why is this especially pertinent in the age of digital texts?
- How is Beveridge's poem 'Dusk' an example of her being 'a forensic observer of the natural world' (p.6)? How are similes, metaphors and imagery used to allow readers to visualise this scene? Use examples from the poem to support your ideas.

STUDY NOTES

World Poetry Day: On Judith Beveridge (continued)

- In what way is 'Dusk' (p.8) a metaphor for human mortality?

Concrete Poetry: On Stuart Cooke

- Read the extracts of Cook's poetry aloud. How do they 'evoke the sounds of the natural world' (pp.11, 13)?
- With the intention of 'replicating the songs of the natural world', create your own concrete poem (pp. 9–11) in response to the lyre birds clustering together after the Black Summer bushfires (see: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-30/lyrebirds-band-together-to-avoid-approaching-bushfire/11910666>)
- What is the significance of the names of the birds in 'Lake Mungo' (p.13) beginning to 'disintegrate, losing a letter here and there' (p.12)?
- In small groups, locate other examples of 'concrete' or 'shape' poetry to share and discuss.

Poetry and Science: On Tricia Dearborn

- How do metaphors serve as 'a bridge between scientific and ordinary languages' (p.15)?
- How does Dearborn share the impact of the elements in '[82] Lead' (pp.15–18)?

The Ode: On Jill Jones

- Using the essay's description of 'Laundromat Near the Corner of Passage Alexandrine' (p.22), annotate this poem, aligning Sarah Holland-Batt's explanation of meaning and devices to the respective lines of the text. In a voice recording, explain what is happening in the poem, and how this has been achieved. Share with a partner.

Incongruous Pleasures: On Aidan Coleman

- What does Sarah Holland-Batt mean when she says, 'Coleman's poems ... present as a series of incongruous detonations, unexpected and pleasurable' (p.24)?

STUDY NOTES

Incongruous Pleasures: On Aidan Coleman (continued)

- Why and how is sardonic humour used in 'Barbarian Studies' (p.26)?

The Elegy: On Brendan Ryan

- Compare Auden's 'Funeral Blues' with Ryan's 'A Father's Silences' (pp.31–32).
- Why has Sarah Holland-Batt described Ryan's poems as 'muscular' (p.29)?
- Innovate on 'A Father's Silences' by writing a verse from one of the daughters' points of view.

The Sonnet: On Judith Bishop

- The sonnet is described as 'purpose-built for the subtle exploration of emotions, such as love and loss' (p.40). How is this evident in Bishop's '14 Weeks' (p.42)? How is it also true for other sonnets, such as those written by Shakespeare?

The Movement of Metaphor: On Anthony Lawrence

- Using the description of 'Murmuration' (pp.45–46), discuss the use of visual and aural devices to reveal different perspectives. In what ways is this poem a 'harmonious marriage of form and content' (p.46)?

The Villanelle: On Sarah Day

- How and why is repetition used in villanelles (p.50)?
- Discuss 'Sea Ice' (p.52) using the notes from the essay to help frame your conversations.
- How has onomatopoeia (p.51) been used to replicate the sounds of sea ice cracking?
- How has Day used perspective to convey her meaning (p.51)?

STUDY NOTES

The Poem's Speaker: On Prithvi Varatharajan

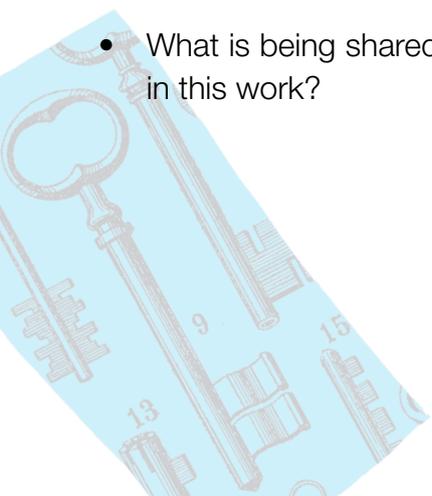
- How has poetry been used to address themes of diaspora, migration and the straddling of 'multiple cultures' for those who 'have a footprint in more than one country'(p.62)?
- Varatharajan's work is described as 'diaristic and anecdotal, almost redolent of journal writing' (p.64). After analysing 'Inner-City Reflection', write your own prose poem that reflects your place within your community.

