The Forward Prizes celebrate the very best in contemporary poetry. Recognizing both established and emerging poets, these prizes promote and showcase the diversity and vitality of modern poetry in the United Kingdom and Ireland. We invite you to explore the shortlists with this reading group guide ahead of the prize ceremony on 16th October at Leeds Playhouse. Reading groups can access group ticket discounts to hear the poets perform and find out the winners in each category at leedsplayhouse.org.uk

Exploring a poem

Overall Impression
1. Beyond specific themes and ideas, how did this poem personally resonate with you? Did it evoke any strong emotions or memories?
2. Is there a particular line, stanza, or image from this poem that you find especially memorable or impactful? Why does it stand out to you?

Themes/Ideas
1. Do you think this poem has contemporary relevance? Why or why not?
2. Are the themes and ideas in this poem universally relatable or specific to the poet's individual experience? How does this impact the poem's accessibility and significance?
3. Are there connections between the themes and ideas of this poem and other literature or academic disciplines you've encountered?

Style/Form
1. How would you describe the overall mood or tone of the poem?
2. Are there any metaphors or symbols or performative moments that stand out to you? What do you think they represent?
3. How does the narrative style of the poem affect your reading?

What are your final thoughts on this poem? How has your understanding or appreciation of it evolved through thinking about these questions?

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Best Collection Shortlist 2023

Jason Allen-Paisant
1. How is sight and viewership important in this poem? Why do you think Jason Allen-Paisant emphasizes this?
2. What do you think of the title Self Portrait as Othello and then the poem ‘The Picture and the Frame’? Why is rewriting canonical writing, such as Shakespeare’s Othello, valuable?
3. In an interview with Forward Prizes, Jason Allen-Paisant said that “Poetry was a way of reckoning with where I was from, which inevitably meant reckoning with colonialism, which was so legible in the spaces where I was.” How do you think the poet’s background, experiences, or cultural context might have influenced this poem?

Mary Jean Chan
1. What is Mary Jean Chan’s relationship to languages? What do you make of them invoking their mother in discussing this relationship?
2. In an interview with Forward Prizes, Mary Jean Chan said “while editing Bright Fear, I listened to Cantopop on repeat for inspiration”. Do you see a cross-cultural influence in the poems?
3. What do you think of the title ‘Ars Poetica’? What else can this allude to?

Jane Clarke
1. Jane Clarke talks about what her parents would have ‘preferred’ in ‘Spalls’. How does the idea of ‘alternatives’ influence the poem?
2. Would you consider this poem ‘queer writing’? How does it contribute to/expand the genre?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Jane Clarke says that “‘Spalls’ was the last one I completed for the book, which explores change, mutual acceptance and love in the relationship with my parents.” Can you identify these themes in the poem?
Kit Fan

1. How does the epigraph of *the poem* influence your reading?
2. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Kit Fan says that *Ink Cloud Reader* developed from “a sense of crisis at home here, and in my first home in Hong Kong”. How does this emerge in the poem?
3. How is the idea of creation present in this poem? Why do you think Kit Fan emphasizes this?

Elisabeth Sennitt Clough

- How does the title ‘*abecedarian for the vagina*’ influence your reading?
- How is the idea of conversation presented in this poem? Why do you think Elisabeth Sennitt Clough emphasizes this?
- In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Elisabeth Sennitt Clough said, “I am a fan of letting the line push and pull against the white space to create its own punctuation”. How does this play of form influence your reading of the poem?
Best First Collection Shortlist 2023

Susannah Dickey

1. What do you make of *Isdal* as a volume of poems that discuss a single unifying theme?
2. In ‘Outtake #3’ Susannah Dickey considers the idea of voyeurism. What stands out in this discussion to you?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Susannah Dickey said, “It was when I started to think about critiquing the means of depicting the Isdal Woman, rather than writing about her, that the book began to take shape.” How does this present in the poem?

Momtaza Mehri

1. How does the title of the poem ‘Fluke by Any Other Name is a Flight Number’ and the volume *Bad Diaspora Poems* influence your reading?
2. How does the lack of fullstops impact the poem?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Momtaza Mehri said her writing begins with “theoretical tussling”. What ‘theoretical tussles’ are apparent to you in this poem?

