

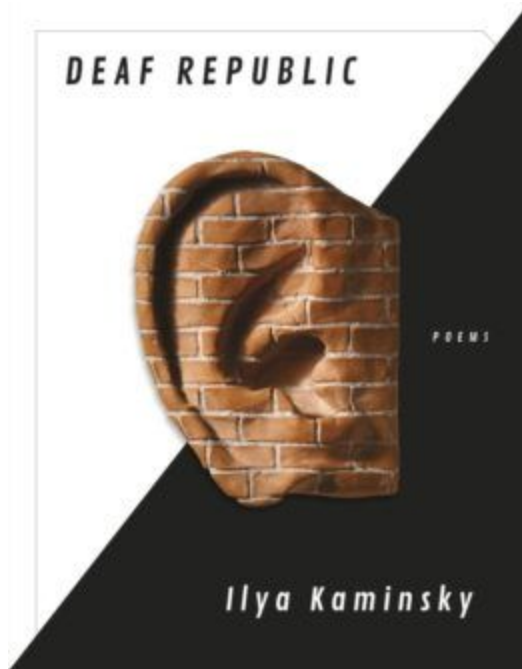
**Lesson Plan**

# Deaf Republic

By Ilya Kaminsky

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**Before Reading**



Cover design is by [Kapo Ng](#). Cover art is by [Gail Schneider](#).

**Like it or not, we *do* judge books by their covers. What does this cover art say to you?**

It seems pretty certain that the image of the ear is related to the word 'Deaf' in the title, but why do you think it made of bricks?

What do the two sections - half-black, half-white - suggest to you?

Put it together, based on the title and the images, what do you expect this book to be about? Why?

How much do you like to know about an author's background before you begin reading? How come? Can you think of an example where knowing about the author's background has helped you understand the book in a more complete or different way? Has it ever been a distraction?

Read [this short biography](#) of Kaminsky. Take notes in the space below about what you think is important to remember as you read his poems.

In his notes at the end of the book, Kaminsky writes: "ON SILENCE: The deaf don't believe in silence. Silence is the invention of the living." What do you think he means?

## Reading

The first poem in the collection, "We Lived Happily During the War," can be read as a kind of [invocation](#). It appears before the title page. In a way, like the cover, it sets the tone for the work to come. So that's the question - *What is the [tone](#) of the poem?*

Please read [the poem](#).

1. Based on your first reading of the poem, including the title, what do you think the tone is? What makes you say so?

1.

2. Consider Kaminsky's use of [repetition](#) - "but not enough," "invisible house," "in the \_\_\_\_\_ of money." How does it contribute to the tone of the poem?

2.

3. Consider Kaminsky's use of the parenthetical comment - (forgive us) - in line 11. How does that contribute to the tone of the poem?

You may want to look at the last line of Elizabeth Bishop's "[One Art](#)" for another example of this technique.

3.

4. Listen to Kaminsky [read](#) his poem. Put his reading of the poem together with your responses to questions 1-3, and explain the tone of this invocation and what it leads you to expect in the pages to come.

4.

A quick glance through [this excerpt](#) will reveal two unusual features of the book. First, it includes a ‘Dramatis Personae,’ something usually found at the beginning of a play. And it includes images of the sign language for key words and phrases in Kaminsky’s work.

Review the excerpt again.

Make a list of words and phrases that are signed.

What do you notice about the list? What inferences can you make?

OPTIONAL: Use this [video](#) to learn how to spell your name using American Sign Language. Then have someone film you spelling your name and submit the film to your teacher.

**Plot Summary:**

*A dictatorship has taken over the country. Because public gatherings have been forbidden, a group of soldiers tries to break up an audience gathered to watch a puppet show. During this confrontation, Petya, a deaf boy, is shot and killed by a soldier. As a result, the narrator reports, “[o]ur country woke up next morning and refused to hear soldiers.”*

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE - Read ["That Map of Bone and Opened Valves."](#)

Find examples of [metaphors](#) in the poem. List them here with their line number(s).  
Example: "map" (3)

Find examples of [personification](#) in the poem. List them here with their line number(s).  
Example: "the air wants" (4)

Find examples of [similes](#) in the poem. List them here with their line number(s).

Why do you think Kaminsky chooses not to use a simile in lines 14-15?

Read ["In a Time of Peace."](#) the last poem of the book. Pay special attention to lines 12-19. Notice how line 19 is almost the same as lines 14-15 in "That Map of Bone and Opened Valves." Why do you think Kaminsky pretty much echoes his previous line?

It may help to read the beginning of [this article](#).

**Plot Summary:**

*The townspeople protect Petya's body from the soldiers. Sonya holds up a sign that reads: THE PEOPLE ARE DEAF. After Alfonso reflects on his marriage to Sonya and their newlywed days, we move back to the present day. The soldiers take Petya's body at gunpoint and set up checkpoints. Alfonso reflects on when he and Sonya conceived their child, Anushka. Anushka is born as Alfonso, Sonya adjust under army occupation and constant bombardments. Then Sonya is arrested.*

Read "[What We Cannot Hear.](#)"

Make a list of all of the words and phrases in the poem that have to do with sound and all of the words and phrases that have to do with silence. As always, make sure to include the line number(s). Consider "a soul's noise" (5). Where should that go???

