

# Sheenagh Pugh and Carol Ann Duffy



My interest in Sheenagh Pugh was provoked by a cry for help from a teacher following a specification which invited a comparison between Pugh and Duffy. Much is known about Duffy and much less about Pugh, though she is a very well-respected poet and much better known in Wales.

My first suggestion would be to set students a webquest on the topic. Provide them with two or three sites to begin with and then ask them to prepare a presentation in, say, a week's time to share what they have found. They can work in small groups if they wish. Their feedback could be by any means, paper-based or electronic; this is one of the occasions where PowerPoint probably does come into its own.

You may need to discuss headings, especially if they are not used to this kind of work; e.g. factual biographical data including publications; range of work; topics about which they have written; tone/voice/point of view; characteristic use of language/form etc. It would be much better if these headings emerge from the students.

Pugh has a very useful website <https://sheenagh.wixsite.com/sheenaghpugh>

One of the most informative sources on Duffy is the Poetry Foundation entry: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/carol-ann-duffy>

## **Some questions to begin to consider...**

Is Pugh a poet of place as well as of portraits? Does Duffy write about place? Does she write about women much more than about men? What are their attitudes / political views? Both seem anti-establishment. Pugh has written poems (implicitly and explicitly) critical of right-wing governments: S Africa, Argentina, Thatcher and Major... Is Duffy less specifically engaged?

## **Issues of reading, meaning, context**

At this level students should begin to think about the reader as active participant and about multiple readings of a text. Pugh's poem 'Sometimes' and Duffy's 'Education for Leisure' provide fertile starting points for this. Pugh's poem can be easily located on the web, as can her reaction to its popularity. She was fed up with the way it has been used and the way its meaning has been somewhat misread - for which she criticises herself (she should have written it better). But the poem and the way its meaning is created by others is now out of her hands – fascinating stuff.

A similar probing of the issues around Duffy's 'Education for Leisure' (consider the roles of AQA, the complainers, the majority of teachers, writers and commentators, Duffy's own response) could be very fruitful. It will help students to get away from the idea that a text is written, published and read in a kind of 'fixed forever' way; it will also help them to focus on 'the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received'.

