

Blood Feather

Karla Kelsey

Writing Prompts and Activities by Alexandra Sladky

The activities in this series of assignments all tie back to the concept of voice. Voice plays an important role in Karla Kelsey's *Blood Feather* because the collection is divided into three monologues, and each monologue has a different first-person narrator. The exercises laid out here build on one another. The final activity gives students the option to combine all these concepts in a single poem. The final assignment focuses on a critical analysis of a poem or series of poems from Kelsey's collection.

Imagery

Target Audience: High School, College and Beyond

Materials: *Blood Feather*, by Karla Kelsey; pen or pencil; paper

Time: 45 minutes (you might lengthen or shorten parts of these lessons to accommodate your own time restraints)

Overview

Imagery includes the “elements of a poem that invoke any of the five senses to create a set of mental images” (“Imagery”). A writer uses imagery to create an image in the reader’s mind, and she can do this by appealing to the senses: taste, smell, sound, sight, and touch. Imagery helps contribute to the author’s creation of a specific voice for a character. This activity asks students to identify how Kelsey creates imagery in a poem from *Blood Feather*, and how imagery contributes to creating a specific voice, then asks students to explore creating their own imagery.

Before the Lesson

1. Ask students to read a poem from *Blood Feather* by Karla Kelsey. (This can be assigned as homework and completed before students even set foot in the classroom, or it can be assigned during class time.)

In-Class Activity

1. First, the instructor should review the definition of “imagery” so that they can be certain that all students know and understand the term and how to use it in poetry. The instructor might provide an example from *Blood Feather*, or from a different source.
2. Ask students to work in small groups (or independently) to identify powerful uses of imagery from the poem in *Blood Feather* (assigned before or at the start of class). Students should make a list (or be able to share the specific quote or page number from the text).
3. Share with the class which passages include powerful imagery. Make a list. Discuss *why* this imagery is powerful, how the author creates it, and why she uses it in her poems.
4. In your own poem: Consider a scenario, character, or scene, and describe it paying particular attention to sensory imagery. Focus your attention as much as possible on imagery, and at this point, don’t worry so much about creating a polished scene or character, be precise in your descriptions and appeal to the audience’s senses. Students

may be encouraged to describe their scene or character using *only* one of the five senses, focusing on sight, sound, taste, smell, or touch.

Sources

“Imagery.” *Glossary of Poetic Terms*. Poetry Foundation.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/imagery>. Accessed 27 July 2022.

Character

Target Audience: High School, College, and Beyond

Materials: *Blood Feather*, by Karla Kelsey; pen or pencil; paper

Time: 45 minutes (you might lengthen or shorten parts of these lessons to accommodate your own time restraints)

Overview

Characters are the beings that populate our texts, they might be fictive, or they might be based on real people, or they might even be a version of ourselves. Even if we write about ourselves, that version of ourselves is still a character whose motives, desires, voice, and beliefs must be made clear to the audience, and often represents only a facet of our true selves. It is important to recognize that the character and the author will often have different voices, and differentiating between different voices in a text is important. This activity asks students to consider a poem from *Blood Feather*, to consider the ways that Kelsey creates her characters and their voices, and then to do some work creating the character whose voice they will use in a poem.

Before the Lesson

1. Ask students to read a poem from *Blood Feather* by Karla Kelsey. (This can be assigned as homework and completed before students even set foot in the classroom, or it can be assigned during class time.)

In-Class Activity

1. First, the instructor should review the concept of character so that all students understand how character relates to voice and why characters are important to poetry, and specifically to Kelsey's poems in *Blood Feather*.
2. Ask students to work in small groups, or individually, to review the poem they've just read (or read for homework). Ask students to answer the following questions: how does Kelsey construct the characters in her poems? What serves as characterization? How does she create conflict in her poems? What do her characters *want*? Students should make a list and be able to share their answers by referring back to passages from the text.
3. Ask students to consider how these aspects (characterization, conflict, desire, as well as imagery and tone) contribute to the creation of the characters' voices. Students should write down some details and be able to share with the class.
4. Ask students to consider the bibliography at the end of the book (p. 101-104). How does research contribute to characterization in these poems?
5. After students have considered how one poet creates characters in her poems, students can begin to characterize the voices they will use in their poems. In their writing students should consider the following and focus as much as they can on characterization, not necessarily writing a polished poem. Who is speaking? Why is it important for this character to speak? What does she want? What does she like? What does she not like? What is she doing at the moment that the poem takes place? What does she do for a living? Who are her friends? Her family? What does she believe in? What does she disagree with? (Instructors might expand on these questions or condense them; they might also come up with their own.)

