

Poem Sequences

Academic Level: High School, College, and Beyond.

Lesson Overview:

After reading *We Are Changed to Deer at the Broken Place* by Kelly Weber, students will revisit “What the Water Bruises Into,” “Abstinence,” “When I Learned to be Fourteen,” “Where the Sky’s Milk Comes In,” “Everyone Remembers Their First Time,” “Reasons I Wouldn’t Be A Good Mother,” “Anchor Point, Arrow Saw,” “Nuptial Bones,” “North of Hell,” “Nocturne With Aroace Girl,” “Aroace Girl With Kettles and Cradles,” “Aroace Girl With Traps,” “Aroace Girl : Plainsong Elegy,” “Aubade With Aroace Girl,” “Skin Hunger,” and “Dermatillomania.”

Useful definition(s):

Aubade: A song depicting lovers who depart at dawn, or a song evoking a sense of daybreak.

Elegy: A poem or song of serious reflection or mourning.

Metaphor: A literary comparison which draws attention to the similarities or differences between two or more unrelated things without the use of the words “like” or “as.”

Nocturne: A short musical composition evocative of night.

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

Lecture

Kelly Weber situates her collection *We Are Changed to Deer at the Broken Place* within the memories, experiences, and stories of an asexual, aromantic person. Weber utilizes form to convey and contrast the subject matter of each poem, which generate a shared understanding of the world, though hardly universal, as each poem confronts the complexities of one at odds with their social upbringing and lived reality.

In this sense, Weber's works evoke an interesting sense of hybridity. Because of her focus on the body being a vessel through which she and others can communicate history and connection, there is a sense of rootedness. However, the legacy of negotiating one's sexual and romantic orientation with the expectations of others lends Weber's work a sense of defiance and, at times, forlornness. The "Aroace Girl" sequence of poems captures this.

Weber's "Aroace Girl" sequence features seven poems with varying forms that frame the larger discussion around the speaker, the Aroace Girl. The poems progress through the Aroace Girl's sentiments and poetic forms. The sequence opens with a nocturne and later features an elegy and an aubade, culminating in a levee. The levee, though not a poetic structure, may refer to the process of welcoming or greeting others. Likewise, the use of levee also evokes the sentiment of preventing the overflow of venting or emotional response, as "Aroace Girl, Leveed" concludes the second section of the collection. This could also be a reference to the previous poem "Aubade With Aroace Girl," an aubade being a morning song and a levee traditionally also referring to a reception of visitors shortly following arising from bed.

After Lecture:

Discussion Questions:

1. Consider Weber's use of structure in *We Are Changed to Deer at the Broken Place*. Write a reading response no longer than 3 pages analyzing how Weber uses form and sequencing to complicate the reader's initial understanding of the collection.
2. Consider Weber's "Aroace Girl" sequence. How else may Weber's use of form complicate the reader's understanding of the speaker's internal thoughts and performed actions.
3. How does Weber's use of form within the stanzas of poems like "Crown of Screws" inform one's reading or interpretation of the poem?
4. Consider Weber's use of the prose poem. How does each use of this form differ from others?

Classroom Activity:

1. Students will create a new poem from words found in various sources that corresponds to a theme in *We Are Changed to Deer at the Broken Place*, as Weber does with works like "Gold Shyness (With Lines from Anne Carson)". Students will then write a reflection describing their choices in sources and diction.
2. Students will complete a free-write that continues the narrative of any poem of their choosing in *We Are Changed to Deer at the Broken Place*. Students should aim to follow or mimic Weber's diction and use of form. Students may also use any poetic form they feel will aid their work.

A Critical Paper Assignment

1. Students will complete a close reading of any poem in *We Are Changed to Deer at the Broken Place* with a focus on the themes and literary devices Weber uses.
2. Students will perform an analysis of five poems from *We Are Changed to Deer at the Broken Place* using any literary theory as a framework.
3. Students will compare the “Aroace Girl” sequence with the “Omphalos” sequence of poems, analyzing both sections of the collection.

