

Poem Series

Academic Level: High School, College, and Beyond.

Lesson Overview:

After reading *Settler* by Maggie Queene, students will read “Female,” “Sex,” “Crave,” “Barren,” “Birth,” “Hand,” “Sweet,” “Mirror,” “Pain,” “Animal,” and “Want.”

Lecture 1:

Useful definition(s):

Conceit: (From the Latin term for “concept”) An extended metaphor that is unconventional or complex in nature

Personification: The literary application of human-like traits to inanimate objects, animals, and beings without sentience

Several poems within *Settler* utilize personification and conceits to explore the demarcations of gender. Exhibiting masculine and feminine traits functions in the larger maintenance of social hierarchies as performative acts to appease others. When children do not perform their genders correctly, they are corrected by their peers. Men and women both avoid performing acts that may compromise their masculinity because acts of overt masculinity and femininity performed to please others must benefit the subject in claiming a desirable rank in the

hierarchy. People in subordinated positions within society are then pressured to adhere to actions and values emblematic of hegemonic femininity and masculinity as they grow to learn their position relative to their peers.

The feminine, thus, functions as a societal Other which opposes the dogma people use to identify themselves and their standards within any set of norms, the Self and the antithetical masculinity. However, the role of woman has value in that it allows men the space to dictate which behaviors society should value and uphold as masculine. The expressions of gender in Queeney's *Settler* frames gender, not as two diametrically opposed yet connected manners, but as a fluid spectrum the speaker inhabits.

After Lectures:

Discussion Questions:

1. Consider Queeney's use of personification in *Settler*. Write a reading response no longer than 3 pages analyzing how Queeney uses personification to complicate the reader's initial understanding of their world and values.

Classroom Activity:

1. Students will create a collage of images from various sources that corresponds to a theme in *Settler*. Students will then write a reflection describing their choices in sources and organization in junction with their understanding of *Settler*.

2. Students will complete a free-write that is a continuation of any poem of their choosing in *Settler*. Students should aim to follow or mimic Queeney's unique choices in diction and form.

A Critical Paper Assignment

1. Students will complete a close reading of any poem in *Settler* with a focus on the themes and literary devices Queeney uses.
2. Students will perform an analysis of two poems from *Settler* using any school of thought or theory as a framework.

Creative Writing Project

1. Students will create an original poem that must use the titles of the poems in *Settler* within its stanzas. Students will then write two pages for the poem explaining their choices in diction, metaphor, and form. Students are encouraged to question how their poems follow and stray from Queeney's methods in *Settler*.

Lecture 2:

Several poems within *Settler* emphasize the concept of literal "rootlessness" in the arrival of self-actualization. In the speaker finding and reveling in newfound parts of themselves, they arrive in the world with a sense of belonging to the natural world, divorced of the new for a physical body.

People's lives are significantly influenced by cultural and societal ideals constantly. These ideas shape the values of people that are reinforced within their homes and daily

interactions. The state of the world with globalization and nationalism has changed the way people create their identities. Many countries have been known to use ideas that oppose femininity in the creation and implementation of its laws or cultural identity. This could not happen, however, without officials and the elite creating an image of the ideal person with defines the country through misogyny which is informed by nationalism. The speakers in *Settler*, however, embrace both their feminine and masculine traits to create a new hybrid identity that is not bound to the laws of society.

Connections to others create the need for improved social awareness that spans beyond political borders. They increase the rate at which people function, as well as decreasing the perceived space between people. By cognition, more people begin to think of the world as a smaller space with limited distances. Modern life differs greatly from the past in that people now live in a world with shrinking political borders, so many people use the search for constant time and identities informed by the immediacy of their spaces tend to cope with society under the effects of this idea of the ideal human. Although the norms of what constitutes the ideal person will differ between places, inherent differences among people and communities will collapse, as well, obscuring the identities of those who do not fit neatly into the new values societies prioritize.

Lines in the poem “Crave” emphasizes the bodyless sensation of many speakers in *Settler*:

So much mean needing

Bottoms our stomachs, calluses

Hands, furs vision, keeps time

With the air wearing to bone.

Our bodies sing for salt, for fruit, the lard

Crackling the skillet bottom and shrouding

The lamb, snarl of rose petals, silver

Chains tracing breastbones, bathing

Infants slick as fish and know no world,

No immediate domain. No spangled

Night sky. Only the hand that stills

Us like livestock, the bellow that cores

Us, the spade blade that tunnels into

The high whine they take for singing.

Although there are mentions of the speaker and their peers having bodies that “sing for salt, for fruit, [and] lard” (5), the poem focuses specifically on the physical sensations of literal and metaphorical hunger. Queeney punctuates this newfound meaning and sense of belonging with the descriptions of infants who are “slick as fish and know no world / No immediate domain” (9-10). Despite the mentioning that infants enter the world with wet, “slick” bodies, the

speaker emphasize their lack of a “domain.” The babies are not bound to one space or place of being. They have a sense of inherent freedom from the systems that organize and judge bodies.

After Lectures:

Discussion Questions:

2. Consider Queeney’s use of language in *Settler*. Write a reflection no longer than 3 pages on how Queeney uses diction and syntax to draw the reader’s attention to particular phrases and descriptions.
3. How does Queeney utilize epithets and metaphors to characterize people? How could this focus on the physical body complicate the themes in Queeney’s poems? Write a response on this with a focus on two poems in *Settler*.

Classroom Activity:

3. Students will form groups of 3-5 people and draw an image corresponding to a stanza in a whichever poem they chose. Students will then organize their pictures to form a narrative consistent with one or more themes in *Settler*.
4. Students will complete a free-write that is a continuation of any poem of their choosing in *Settler*. Students should aim to follow or mimic Queeney’s unique choices in diction and form.

A Critical Paper Assignment

3. Students will complete a close reading of any poem in *Settler* with a focus on the themes and literary devices Queeney uses.

Creative Writing Project

2. Students will create three original poems detailing the physical sensations they feel in response to a specific emotion or state of being. Students will then write one page for each poem explaining their choices in diction, metaphor, and form. Students are encouraged to question how their poems follow and stray from Queeney's methods in *Settler*.