

SHORT READS FOR PEOPLE WITH NO TIME

HOW TO SAY
BY
SAFIA ELHILLO
&
RED-CROWNED CRANE
BY
LINDA SUE PARK

Read or Listen to

HOW TO SAY

by Safia Elhillo

About Safia Elhillo

"Safia Elhillo is the author of *The January Children* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017), which received the the Sillerman First Book Prize for African Poets and an Arab American Book Award, *Girls That Never Die* (One World/Random House, forthcoming), and the novel in verse *Home Is Not A Country* (Make Me A World/Random House, 2021).

Sudanese by way of Washington, DC, she holds an MFA from The New School, a Cave Canem Fellowship, and a 2018 Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation. Safia is a Pushcart Prize nominee (receiving a special mention for the 2016 Pushcart Prize), co-winner of the 2015 Brunel International African Poetry Prize, and listed in Forbes Africa's 2018 "30 Under 30."

Safia's work appears in POETRY Magazine, Callaloo, and The Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-day series, among others, and in anthologies including The BreakBeat Poets: New American Poetry in the Age of Hip-Hop and The Penguin Book of Migration Literature. Her work has been translated into several languages, and commissioned by Under Armour, Cuyana, and the Bavarian State Ballet. With Fatimah Asghar, she is co-editor of the anthology *Halal If You Hear Me* (Haymarket Books, 2019). She is currently a Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University and lives in Oakland."- bio from author's page (<https://safia-mafia.com/bio>)

Read

RED-CROWNED CRANE

by Linda Sue Park



About Linda Sue Park

"Born in Urbana, Illinois, children's writer and poet Linda Sue Park grew up outside Chicago and earned a BA at Stanford University. She is the author of numerous novels, picture books, and poetry collections for children. Her work often uses historical settings and innovative forms to expand young readers' sense of possibility; her poetry collection *Tap Dancing on the Roof: Sijo* (Poems) (2007), illustrated by Istvan Banyai, utilizes a Korean syllabic verse form to bring surprise and humor to everyday moments and objects.

Park's most recent book for young readers, *The One Thing You'd Save* (2021), is a story told through a series of linked poems. Park's novels for teenage readers include *Prairie Lotus* (2020); *A Long Walk to Water: Based on a True Story* (2010); *When My Name Was Keoko* (2002), which was chosen as a Best Book of the Year by Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal, and Bank Street; and Newbery Medalist *A Single Shard* (2001). Her picture books include *Gurple and Preen* (2020), illustrated by Debbie Ridpath Ohi; *Bee-bim Bop!* (2005), illustrated by Ho Baek Lee; and *The Firekeeper's Son* (2004), illustrated by Julie Downing. Park lives with her family in Rochester, New York." - bio from Poetry Foundation

HOW TO SAY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are your first reactions to this poem? What phrase, if any, stuck out to you the most? Why?

What do you think the poet means when they say, "i sleep | unbroken dark hours on airplanes home | & dream | i've missed my | connecting flight"? Consider this line: "I dream my alternate self."

Safia Elhillo says this poem is "a space to mourn [and] it is a space to also take ownership of my hyphens, of the hybrid worlds and languages I live in." Describe your own identity. Can you think of moments in your own life where you had a similar conflict regarding aspects of yourself? What are the "hybrid worlds" you live in?

Read the poem silently, then aloud. What phrases stand out while reading as opposed to speaking? Are they the same or different phrases? Does reading the poem aloud convey a more powerful image than reading silently? If so, how?

Ghazal is a form of poetry. Safia Elhillo chose this form for its "ancientness and lineage". "Traditionally invoking melancholy, love, longing, and metaphysical questions, ghazals are often sung by Iranian, Indian, and Pakistani musicians."

In your opinion, does this poem capture more love or longing? Why?

Questions were adapted from
<https://poets.org/lesson-plan/teach-poem-how-say-safia-elhillo>

RED-CROWNED CRANE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Why do you think the poet chose to write about the red-crowned crane in relation to the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea? Consider the opening sentence: "cranes have flourished in the world's unlikeliest sanctuary..."

The key aspect of this poem is about finding beauty and life in the most unsuspecting of places. Can you think of other instances either in your life, in the news, or any other source that captures a similar circumstance?

Examine the structure of this poem. Reorganize the poem by changing where the line breaks appear. Do these changes alter the flow and tone of this poem? If so, how?

What phrase, if any, stuck out to you the most? Why?

Why do you think the author waited until the end of the poem to mention mines and razor wire? What impact does it have, if any?

Using the title and the opening statement from Smithsonian Magazine, write an alternate opening to this poem.

Read the poem silently, then aloud. What phrases stand out while reading as opposed to speaking? Are they the same or different phrases? Does reading the poem aloud convey a more powerful image than reading silently? If so, how?

WRITE IT DOWN!

WRITING PROMPTS

Warm Up

Option 1: Write a brief poem focused on your own self identity starting with the first line of Safia Elhillo's poem *How to Say*:

in the divorce I separate into two piles

Option 2: Write a brief poem inspired by a recent news article. Similar to Linda Sue Park's poem, *Red-Crowned Crane*, focus on an unexpected aspect within the article.

Exercise: Create a Found Poem

"Found poems take existing texts and refashion them, reorder them, and present them as poems. The literary equivalent of a collage, found poetry is often made from newspaper articles, street signs, graffiti, speeches, letters, or even other poems.

A pure found poem consists exclusively of outside texts: the words of the poem remain as they were found, with few additions or omissions. Decisions of form, such as where to break a line, are left to the poet." Definition from Poets.org.

Exercise: Inspiration from Films

Find a scene in a movie and watch it without sound. Write a poem based on the setting, characters, and events. Stream movies on [Kanopy!](https://www.kanopy.com) [ssf.kanopy.com](https://www.kanopy.com)

MORE READS

NOVELS IN VERSE AND BOOKS OF POETRY

Home Is Not A Country
by Safia Elhillo

Punching the Air
by Ibi Aanu Zoboi

Somebody Give This Heart A Pen
by Sophia Thakur

Clap When You Land
by Elizabeth Acevedo

Black Girl Magic: A Poem
by Mahogany L. Browne

For Everyone
by Jason Reynolds

The Black Flamingo
by Dean Atta

The Hill We Climb
An Inaugural Poem for the Country
by Amanda Gorman

[Full list](#)



**HAVE COMMENTS OR
WANT TO SUGGEST
A SHORT STORY?**

Email us!
ssfyouth@plsinfo.org