

High School Level Course Adoption - Landsickness by Leigh Lucas

Discipline: Poetry, Creative Writing, Literary Studies & Analysis

Audience: High School

Time: 30 - 45 minutes

Overview: After reading *Landsickness* by Leigh Lucas, the class will create a discussion around tone, poetry forms, and techniques that are present throughout Lucas' collection.

* Please note the content of this book includes sensitive subject matters that may be difficult for some students to discuss. Trigger warning: mental health and suicide. *

Objective: Introduce students to recently published poems and their work. Widening the curriculum to incorporate current voices in poetry will benefit the students and open them up to the precision of language, power of voice, and emotional expression.

Before Lecture: Make sure that all students have read *Landsickness* by Leigh Lucas. Additionally, make sure that they have their books present with them in class for the discussion. Take 5-10 minutes to allow students to sit in groups and freely discuss what they thought about the book. This could include which poem they thought most striking, which lines stood out to them, unique phrases or interesting language that they highlighted, as well as how the poems made them feel.

Lecture:

Revisit the definition of tone, poetry forms, and imagery. Provide examples and have students give examples of their own.

Define and discuss what the speaker of a poem is.

Speaker: this refers to the voice adopted by the author. The speaker can also be a voice that is separate from the author.

Tone: reveals the narrator's attitude as conveyed by their specific word choice.

Poetic Form: refers to the structure and shape that holds the poem.

Imagery: language used by poets to create images in the mind of the reader.

Depression and Mental Health

In *Landsickness*, Lucas takes the reader on a journey of grief and self-preservation as she tries to make sense of the loss of her partner who takes his own life. Throughout the collection we learn

about the speaker and her partner, their relationship, the tragedy that occurred, and how someone can try to come back from a trauma of this scale.

- The book starts off with the poem, *In my new life, I must learn everything again*, where we are introduced to the speaker. This piece shares the intimate evidence that the speaker is enduring a deep anguish that they are trying to heal from: “More and more, I manage on my own, lift my arms to wash/ my hair, thread my legs through underwear and pants, then/ let in wind, and speak a bit when spoken to...” By the end of the poem the reader becomes aware that the speaker is wounded and aimless as they try seeking a tangible connection to an individual with the lines: “Hoping to find something/ That belonged to him.” Discuss the tone of this poem.
- In the poem *The man I love*, the speaker reveals deeper imagery of the partner that they lost: “The man I love/ taught poetry/ to college students and kids at the Y...” as well as “He loved to sing and eat Kind bars and pet me when I’d sleep. / Tall, still he liked to wear my clothes. His eyes made little/ crinkly noises when he smiled.” The structure of the poem changes form to shorter one-to-two-word lines, with words even being cut off. Create a discussion around why you think the author chose this specific form for the final lines: “He sank like a man of stone. The sun, I think, was in his eyes.” How does this form complement the poem's intentions? Discuss the intentionality of placement.
- In the poem *Shrines of his photographs, trinkets, and scraps*, there is imagery of an altar in memoriam that has taken over the room containing trinkets, and photos, and various other mementos. The poem carries on: “I lie in bed and stare into the messy monuments in search/ of signs from the beyond. / I dream I am /a woman under water, /wordless and unmoving. / Sometimes, he is there. He holds his face and cries.” These lines depict a woman in sorrow who is stuck in the pit of despair and yearning for her partner, and the imagery is especially haunting to not only the reader, but the speaker as well.

Poetry acts as a powerful tool for anyone's story. However, it especially acts as a powerful form when talking about such heavy themes like depression and mental health. Let's look at other poets and their works depicting themes along this subject matter.

