

An Interview with Carol Ann Duffy

Carol Ann Duffy talks about her Laureateship and gives advice for aspiring young poets



This resource is great for:

Thinking about Carol Ann Duffy's work, and the place of poetry and a Poet Laureate in society.

Summary:

An interview with UK Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy and some activities to get you discussing her work and writing your own poetry.

Introduction:

"...you're using your own humanity, your own memories, your own experience, your own imagination, your own language, the music, your particular voice as the subjects of your poetry, and so just confidently, happily, joyously celebrate who you are."

During the 2017 Edinburgh International Book Festival, our young reporter Beth took the opportunity to interview Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy. **Read the interview** and then use our discussion points to start talking about Duffy, her poems, and the Laureateship.

Activities - Discussion Points

Part One

“And over the centuries there have been 20 [Poet Laureates], all male... And the main reason for my agreeing to do it was because there’d never been a woman. So when I was Poet Laureate, Gillian was National Poet of Wales, and there’s Liz Lochhead, the Scottish makar. So it was like you waited for 400 years for a Poet Laureate, then three of them come along at once, to be a woman. And so it was a very serendipitous time.”

Which of Duffy’s poems talk about feminism, or which are written particularly from a woman’s perspective? Do you think this is important? If so, why? What difference does it make for the country to have a female Poet Laureate (or makar or National Poet)?

Read some of the poems in Duffy’s collection *The World’s Wife*. Here, she writes from the perspective of the neglected women behind the most powerful or well-known men in history and fiction. What effect does this have? What do you think Duffy is trying to achieve with this collection?

Part Two

“So for example, I’ve written about the Scottish Referendum. And then other kind of bits of popular culture like David Beckham. I’ve written about the Queen being 60 years on the throne, because everyone seemed to be attuned to that kind of remarkable length of duty and service... But there isn’t anyone asking me or telling me what to write about. And then sometimes you do feel that the poetry should clear its throat and perhaps add to the babble. So that’s how I’ve interpreted the role.”

Read some of the poetry which Duffy has written during her time as Poet Laureate. Choose some poems which you think are about contrasting subjects.

Why do you think Duffy has written about a wide range of subjects in her time as Laureate? Which poems do you prefer and why? What subjects do you think the Poet Laureate should write about?

Try your hand at writing a piece of poetry about popular culture. It could be about a national event, a famous person, or anything else you feel is of national significance.

Part Three

“What I have tried to do is share it, and be inclusive and put what light there is around a Laureate on as many poets as possible...”

Duffy tells us about some initiatives she’s started up or supported during her Laureateship:

- [The Ted Hughes award](#)
- [The Poetry Business](#)
- [Mother Tongue Other Tongue](#)

Take a look at the website links above and choose which one interests you the most. What do you think is the importance of this organisation? Why do you think Duffy has chosen to support and promote it during her Laureateship?

Imagine you were the Poet Laureate. Which organisations, or what kind of organisation would you want to support or found? Which areas of society would you want to work with and why do you think that work would be important? What would you want to achieve?

Final Thought

“A good poem is memorable. So it can enter us and it’s a little piece of very special language that helps us understand ourselves, and the world we live in. So it’s different from a novel, or a piece of theatre. It goes right into you, and we can keep it forever. That’s what makes it personal.”

Further information:

To find out more about Carol Ann Duffy, and to read some of her poems, take a look at the **Scottish Poetry Library's website**.

You can also listen to Duffy reading some of her own poems on the **Poetry Archive website**.

Young reporter Beth is taking part in What's Your Story?, Scottish Book Trust's development programme for teenage writers and illustrators. Find out more about the programme at **www.thestoryis.co.uk**