

## Introduction

Download the poem and listen to the audio recording. You can also download the comprehension activity.

This support pack contains the following materials:

- the poem that you can listen to in the podcast
- a comprehension activity

## Read the poem

### Poetry as a Foreign Language

by Mike Ramsden

"...Not really sure I'll get much out of it,  
Understand what's going on,"  
I whined and vacillated.  
I was assured he was big  
(Though not in size)  
Old, blind and from the capital.  
So in I went with the rest of the faculty  
To the biggest hall on campus,  
Packed with more than I'd ever seen before  
And when the applause started from the back  
And advanced with him to the front,  
It was not polite or respectful  
But loud and from beyond the palms of hands,  
And they were standing and clapping  
The old blind poet right up to the stage  
With videocams and flashlights on his face  
And I knew I'd not seen the likes of this before,  
And not only the intoning of the country's prayers  
But the readings from the campus luminaries,  
Strong declamatory stuff,  
Speaking to the audience. You could  
Tell this because they'd clap and cheer  
Right in the middle of the poet's flow.  
All this told me it was not like  
My home, my country,  
And when the old poet began...  
But why go on?

Well, yes, I told myself,  
A different tradition,  
An oral society, the public  
Gesture, their particular  
Stage of development,  
The revolution, nationhood.  
The excuses flooded in.  
Yes, I understood in the end.  
This was not British.  
This was not our language at all.

## After you read

### Exercise 1

Decide which is the best answer for each of the 3 questions below.

1. The person speaking at the beginning was ...
  - a. A campus luminary (an eminent teacher at the university)
  - b. The old blind poet
  - c. The writer of this poem
  
2. The audience in the hall were ...
  - a. Very enthusiastic – even ecstatic
  - b. Polite and restrained
  - c. Bored and apathetic
  
3. Listening to the poet and the audience, the author primarily felt ...
  - a. Depressed because his own culture was so different
  - b. Very moved and impressed, despite the difference
  - c. All at sea because he couldn't understand

### Answers

Exercise 1: 1. c; 2. a; 3. b