

The Sequence

Age Group: undergraduate, graduate, community audience

Materials: “Master Suffering” CM Burroughs, a grouping of 3 related poems of yours

Time: 45 - 60 minutes

Medium: in person or virtual

Lesson objective: through reading, discussion, and writing students will learn the goals and possibilities for a poetic sequence, and mine their own work for the possibilities to leverage the form.

Pework: students will need to have at least 3 poem drafts, and have read at least the following the sections of poems: “II” - “VI” (6-10 pg), and, “Incidents for Forgettery (14-16 pg, 26 pg) although preferable the entire collection.

Note for instructors: the opening section of the lesson features a lecture component with links to more information and examples.

The Lesson

Lecture

Defining the sequence: a series of poems that share similar thematic concerns. Oftentimes these poems share similar forms.

History: The earliest form of poetic sequences can be found in Homer’s work such as the Iliad and the Odyssey. Yet still today we see contemporary innovations in the sequences such as sonnet crowns. For more information on the history of the form view this link courtesy of [Black Bird Literary Journal](#)

Examples: Dorthy Chan’s [“Triple Sonnet for Celebrities with Three Names”](#) courtesy of The Poetry and, Foundation, Richard Siken’s [“You Are Jeff”](#) courtesy of Yale Press

Discussion

As a group discuss the following questions:

- How do *you* define a poetic sequence/sequences of poetry?
- What associations do we link with poetic sequences/sequences of poetry?
- What are a few poetic sequences/sequences of poetry that come to mind?
- Are there any groupings of poems that feel like a sequence but are not labeled as such?

Read and Discuss

“II” - “VI” (6-10 pg.)

- How are the titles working in these poems?
 - Why start at “II”?
 - How does this shape the poems before the sequence in the world of the collection?
 - What do the titles suggest about the progression of these poems?
- How do we read the “you” address in these poems? Does it change overtime?
- How does the “she” over time?

Activity

These poems move more through lyric understanding rather than narrative.

Map the progression of the poems After reading each poem note the following:

- What do we know.
- What is the speaker commanding from us?
- If applicable who is the “you” and the “her”

Writing

Have students now examine their own three poems. Organize them in a way that *creates progression* whether that be in lyrical or narrative movement. Once the poems are organized in such fashion have students make changes (or notes on changes) to said poem drafts to better fit the needs of this sequence.

Read and discuss:

“Incidents for Forgettery (14-16 pg, 26 pg)

- How are the titles of these poems working differently?
 - What does this suggest about the association between the poems?
- If “II” - “VI” moves through progression, how would you describe the movement of this sequence?
- These poems all live in the past tense or subjective. How does this shape the work?
 - How is this working with the titles?

Writing

With the original poem drafts, reorder and rework them based upon the movement in the “Incidents for Forgettery” sequence, however that is defined to you.