***I Can't See My Insides* by Patrycja Humienik**

<https://losangelesreview.org/2-poems-by-patrycja-humienik/>

Patrycja Humienik, the daughter of Polish immigrants, is a writer, editor, and performance artist. In Humienik's poem, *I Can't See My Insides*, the speaker takes the reader on a journey from their morning of waking up and venturing out into the city streets. The poem starts off, "I pretend to make a movie / out of my morning as I abandon the bed. / Flicker of muscle and running, / the light-sensitive emulsion of dreams / cut. When people ask how I'm doing, / I participate reluctantly. I know I'm not the only one / thinking about death, / abstracted daily in the headlines." This poem shares similarities to Lucas' *I take the long, dumb walk to work* and *I am not a New Yorker* as the writers are able to create an overwrought tone all while bringing in the imagery of an invasive city and its inhabitants. The poems' speakers share the feeling of being overwhelmed by the world and although alone, still wanting to be even more distant from it all.

Rain by Jennifer Grotz (Still Falling: Poems)

Jennifer Grotz is an author of three collections of poetry, a professor, and the director of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences. In this author's poem, *Rain*, the speaker wakes up after dreaming about loved ones she has lost. They stay on her mind, and she is taken back to a memory or a daydream of a rainy September evening in Warsaw. The poem starts: "Sometimes I dream too vividly, / I go to bed with my dead, I wake / and they're still alive in my mind / so I stay there; the longer I am here, / the more I shuffle back and forth, the harder / to say what living is." As the poem continues, the speaker contemplates, "To exist on earth, / if you are lucky, is to be alone / then with loved ones, or with loved ones, / and then alone, to walk the streets among / strangers." This poem shares similarities to Lucas', *Shrines of his photographs, trinkets, and scraps*, where the speaker in the poem is also in a dream state where they fantasize about their loved one and search for them from signs of the beyond.

Post-Lecture Discussion Questions for Landsickness by Leigh Lucas

1. Who is the speaker in these poems?
2. What page does the first poem start on? What is unusual about the contents list?
3. When analyzing the poems did you notice any images or words that were continuously repeated in the collection? What could this repetition signify?
4. How would you describe how the poems look on the page?

Writing Prompts:

1. Think about someone you no longer have a relationship with. This could be a family member who has passed away or a friend that you no longer have any contact with. Write a poem in any stylistic form recalling the last time you remember seeing them.
2. Write a free verse poem that imparts movement onto the page. Experiment with different line breaks and line lengths.
3. Experiment with creating a line poem that is at least 10 lines long.

Critical Writing Assignment

Summary: This assignment will fulfill the academic paper requirement for the course.

Materials: *Landsickness* by Leigh Lucas

Timeline: 1 - 2 Weeks

Assignment: In *Landsickness* each poem in the collection is braided into the next to create a sequence. Students should write a comparative essay about how the pieces communicate and relate to each other. Students should examine the similarities and differences between pieces and answer the question: how does this form help to achieve what the author wants to accomplish?

Requirements: Papers must be in MLA format, 2-3 pages double spaced, and contain a separate citation page. Students are required to schedule a session at the Writing Lab to receive help if needed and to have their drafts edited before being turned in.

Creative Writing Project:

Summary: This assignment will be considered as a final creative writing project and can also be considered as work to add to a portfolio.

Materials: *Landsickness* by Leigh Lucas

Timeline: 1 Week

Assignment: Lucas writes about a deeply wounding event that changes her life forever. Through striking poems of grief and diminishing welfare she is still able to impart moments of smile inducing and hopeful, witty humor. In “*I love to think about his body*” she writes: “I take it for a spin around the block, feed it strawberries, / test out a big blasting fart.” For this project, students will work to write five poems that imitate the concept of weaving two polar opposites together. You may write poems in any form, or at any length, that create a kind of juxtaposition. For example: You can write about a negative event or experience but incorporate humor into your poem. Vice versa students can write about something typically perceived as positive and incorporate their negative experience.

Requirements: Students must complete a total of five poems that reflect the directions of this assignment. A one-page double-spaced preface is also required.