Tone

Target Audience: High School, College, and Beyond

Materials: *Blood Feather*, by Karla Kelsey; pen or pencil; paper

Time: 45 minutes (you might lengthen or shorten parts of these lessons to accommodate your own time restraints)

Overview

Tone is “the poet’s attitude toward the poem’s speaker, reader, and subject matter, as interpreted by the reader” (“Tone”). Tone differs from the concept of voice because tone refers to the poet. Voice refers to the character, and how the character speaks in the poem. Tone can tell the reader a great deal about the poet and the character(s), and how the poet feels about or views the character(s). This activity asks students to consider a poem from *Blood Feather*, to identify the author’s tone in the poem, and then to identify their own tone in the poems they have written from these activities. Students may then work toward creating their own specific tone for their poems.

Before the Lesson

1. Ask students to read a poem from *Blood Feather* by Karla Kelsey. (This can be assigned as homework and completed before students even set foot in the classroom, or it can be assigned during class time.)

In-Class Activity

1. First, the instructor should review the definition of “tone” so that they can be certain that all students know and understand the term and how to use it in poetry. The instructor might provide an example from *Blood Feather*, or from a different source.
2. Ask students to work in small groups, or individually, to review the poem they’ve just read (or read for homework). Ask students to identify words and phrases that indicate the author’s tone. Then, make a list of words these words that contribute to their sense of the author’s tone. After they students have a list, as them to consider whether the words create a positive or negative tone? A formal or informal tone? A feminine or masculine tone?
3. Ask students to review their own poems or descriptions (from previous exercises), then to identify words that contribute to their own sense of tone towards the character or scenario.
4. Students rewrite or revise the poem (from previous exercises) and pay attention to tone while they do so. Is there anything in the poem that might confuse the reader? Is there any part where the tone is not consistent with the rest of the poem? What needs to change in order to make the tone consistent?

Sources

“Tone.” *Glossary of Poetic Terms*. Poetry Foundation.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/tone>. Accessed 27 July 2022.

Final Project: Building a Poem

Target Audience: High School, College, and Beyond

Materials: *Blood Feather*, by Karla Kelsey; pen or pencil; paper; word processor; access to a printer

Time: 2-3 weeks. This might be assigned at the beginning of this unit so that students understand that they have a longer period to work on this, and so that they can see where and how the different writing exercises eventually culminate.

Overview:

The final project allows students to build on different devices and aspects of writing that this unit develops. The focus in studying *Blood Feather*, by Karla Kelsey, has been voice, and students have worked on different exercises that help them build towards writing a poem driven by a particular character's voice. Once students have completed all the exercises, they may then do this final project. This project can be adapted to include many poems, or only one.

Assignment

Write a poem (or a series of poems) using a single character's voice. Take care to consider the different devices that contribute to the creation of voice (tone, imagery, characterization, conflict, desire, etc.). Include a short (2-3 paragraph) reflection in addition to the poem that explains who your character is, and the way that you've used these different devices to create their voice.

Requirements

Poems should be typed.

Reflection piece should be typed and on a separate page.

Reflection piece should be composed using MLA formatting.

Critical Paper Assignment

Target Audience: High School, College, and Beyond

Materials: *Blood Feather*, by Karla Kelsey; pen or pencil; paper; word processor; access to a printer

Time: 2-3 weeks. This might be assigned at the beginning of this unit so that students understand that they have a longer period to work on this, and so that they can see where and how the reading and analysis of the text will culminate.

Overview

This paper assignment may be given as the culmination of a unit, or of the reading of *Blood Feather*, by Karla Kelsey. Students focus on taking a stance or forming an argument around a poem or set of poems from the collection and analyzing different aspects of Kelsey's poetry.

Assignment

Compose a 3-4 page paper that analyzes one or more poems from Karla Kelsey's *Blood Feather*. (Instructor may assign the selections, or students may choose their own.) In your analysis consider the following:

- Tone, Imagery, Character Development, Figurative Language, and Voice.
- How does Kelsey use these devices?
- How does she create these devices?
- Why are these devices important to her poetry?

Requirements

Your essay should illustrate that you have a clear understanding of the poem(s) that you are analyzing and should include:

- a clear thesis statement that takes a stance on your interpretation of the poem.
- a clear argument that adds perspective to an ongoing conversation.
- supporting evidence from the text.
- a coherent organizational structure.
- proper MLA style: including double-spaced, 12-pt font, Times New Roman, proper citations, a works cited page including the text and any outside resources.
- attention to proofreading.