

## Kowloon City State of Mind

*Cheng Tim Tim*

5 Better than flashlights crowning Lion Rock  
are *daisuk*, *dama* blasting Canton-Pop  
(remixed in *boom-chi-boom-chi-boom-chi-boom-chi*),  
not sorry at all, yoga-posing on peak boulders,  
bolder than kidults with stiff knuckles.

10 Better than running into teachers at lunch,  
is that husky lying on the musty pavement, nonchalant  
until it smelled fear in pedestrians  
who stopped to pat other fat furry purrs  
in the cracks and surfaces of that gas supply store.

15 Better than heritage sites turned into cafes  
is Thai food galore: Skewers next to bus stops,  
soup in clear treat bags, smaller shopfronts  
for more flavour. Saving up is a matter of not  
adding \$10 sunny-side up to basil minced pork.

20 Better than photos of planes almost scraping  
antenna-ridden rooftops of interlocked, rugged blocks  
are kids who played up and down the maze-fortress  
of dens, factories and squats, kids who grew up to be  
that *daisuk* telling off engraving in Walled City Park.

25 Better than neon lights left in puddles  
is that mannequin in season, surrounded by planters  
out on South Wall Road. It gazed beyond  
degrading shop signs, banners against demolition  
behind bamboo scaffolding every year.

30 Better than living with parents in comfort  
are friends bracing gas shortage, rain leaks,  
weak wifi in *tong lou* flats with a shrug.  
There may not be something better  
in the future — at least we're here together.

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## Glossary

Line 1	Lion Rock	a mountain in Kowloon, Hong Kong
Line 2	<i>daisuk</i>	Middle-aged men in Cantonese
Line 2	<i>dama</i>	(slightly offensive) middle-aged women in Cantonese
Line 3	<i>boom-chi-boom-chi-boom-chi-boom-chi</i>	the sound of heavy bass in songs
Line 4	boulder	a large rock, typically one that has been worn smooth by erosion
Line 5	kidult	an adult with childish tastes
Line 5	stiff	not easily bent or changed in shape; rigid
Line 5	knuckle	a part of a finger at a joint where the bone is near the surface
Line 7	nonchalant	(of a person or manner) feeling or appearing casually calm and relaxed
Line 12	galore	in abundance
Line 12	skewer	a long piece of wood or metal used for holding pieces of food
Line 15	sunny-side up	(of an egg) fried on one side only
Line 15	basil minced pork	a traditional Thai dish
Line 17	antenna	a rod, wire, or other device used to transmit or receive radio or television signals
Line 17	rugged	(of ground or terrain) having a broken, rocky, and uneven surface
Line 20	Walled City Park	The Kowloon Walled City had been a military stronghold since 15th century due to its coastal location and was a centre of vice and crime until 1987. The Walled City Park is a public site which promotes that history.
Line 21	puddle	a small pool of liquid, especially of rainwater on the ground
Line 22	mannequin	a dummy used to display clothes in a shop window
Line 24	demolition	the process of pulling or knocking down a building
Line 25	scaffolding	a temporary structure on the outside of a building, made of wooden planks and metal poles

## In-class activities for teachers

1. Warm-up:

Ask students to share one thing they like/dislike about the neighbourhood in which they live/ the school locates.

2. Before reading the poem:

Ask students to look at [photos of Kowloon City](#) in the past. (Guided questions: What can you see? What are the feelings in the photos? Can you see something similar in Hong Kong these days?).

3. Listening to the poem:

Read the poem out loud. Ask students to highlight images and similar sounding words that stand out to them or write down any questions they may have. Solicit responses.

4. Reading pair:

Put students in groups of 2-4. Allocate a stanza to each group. Half of the group are responsible for reading the stanza out loud for the other half to do a quick sketch of the sceneries depicted in the stanza.

5. Whole-class sharing:

Share the sketches to other groups. Ask the class to match the sketches with the corresponding stanzas. (There could be sophisticated sketches or funny ones. The idea is to broaden students' imagination — everyone sees differently — and help them engage in active reading.)

6. Reflection:

Ask students which images in the poem describe the past, and which images describe the present. What is the feeling that poem is trying to create? Why does the speaker in the poem keep using the structure “better than ... is / are ...”?

7. Extension:

Ask students to google keywords highlighted in the poem (e.g. “heritage sites, cafes, kowloon city”; or “cats, kowloon city”) to find some news articles or photos to learn more about Kowloon City.

## Writing prompts for students (auditory imagery)

1. Picture yourself walking in a place you know well. The smaller the place, the better. The place doesn't have to be famous or exciting. It could be somewhere you go to every day. Jot down some nice things, and bad things you can see, smell, touch, taste and hear in that place.
2. Who do you usually see in that place? Do you know them well? What do they usually say or do in that place that helps you know about their characters more?
3. What do other people usually say about that place? Do you think what they say truly reflects what you think and feel about the place? Are they missing out on something special?
4. Ask your classmates the questions above! See if you could discover new stories and perspectives about that place you think you know well
5. Visit that place again after you have written your draft! This time, pay attention to things and people you wrote about to see if they have changed (of course, you are welcomed to add in things you didn't write about!)
6. Do some research on the Internet. Find articles and pictures to help you add details to your draft. You don't have to copy everything into your draft but a sense of history will help more readers connect to your personal observations.
7. To turn your draft into a poem, use words that describe the place in such details that after a long time, when you come back to your poem, you can still easily recall the special things you love about the place that make you devote your time to write. Don't go for general terms. The more specific, the better.
8. To create music in language, find a hook. It could be a repetitive word. String words with similar sounds together. Intersperse short and long sentences to make them pop!