College Level Course Adoption - *Landsickness* by Leigh Lucas

Discipline: Poetry, Creative Writing, Literary Studies & Analysis

Audience: Undergraduate Level and Beyond

Time: 45 - 90 minutes

Overview: After reading *Landsickness* by Leigh Lucas, the class will create a discussion around tone, poetry forms, atmosphere, and technique that are present throughout Lucas’ collection.

* Please note the content of this book includes sensitive subject matters that may be difficult for some students to discuss. Trigger warning: mental health and suicide. *

Objective: The course will depart from the literary canon and the traditional writers that are often taught and focused on in the classroom. Broadening the curriculum and incorporating new

releases of poetry will advance the students' breadth of knowledge, precision of language, power of voice, and emotional expression.

Before Lecture:

Make sure that all students have read *Landsickness by Leigh Lucas*. Additionally, make sure that they have their books present with them in class for the discussion. Start the class by taking 5 - 10 minutes to slowly ease into the lecture by asking students what they thought about the book and what they would like to share with the class.

Lecture:

Revisit the definition of imagery, atmosphere, form, and theme. Provide examples and have students give examples of their own. Define and discuss what the speaker of a poem is.

Speaker: this refers to the voice adopted by the author. The speaker can also be a voice that is separate from the author.

Theme: message or lesson that the writer wants to convey.

Atmosphere: the way a writer constructs their piece to convey feelings, emotions, and mood to the reader.

Poetic Form: refers to the structure and shape that holds the poem.

Imagery: language used by poets to create images in the mind of the reader.

Grief, Mental Health, and Suicide

In *Landsickness*, Lucas journeys through the impact of a traumatic loss and the grief that the speaker spirals into and how, or if you can ever recover. Lines featured include: "In my new life, I must learn everything again, "Walking the streets takes extreme effort, but even my bare minimum life requires it," and "The water doesn't move like blood because it moves like water." The collection depicts themes of grief, mental health, suicide, and hope for healing.

- In *The man I love*, the speaker reveals deeper imagery of the partner that they lost: "The man I love/ taught poetry/ to college students and kids at the Y." as well as "He loved to sing and eat Kind bars and pet me when I'd sleep. / Tall, still he liked to wear my clothes. His eyes made little/ crinkly noises when he smiled." The structure of the poem changes form to shorter one-to-two-word lines, with words even being cut off. Create a discussion around why you think the author chose this specific form for the final lines: "He sank like

a man of stone. The sun, I think, was in his eyes.” How does this form complement the poem's intentions? Discuss the intentionality of placement.

- In the poem *I take the long, dumb walk to work*, Lucas writes: “At lunchtime my work-husband claims he no longer likes/ the salad place we’ve stood in line for every day for six/ months. *suck a dick*, I type in the company chat, and watch/ the cursor blink.” This interaction shows how the speaker is not deferring from sharing her true feelings at her workplace, even if they are not professional or appropriate. The poem continues: “My apartment is small/ enough that I can both shut the door and turn the knob on/ the stove without removing myself from bed.” This line reveals that the speaker lives in a tiny living space, presumably a city studio apartment where she confines herself in her grief. Be sure to analyze this line further. While the proximity to the door and stove can alleviate some burden for the speaker, the imagery of the knob and the stove can also be interpreted as the speaker sharing thoughts of ideation.
- The poem *At the funeral, his other former girlfriend*, is the piece that ends the collection. From start to finish the poem renders emotion like a pendulum swinging back and forth. A sense of landsickness. “There are so many different people to hate, so I keep things / simple and hate everyone. / Grief does not look good on me. / I know why he picked me, a novelty.” The poem continues, “A black dog, a broken heart. / I revel in being more like him now.” The poem ends with the two powerful lines: “The world will be unsettled. / I will unsettle them.” Discuss as a class how reading this poem made everyone feel. What kind of atmosphere was present?