Creative Writing Project

1. Students will compose an original poem that must use the words of a poem in *We Are Changed to Deer at the Broken Place*. This new poem will use Weber’s words in the student’s order of choice, reflecting or recontextualizing a theme or event within the poem. Students will then write three pages for the poem explaining their choices in diction, metaphor, and form.
 - a. Students are encouraged to question how their poems follow and stray from Weber’s methods in *We Are Changed to Deer at the Broken Place*.

Literary Theories:

Queer theory will be useful for students examining *We Are Changed to Deer at the Broken Place*. Originally coined through the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa and other scholars, the term Queer theory has informal origins. These scholars, inspired by Foucault’s rejection of identity politics and alignment of social constructs. Today, many scholars use Queer theory as a framework to analyze the social structures that uphold or reinforce biases around gender, sexuality, race, disability and the intersection of all area of marginalization.

Feminist theory, like Queer theory, through literary criticism encourages reader to think through the societal implications of their identities by contributing to discussions on essentialism and identity. Thus, many feminists use concepts that can be applied to other identity-based fields of study. Feminism, as theory, is one of the most influential disciplines that has extended into queer theory, cultural studies, gender studies, and women's studies. Scholars typically divide feminist theory into three sections, separated by era and frames of thought within feminism: first-, second-, and third-wave feminism.

Feminism, as a word denoting advocacy for women and the equality of the sexes, did not exist in the English language until the 1890s, one of the first feminist philosophies was Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Major works of first-wave feminism included Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which described the experiences of female writers in male-dominated fields. Similarly, Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about Women* (1968) examined the progression of depictions of femininity in British and American literature. Kate Millett expanded her Ph.D. dissertation into a book entitled *Sexual Politics* (1970) that analyzed the function and application of patriarchy in sexual acts in the works of English and American male authors Henry Miller, D. H. Lawrence, and Norman Mailer.

Second-wave feminism began in the 1960s and fundamentally adheres to the principles of first-wave feminism in the need for equality among women and men. However, second-wave feminism focused on the inherent specialness of women and femininity as an oppositional culture. Cultural femininity stated that the culture of women was naturally more gentle than the dominant, male-centered culture. Difference feminism strayed from the original tenets of first-wave feminism and sought to identify women's cultural difference and superiority. Notable

works include Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970). Second-wave feminism frequently concentrated on shared identity and camaraderie among all women which third-wave feminists contested.

Third-wave feminism explored the diversity of women's experiences and identities by including women of all races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and nationalities. Notably, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality. She used intersectionality to describe how the different bases of women's identities inform and affect their treatment and understanding of the world. One of my favorite subcategories of third-wave feminism is the recent study of post-secular feminism which seeks to combat harmful Western-driven narratives of women's experiences in relation to religion.

The field of ecocriticism may be useful in analyzing select poems from this collection. In the early 1990s, the wide range of literary criticism began to oppose its apolitical history. Critics from different fields and countries created a new movement called ecocriticism with origins in the new ecological activism. Notable critics included Lawrence Buell of the United States and Jonathan Bate of Great Britain.

There are two prevalent ways in which literary and cultural critics interpret the use of ecological activism and ecocriticism. One way diminishes the field's value. Thus, ecological issues are trivial or as material for people who worry needlessly over policy. Ecocriticism has little importance for aesthetics or literary and cultural criticism. The other way asserts that the process of reimagining our world in more ecologically sustainable ways is one of the most difficult, urgent problems of the modern era.

With the growth of ecocritical thought, many critics have also emerged with the thought that concern for the environment is of importance, but for someone else. These critics do not believe ecocriticism should be something they personally integrate into the system of values or ethics.

Early ecocriticism has the following interests: a focus on writing directly about nature; a focus on nature and pastoral writing from Great Britain and the United States; an often-reverential perspective on nature by white male writers; an indifference to or mistrust of critical theory, particularly poststructuralism; ecofeminist perspectives through second-wave feminism in discussions of ecology; discussions of local ecosystems outside the direct influence of large cities.