A History of Place: On Lisa Gorton

- View the following YouTube clip about magic lantern slides, or search for sites showcasing this technology at The Great Exhibition of 1851 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1fUSqH5op8>). How does the poem 'Landscape with Magic Lantern Slides' (pp.76–77) replicate the flickering of photographs projected by this device? How is this used to comment on 'our glimmering visions of the future' (p.75)?
- What comment is Lisa Gorton making about empire-building through her poem? How has she achieved this?

Indigenous Poetry: On 'Fire Front'

- How do Indigenous poets examine the 'ongoing impact of colonialism on Aboriginal communities' by dismantling and challenging the 'dispossession wrought by colonialism' (p.78)? Find examples from texts such as *Blakwork* (Magabala, 2018) and *Fire Front: First Nations poetry and power today* (UQP, 2020), written and edited by Alison Whittaker respectively, to support your thinking.
- Compare Ali Cobby Eckermann's 'Unearth' (p.82) with Lisa Gorton's 'Landscape with Magic Lantern Slides' (pp. 76–77). What are the commonalities between these poems?
- What is being shared about relationships to ancestors, kin and Country, as well as dispossession, in this work?



STUDY NOTES

The Sonnet Sequence: On Keri Glastonbury

- How is satire (p.84) used in Glastonbury's poetry?
- In 'The Pink Flamingo of Trespass' (p.87), what correlation is there between Glastonbury's 'false memories' (p.86) and social media?
- Write your own sonnet sequence sharing observations of your neighbourhood or home town.

The Readymade: On Toby Fitch

- Why does Sarah Holland-Batt say that rather than having readers slowly arrive at a metaphor, Fitch's poems 'ask you to cling on for your life' (p.90)? How does Fitch include 'mishearings ... deliberately misspelled homophones ... [and] deliberate hiccups' to achieve his purpose?
- Choose a 'readymade' object on which to base your own piece of poetry. In a style similar to Fitch's, collage and remix 'from pre-existing sources and found texts' (p.89) to create your text.

Animal Language: On Siobhan Hodge

- Read Hodge's 'Happy Valley Turnover' aloud. How does it replicate the 'echoing of pounding hooves' (p.101)?
- Using the essay as a guide, annotate 'Happy Valley Turnover' (pp.102–103), identifying the devices used to achieve the poem's desired effect.

The Fragment: On Antigone Kefala

- Using evidence from the essay, respond to Sarah Holland-Batt's comment that: 'Kefala's poems are supremely confident: composed of clean, terse lines ... austere and picked clean as bones' (p.113).
- Explain how the fragment has been successfully utilised in Kefala's 'On Loss' (p.116–117).

STUDY NOTES

Influence and Conversation: On Caitlin Maling

- Compare Maling's 'Calenture' (p.122) with Randolph Stow's poem of the same name. As an extension of this, respond to both works with your own poem entitled 'Calenture'.

Sound and Meter: On Felicity Plunkett

- Discuss the use of syllabification, alliteration and repetition (p.125) in 'Syzygy'.
- How has the 'rule of three' been used to effect in this poem (p.125)?
- Compare the poetry of E.E. Cummings with Plunkett's.

Poetry and Witness: On Jennifer Harrison

- This essay brings into question whether poetry of witness is more effectively written by those who've experienced suffering firsthand. Using evidence from 'Door 1' (pp.144–145), and a range of such poems, respond to this premise.
- Debate whether 'photography does "as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it"' (p.141). Use selected photographs to further stimulate this discussion.
- After viewing Ben Quilty's paintings of soldiers on tour in Afghanistan (<https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/quilty/portraits>), discuss Harrison's description of veterans 'vague with distance' (p.142). (NB: An Education Kit of Quilty's work is downloadable at this site.)

The Pantoum: On Emma Lew

- Take notes about the poetic form known as the pantoum. See examples of this form from this essay (pp.151–156).
- Write your own pantoum.

STUDY NOTES

The Line: On Robert Adamson

- Read p.157, where Sarah Holland-Batt states 'the poetic line is the single most important tool at a poet's disposal'. Considering this essay, discuss the use of line in Adamson's 'Harsh Song' (p.161).

The Epistle: On Charmaine Papertalk Green

- Create your own 'life-journey suitcase', filled with letters, postcards, birthday cards and other keepsakes from your life. Use these as stimulus for writing about your connections with loved ones.
- Write a letter to your future self that shares your fears and aspirations.
- What does 'Family Food List' (p.172) share about the poet, her family and culture?