Rowan Evans

1. What do you make of the title ‘On Eglond’? How does the mixing of languages impact your reading?
2. Who do you think the ‘they’ are in the poem? Why do you think Rowan Evans writes about this ‘they’?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Rowan Evans said that this collection was created with many cross-genre and performance collaborations. Can you find any such indications in the poem?
Safiya Kamaria Kinshasa
1. What stands out about the structure of ‘Gully’? How does form impact your interpretation of the poem?
2. How does the epigraph of the poem influence your reading?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Safiya Kamaria Kinshasa discusses that her writing is influenced by researching and recording the choreography of Barbadian women on slave ships. How does the idea of ‘movement’ emerge in the poem?

Kandace Siobhan Walker
1. How does the epigraph of the poem influence your reading?
2. How does Kandace Siobhan Walker use repetition in the poem? Why do you think she makes this choice?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Kandance Siobhan Walker said poetry is making “feeling out of the accumulation of words and images”. How does this emerge in the poem?
Best Single Poem: Written
Shortlist 2023

Malika Booker
1. How does the title of the poem influence your reading?
2. How does the idea of ‘ritual’ impact the poem?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Malika Booker said “missing [her homeland] was like an all-consuming illness that writing poetry helped me to articulate on the page”. How does this emerge in ‘Libation’?

Kizziah Burton
1. How does the length of lines and sentences in the poem influence your reading?
2. How does Kizziah Burton use maximalist imagery of flowers in the poem? How does it impact the effect of the poem?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Kizziah Burton said the poem was inspired by Hades taking Persephone. How does this poetic retelling of the myth stand out?

Breda Spaight
1. How does the title of the poem influence your reading?
2. The central subject of this poem is first described, and then revealed. Why do you think Breda Spaight makes this choice?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Breda Spaight said ‘The Curse’ examines “innocent cruelty between siblings that originates in misogyny”. What are instances of this in the poem?

Eric Yip
1. How does the title of the poem influence your reading?
2. What is Eric Yip’s relationship to English? What tensions does this reveal in the poem?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Eric Yip said that ‘Fricatives’ emerged from “a sense of estrangement, a frustration at being misunderstood and being expected to submit… and the paradox of writing in a language that, despite all of its unsavoury connotations and colonial baggage, lent me a communicable vessel for my thoughts.” How do these themes emerge in the poem?

Kathryn Bevis
1. How does the title of the poem influence your reading?
2. Kathryn Bevis uses the images of domesticity in her work. How does this impact your reading?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Kathryn Bevis said writing this poem “has made it possible me to articulate love in the face of my own mortality”. How can poetry, reading or writing it, be cathartic?
Best Single Poem: Performed
Shortlist 2023

Zena Edwards
1. How does the title of the poem influence your reading?
2. How does Zena Edwards use body language and movement to complement the words of the poem? Does this add depth to the performance?
3. How do questions of climate change and justice emerge in this poem?

Michael Pedersen
1. How does the title of the poem influence your reading?
2. What role does Michael Pedersen’s voice and vocal expression play in conveying the poem’s message and emotions?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Michael Pedersen said that ‘The Cat Prince’ hopes to shine “light on a form of masculinity brimful of tenderness, playfulness and curiousness about the world around us”. Were there specific moments this emerged in viewing this performance?

Bohdan Piasecki
1. How does the title of the poem influence your reading?
2. How does the performance style influence the emotional resonance of the poem? Are there moments that particularly resonate with you?
3. How does repetition impact your understanding of the poem?

Roger Robinson
1. How does the title of the poem influence your reading?
2. How do the visual or dramatic elements of the poem contribute to the overall experience?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Roger Robinson said that the poem, part of a book project, involved driving “anti-clockwise around the country talking to black communities and responding with poems and pictures.” How does this influence your experience of the poem?

Nidhi Zak/Aria Eipe
1. How does the title of the poem influence your reading?
2. Do you feel that the performance of this poem adds new layers of meaning or subversion that might not be as evident in the written text?
3. In an interview with the Forward Prizes, Nidhi Zak/Aria Eipe’s said that the snippets in the poem hoped to ‘invoke the possibility of responding to acts of inhospitality with advances of love’. What moments embody this in the poem?