Poetry acts as a powerful tool for anyone's story. It especially acts as a powerful form when talking about such heavy themes of mental health, health, and suicide. Let's look at other poets and their works depicting themes of this subject matter.

notes by Danez Smith (*Homie*)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/148379/notes-5be30d611940d>

Danez Smith is a queer, non-binary poet, writer, and performer. In the poem, *notes*, the speaker starts off each of the six stanzas with the words *dear suicide*. The poem is located toward the end of the collection and is titled under the “notes” section of the book. The piece shares the speakers’ thoughts on suicide and their own connection to it. The third stanza starts off; “dear suicide /where are you keeping my friends? / every cup i turn over holds only air. / i jimmy open a tulip expecting their faces / but find only the yellow heart. / what have you done with them? / yesterday i took my body off / beat it on the front steps with a broom / & not one of them / came giggling out my skin.” This poem gets straight to the point by confronting how suicide can take people away from their loved ones so quickly, and leave them remembering the memory of them forever.

Hindenburg by Diane Seuss (Still Life with Two Dead Peacocks and a Girl)

Diane Seuss is an American poet, educator, and Pulitzer Prize winning author. In her poem, *Hindenberg*, the speaker is trying to share worrisome medical news with another individual who is unable to completely comprehend what is being told to her. The speaker shares: “and then I’m like no it’s in his neck it’s in his / goddamned neck and I blame the government / and she’s like who do you blame and I’m all I / blame the government and she’s like if I were you I’d blame the bug spray.” The poet utilizes a prose style and the repetition of language in the piece while trying to relay the trouble between the conversation. What makes this poem shine is its ability to bring an element of humor into a poem dealing with devastating news, in the same way that Lucas is able to incorporate humor sporadically throughout writing about her difficult journey.

Post-Lecture Discussion Questions for Landsickness by Leigh Lucas:

1. What page does the first poem start on? What is unusual about the contents list?
2. What kind of forms does the author utilize?
3. What is a lyric poem?
4. What do enjambment and end-stopped lines accomplish in these poems?

Writing Prompts:

1. Write a lyric poem.
2. Think about someone you no longer have a relationship with. This could be a family member who has passed away or a friend that you no longer have any contact with. Write a poem in any stylistic form recalling the last time you remember seeing them.
3. In this collection the author uses each poem to recall a series of events. All of the poems braid together and interact with one another, creating a list poem on the contents page. For this assignment create a list poem that is four lines long. You can write about whatever you like. Then, take those lines and use them as your first lines in creating four different poems. Try to find a way to relate the poems if possible.
4. Write a poem that imparts movement onto the page. Experiment with different line breaks, line lengths, end-stopped lines, and enjambment.

Critical Writing Assignment

Summary: This assignment will fulfill the academic paper requirement for the course.

Materials: *Landsickness* by Leigh Lucas

Timeline: 1-2 Weeks

Assignment: In *Landsickness* each poem in the collection is braided into the next to create a sequence. Students should write a comparative essay about how the pieces communicate and relate to each other. Students should examine the similarities and differences between pieces and answer the question: how does this form help to achieve what the author wants to accomplish?

Requirements: Papers must be in MLA format, 3-4 pages double spaced, and contain a separate citation page. Students are encouraged to utilize academic support services and schedule an appointment at the tutoring center to receive help if needed. Sessions are available both in person and online.

Creative Writing Assignment:

Summary: This assignment will be the final creative writing project.

Materials: *Landsickness* by Leigh Lucas

Timeline: 2 -3 Weeks

Assignment: For this assignment, students will take what they have learned and expand upon writing prompt #3. Students will create a mini chapbook of 11 poems. Like before, students will create a contents page that features a list poem and write 10 poems that contain braided structures. Poems can be lyric and/or any other forms, as well as any length. Consider the placement of your poems in this chapbook. Will they be listed chronologically, or will the order be varied? For the final day of class, students should be prepared to select one of their poems to read aloud and participate in an in class reading.

Requirements: Students must complete a total of 11 poems that reflect the directions of the assignment. The chapbook must include a title, preface page, contents list poem, and be sure to have the pages numbered.