

Six Poems by Jeet Thayil (from *Collected Poems*)

How to be a Krait

This one is easy,
let your grief take over.
Enjoy salt.

Forget the rest.
When your skin falls off,
sere as bone,

laugh out loud.
That is the first thing. The second:
Avoid the mongoose.

How to Be a Leaf

Hold your breath until
you are God's green thoughts.
Stop eating,

Air will suffice for food.
Water is another matter:
The skin absorbs moisture,

eyes adjust,
limbs grow inward.
Conjugate patience.

Worship women and trees.

How to Be a Horse

Know the nostril,
all power gathers there.
Inflate yours until the blood sings.

You will need all your training
to be a horse, not ass.
It is a thin crossing

perilous to the absent-minded
and the estranged of heart.
Avoid all latitudes.

How to Be a Crow

Learn to name the animals
--Stinking, Babbling, Breedy,
Querulous, Maddened, and Jet.

Usurp the duties of God.
Why not?
This is what poets do.

As for crow,
kill colour.
Turn black.

How to Be a Bandicoot

Assume dominance
over the underworld.
Your enemies are legion

--eat them.
Eat everything.
You must build your strength,

change will surely come.
Your eyes are red legends.
Your name is Adam.

How to Be a Toad

Take three fresh spores
with a dram of rum,
hold it on your tongue

For longish moments.
Pack all thoughts of gold
In a small leather case

the size of a sapphire.
Say to yourself repeatedly,
'I'll never again be beautiful.'

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Lesson Plan featuring poems by Jeet Thayil

The goal is to introduce students to Jeet Thayil, a Man Booker Prize nominated novelist and poet who lives in Delhi, to practice writing imperative sentences, to understand the definition of “tercet,” and to practice poetry recitation and pronunciation in English.

1. Make copies of the poems. They can also be written on the board or projected on the screen, but please be sure students can read from them aloud when asked.
2. Choose the poem you want to start with. Read the poem aloud to the class demonstrating pronunciation. Ask students to identify words they don't understand or vocabulary that's new to them. Have students who volunteer read the poem to the class.
3. Discuss the structure of the poem. Point out the three line stanzas are called tercets and that the poems are the use of imperative sentences sets the tone for the poems. Each poem offers directions.
4. Practice writing some imperative sentences together. Ask students to think about the kinds of directions teachers give to classes. These can be the model sentences for student work.
5. Choose an animal as a class and ask each student to write at least three stanzas that are imperative sentences. Each sentence should be a direction for being that animal.
6. In groups of three, have students share their stanzas, then have them choose one stanza for each person to read aloud. They can choose the order they want.
7. Have a poetry reading where each group reads the poem they have written together to the class. Ask each student to read his or her own line so all students get practice with public speaking.

For more biographical information about Jeet Thayil [look here](#).

For a video of Thayil reading from his work [look here](#).