The Verse Novel: On Luke Best

- As a class, share verse novels such as *Ruby Moonlight* (Magabala, 2012) by Ali Cobby Eckermann, Steven Herrick's *The Simple Gift* (UQP, 2000) or *Silver People: Voices from the Panama Canal* (HMH Books, 2016) by Cuban–American Margarita Engle.
- After reading the essay, discuss Luke Best's portrayal of the 2011 South East Queensland floods in 'Cadaver Dog' (p.177–178).

Ekphrasis: On Laurie Duggan

- Ekphrasis is 'poetry that responds to visual art' (p.187). View the art of Georges Seurat (<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/27992/a-sunday-on-la-grande-jatte-1884> and <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437654>) to contextualise Sarah Holland-Batt's discussion of Duggan's poem 'Georges Seurat' (p.189). In pairs, make connections between the art and the poem.
- Choose an artwork on which to write your own ekphrasis.

STUDY NOTES

The Verse Biography: On John A Scott

- Choose a subject on whom to base a verse biography, using the example of Scott's 'The Last of Dora Maar' (p.223), together with Sarah Holland-Batt's analysis of this poetic form, to inform your work.

Reclaiming History: On Jeanine Leane

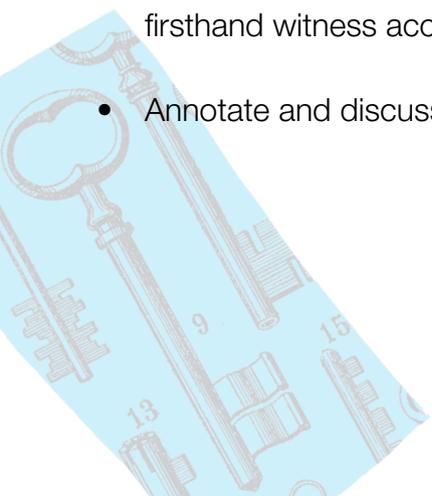
- How does Leane's 'Bridge over the River Memory' (pp.229–231) share the 'idea of the landscape being inscribed with history' (p.227)?
- What is the importance of First Nations' voices being heard through poetry?

The Haiku: On Beverley Farmer

- The haiku is described as 'the poetic equivalent of a photograph: impressionistic, vivid and brief, [aiming] to capture a moment in time' (p.235). How is this true of Farmer's 'A Body of Water' (pp.236–237)?
- Create your own haiku poem that captures a 'moment in time'.

The Political Poem: On Barry Hill

- Read and discuss Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est'. How does this poem successfully focus 'on a single moment from the frontline' (p.238)?
- How does Barry Hill challenge the notion that effective political poetry should be written from a firsthand witness account (p.239)?
- Annotate and discuss 'The Gusts' (p.243), using the essay to help scaffold your analysis.



STUDY NOTES

The Love Poem: On Adrienne Eberhard

- Study Shakespeare's 'My Mistress's Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun'. How is it a celebration of the subject's flaws?
- Discuss the asymmetry of love presented in Auden's 'If equal affection cannot be, / Let the more loving one be me' (p.246).

The Mystery of Language: On Meredith Wattison

- In reference to Wattison's 'I Start' (p.255), discuss Sarah Holland-Batt's assertion that 'Wattison's poems ... encourage the reader to puzzle over the strangeness and mystery of language' (p.253).

Poetry and Memory: On Todd Turner

- Turner's poems are described as 'image-heavy, [featuring] often elaborate and at times mixed metaphors' (p.258). Assess this assertion in his poem, 'Swept' (p.260).

The Satirical Impulse: On Ed Wright

- Create a portfolio of satirical pieces, including poetry, television programs (such as *Frontline*, *Shaun Micallef's Mad As Hell*, *The Hollowmen*) and political cartoons. Compare the rhetorical devices used in each. Use these examples to respond to the following extract from *Fishing for Lightning* (p.262):

'Satire is a broad church, encompassing everything from Swift's lacerating irony through to gentler lampooning, parody, hyperbole and caricature; most often it targets hypocrisy, vices or moral failings, especially when those qualities are on display among powerful figures or institutions. In this sense, satire has a moralising dimension: under the humour, there's a social critique at play.'