



First Poets

Guide for Curriculum Unit 24.03.03, published September 2024
by Damon Peterson

This unit curriculum is a close look at the world's first poets. Therefore, this curriculum will focus on both the writing traditions of the Sumerians and the Vedic Aryans. With regard to the Sumerians, the curriculum will focus on the writings of Enheduanna. Enheduanna was a priestess who lived nearly 3000 years ago in ancient Sumer. Ancient Sumer is also notable in the history of literacy as the Sumerian civilization developed the world's first writing system, cuneiform. Therefore, this moment in history will provide students the significant opportunity to explore both the development of writing as well as the world's first author and poet. Students will explore this tradition by looking closely at the history of the Sumerian civilization including how they developed the world's first writing system. Next, students will explore another formative and early writing tradition. This will be the Vedic Aryan tradition. The Vedic Aryans were formative poets in their own regard. For example, they have a long tradition of memorizing and reciting poetry by heart to pass it along from generation to generation. Current scholarship has not arrived at a consensus as to the historical period of these early poets. However, they are arguably relatively contemporary to the Sumerian tradition. Moreover, the poems recorded by the Vedic Aryans now comprise the heart and soul of Hindu theology. Together, these two cultures and their corresponding poems provide students a window onto the earliest forms of literacy and poetry. Through these poems students will discover an ancient thread, a theme, that has run through poetry from then until now. The unit will culminate in students writing their own poem, on a similar theme to those of the Sumerians and the Aryans, and students will celebrate and preserve their writing like the Sumerians and Aryans by dedicating the poems to stone (clay), heart, and mind.

(Developed for Social Studies/English Language Arts, grade 4; recommended for English Language Arts, Social Studies, and World History, secondary grades)

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