

Travel to Malaysia: Learn to Write Pantoums  
by Saraiya Kanning

**Grade Level:** 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade

**Time Frame:** 30-45 minutes

**Objective:** Students will virtually travel to Malaysia, using art and visual writing to express a sense of adventure and joy in learning about other places. Students will learn about the pantoum as a poetry form.

**Prior Knowledge and Skills:** Grade level reading and comprehension

**Required Materials:** paper, pencil, sample pantoum (below), technology for playing a video, pictures of Malaysia, including landmarks, animals, people, and other images to bring the journey alive (these can be assembled in a slideshow or printed and passed around).

**Literary Models:**

A sample pantoum by students in 4<sup>th</sup> grade:

***Water Cycle***

*Water is unusual*

*Water is a clear liquid*

*Water on a journey to Africa*

*Evaporation: flying in the air like a ghost*

*Water is a clear liquid*

*The world is cruel*

*Evaporating: flying in the air like a ghost*

*Wishing for spicy food and a way down*

*The world is cruel*

*Water on a journey to Africa*

*Wishing for spicy food and a way down*

*Water is unusual*

A video of Alena Murang playing the sape, an instrument from Malaysia and nearby Borneo (Indonesia):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZVGddDc86I>

## **Sequence of Activities:**

### *1. Welcome and Class Introduction (5-10 minutes)*

If this is your first session with students, consider facilitating a name learning activity. For example, have students sit in a circle and pick an animal that shares the same first letter as their name. They can introduce themselves using this animal and then express an action or sound associated with that animal, which everyone else will then copy (i.e. we all roar like lions, or flap our arms like birds).

You can also use the first session to facilitate the following discussion on poetry: What is poetry? What inspires us to write poetry? Some ideas: Poems can tell a story or express feeling, poems can help us say things that regular speaking or everyday use of words cannot – we might write about experiences and memories, people, nature, wishes and hopes, dreams, fears, and more. Poems can also be like songs. They can repeat words and phrases, or even have a rhythm and rhyme. This is the case of the pantoum, a special type of poem from Malaysia meant to be sung!

As the discussion about poetry grows, be sure to emphasize a sense of vastness. Poetry encompasses many forms, styles, and modes of expression. There is no right or wrong, good or bad, as we go about our writing. There is only a sense of exploration.

To engage students more in the above discussion, consider asking them a simple question: What sort of things would you be excited to write about?

### *2. Let's go to Malaysia! (5-10 minutes)*

Bring a globe or map to show students the location of Malaysia and Indonesia. Show students pictures of things in Malaysia (i.e. Kuala Lumpur, tapir and tiger, the sape, people, etc.). Explain that pantoums are poems meant to be sung! In a pantoum, the lines repeat in a special pattern. When you hear a song on the radio, you hear the singer repeat lines. Repetition is used quite a lot in music and poetry. Sometimes repetition also helps establish a rhythm or beat. Read the sample poem written by 4<sup>th</sup> graders and ask students to listen carefully for the repeated lines.

Show students the video of Alena Murang singing and playing the sape, a traditional instrument from Malaysia. Ask students what they observed in the video. What did they find interesting? Did they hear repetition in the song?

### 3. Write a Collaborative Pantoum about Malaysia (10-15 minutes)

Prepare a large sheet or whiteboard with the following outline:

Line 1  
Line 2  
Line 3  
Line 4

Line 5 (repeat of line 2)  
Line 6  
Line 7 (repeat of line 4)  
Line 8

Line 6  
Line 3  
Line 8  
Line 1

Pick a photo from the images of Malaysia and ask students to use their five senses as well as their imaginations to create lines for this collaborative poem, as inspired by the image. Below are sample questions you can use if using an image of a tiger combined with the video of Alena Murang playing the sape. Use their responses as lines in the poem. While they are letting their observations and ideas flow, you are shaping their words in the form of the pantoum:

Questions to sprout ideas:

Listen to the sape with your eyes closed and imagine something happening along with the music. What do you see? What do you feel? What does the sape sound like to you?

What does the sape look like?

What would it feel like to play this instrument?

How would you learn to play this instrument?

Who do you think made this instrument? How long do you think it took them?

Why did they make it?

Tell me more about the tiger in this picture – where has it been? where is it going? what is it thinking? What happens in her dreams? What does the tiger know that nobody else knows?

Once the pantoum is complete, read it out loud to students. You might even invite them to read aloud with you, emphasizing the lines that repeat, or the entire class can be invited to read the first and final line together as one.

#### *4. Individual Pantoums (optional, 20 min)*

In partners – students should pick another image and use it to inspire a new pantoum. This works best with older children. For younger children, you might skip individual writing and move on to illustration or write another collaborative class pantoum.

#### *5. Illustrations (optional, 15-20 min)*

Use watercolor on cardstock, pastels, or some other fun color medium to illustrate Malayan tigers, an endangered species. Students can use reference photos from the internet (assembled by the teacher and displayed in a slideshow or printed for each table). If time, show students this video from the World Wildlife Fund:  
<https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/camera-traps-capture-mother-tiger-with-four-cubs>