<u>Sound</u>	<u>Silence</u>
"piano" (6)	"Cannot Hear"

Kaminsky juxtaposes sound and silence in this poem and throughout this collection. What effect does this juxtaposition have on this poem?



In history, sometimes the violence following a revolution is just as bad, if not worse, than the violence that prompted the revolution. Consider [The French Revolution](#). Why do you think this happens? Why do you think it's so difficult for revolutionaries to decide on, to borrow a line from *Hamilton* about a revolution that was a contemporary of the French Revolution, "what comes next"?

Your response -

Kaminsky reportedly worked on this collection for quite a number of years. Therefore, several incarnations of many of the poems exist on the internet. [This one, found on page 44 of the document](#), is the closest one I've found to what actually appears in the book. If you have the book, it's definitely worth comparing it to what's found there (39). There are also some striking differences with [this](#), presumably earlier, version.

Go to page 44 (the last page) of [this document](#). Read "Above Blue Tin Roofs, Deafness."

There are a striking number of colors in this poem -

"oranges" (5)

"raw egg" (7)

"red" (10)

"blue" (18, the title)

"copper" (19)

All of these colors could be a coincidence, but Kaminsky *chose* to point Alfonso's socks are red and in a poem, every word is supposed to matter. So why all of these colors?

What evidence do we have here that the citizens have changed? How can you compare this change to what came after the French Revolution?

Kaminsky [personifies](#) deafness (18-21). How come?

The poem starts with boys who want a public killing and ends with girls stealing oranges. What do you make of this shift?

Poets think of titles in different ways. Some, like Emily Dickinson, didn't use titles at all. (Re)Consider Kaminsky's title: "Above Blue Tin Roofs, Deafness." Why this title? Who or what is above blue tin roofs?

Now read the poem below - "A City Like a Guillotine Shivers on Its Way to the Neck." Look at line 4 and think about the word "Above" in the previous title. Is there a connection? Explain.

## A City Like a Guillotine Shivers on Its Way to the Neck

Alfonso stumbles from the corpse of the soldier. The townspeople are cheering, Elated, pounding him on the back. Those who climbed trees to watch applaud From the branches. Momma Galya shouts about pigs, pigs clean as men.

At the trial of God, we will ask: why did you allow all this?  
And the answer will be an echo: why did you allow all this?



An image of a guillotine, a method of public execution commonly used during the Reign of Terror that followed the French Revolution (image courtesy of parisreview.org)

Kaminsky's title seems strange. Shouldn't the person's neck be shivering as it waits for the blade to cut it off? Explain.

Compare the look of the first stanza and the look of the second stanza. What do you notice? Why the difference?

Read line 4 out loud. What word or words should be stressed? How come?

Read line 5 out loud. What word or words should be stressed? How come?

What is an echo? What purpose does the word serve in this poem? The previous one?

[Read](#) and [listen to](#) "The Townspeople Watch Them Take Alfonso."

Consider the lines that are almost repeated -  
"Now each of us is  
a witness stand:" (1-2).

AND

"each of us  
is a witness stand" (13-14).

Explain the metaphor.

Explain the impact of the repetition and the omission of the word 'Now' from the second version.

Why did Kaminsky use after 'stand' both times?

Anything strike you as odd about the end of line 7 (“First he screams”)?

Why does Kaminsky keep reminding us of the sunlight? Re-read line 9 here. The first line of “Above Blue Tin Roofs, Deafness” is “Our boys want a public killing in the sunlit piazza.”

In line 16, Kaminsky uses the word “stands,” but it has a different [connotation](#). Explain the impact of the various uses of forms of the word ‘stand’ on the poem as a whole.

Watch the following [video](#) and explain how it connects with “The Townspeople Watch Them Take Alfonso.”

**Plot Summary:**

*Part 1 ends after a few poems. The last line of the last poem is “What is silence? Something in the sky of us.” The title of Act Two is “The Townspeople Tell the Story of Momma Galya.” Momma Galya is the narrator of Act Two. We last heard her shouting at the end of the poem, “A City Like a Guillotine Shivers on Its Way to the Neck.” The first two poems give us some background on Momma Galya.*

We learn that Momma Galya actively and vocally protests the occupation. At the end of the second poem of Act II, we are told that “In a time of war // she teaches us how to open the door / and walk / through / which is the curriculum of schools.”

1. What is Kaminsky calling “the curriculum of schools”?
2. Is it the curriculum of schools? Of your school? Explain.



Response to #1 -

Response to #2 -

**Plot Summary:**

*Momma Galya, together with her company of female puppeteers, begin to kill the soldiers one by one. Eventually, the soldiers figure out what's happening and take revenge. The puppeteers are arrested, and the army begins bombing one store for each soldier killed. They also tighten security.*

Read "[Search Patrols.](#)" There are a lot of references to watching in this poem (1, 4, 5, 14). How come?

There are other kinds of [imagery](#) in this poem, particularly touch and hearing. List examples of each. Include line numbers.

Touch	Sound

Consider and explain your understanding of lines 6-8. If you don't think you understand (all of) it, write down the questions you would want to ask Kaminsky.

"I teach his children's hands to make of anguish // a language - / see how deafness nails us into our bodies."

Write a poem in which you use the 5 senses. Or are there [more](#)? In any event, use at least the 5 major ones. The topic is up to you.

Plot Summary:

Because of all of the consequences of Galya's attempts to resist the army, the people of the town turn on her.