Knowledge Study Guide

Knowledge by Kim Addonizio

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Kim Addonizio's poem □Knowledge□ is a twenty-line free-form poem, with no rhyme scheme. Indeed, free verse has no distinct limits or rules and so does not restrict the poet to a particular format. In □Knowledge,□ Addonizio's narrator asks the reader to consider whether the horrors of modern life are limited in some way to the tragedies to which one has already been exposed. □Knowledge□ appears in Addonizio's fourth book of poetry, *What Is This Thing Called Love*, published in 2004. The collection is divided into five sections, with the first devoted to love, the second to death, the third to the world, the fourth to drinking, and the fifth to no topic in particular. □Knowledge□ is found in the third section.

The poem focuses on the most horrific things that take place in the world, although it does not mention any horrors in particular. Addonizio begins the poem with a lengthy dependent clause that allows the reader to slowly come to an understanding of the assertion that even though one might think one knows the depth of human cruelty and the extremes of barbarity, some events can still prove utterly appalling. As she suggests in the last line, one might remain frightened that even worse acts are yet to come. Addonizio uses the second-person □you□ throughout the poem, inviting the reader in as a participant in her very personal exploration of the horrors that continue to shock the world.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: American

Birthdate: 1954

Kim Addonizio was born in Washington, D.C., on July 31, 1954, as one of five children of Pauline Betz Addie, a U.S. tennis champion in the 1940s, and Bob Addie, a sportswriter for the *Washington Post*. Addonizio moved to San Francisco, California, in 1976, where she worked in a succession of jobs as secretary, waitress, and office clerk. She began writing poetry in her twenties. She earned a bachelor of arts degree from San Francisco State University when she was twenty-eight years old, in the same year that her daughter was born. In 1986, after another four years of part-time classes, Addonizio earned a master's degree in fine arts.

In 1987, Addonizio published several poems in collaboration with two other poets in a book of poetry called *Three West Coast Women*. She received her first National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant in 1990, which gave her the economic freedom to focus on her poetry. At the age of forty, she published her first book of her own poetry, *The Philosopher's Club* (1994). Subsequently, she won a second NEA grant in 1995 and published *Jimmy & Rita*, a verse novel, in 1997. She won a Pushcart Prize and the Chelsea Poetry Award in 1998 and was a finalist for the 2000 National Book Award for Poetry for her third collection, *Tell Me* (2000). She was awarded the James Dickey Prize for poetry in 2001 and the John Ciardi Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003.

□Knowledge□ is from Addonizio's 2004 collection, *What Is This Thing Called Love*. She was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and published her first novel, *Little Beauties*, in 2005. She has spent most of her adult life living and working in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she has also occasionally taught classes on poetry at regional colleges.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-6

The first several lines of □Knowledge□ contain a dependent clause that forces the reader to continue reading without understanding the intent of the rumination until the middle of line 6. The first line suggests that the poem will explore events or behaviors that are outside the ordinary events of daily life. The words □Even when you know□ imply that one can still be surprised, that not everything can be understood or anticipated. The second line continues in this mode, with the addition of □even when you pride yourself.□ The inclusion of the word □pride□ clarifies how fully the poem's addressee, □you,□ claims to understand the world, in that this person is proud of this knowledge. Thus, the reader may anticipate that the narrator is asserting that even those who understand the cruelty and arbitrariness of the world can still be surprised by the level of cruelty that is inflicted on innocent people. She expands on this point in line 3 when she points out that unflinchingly studying history or watching the news still may not prepare one for the barbarities to which some people can subject others. That is, no history book, newspaper, or newscast can prepare a reader or viewer for the horrors that will be committed. This line makes clear that, for example, forcing people to study the Nazi Holocaust does not mean that they can be ready to objectively understand the situation when such an event occurs again.

In line 4, Addonizio continues the topic of line 3, explaining that even when one is aware of the □quotidian,□ or everyday, examples of human cruelty, this awareness provides no immunity. The poet uses the word □minor□ in this line to reinforce how ordinary these events have become, how unimportant they seem; that is, she stresses the theme of how accustomed people can become to other people's meanness. She labels these incidents □endless□ and in the first part of line 5 refers to them as □relevant examples□ of how cruel human beings can be to one another. The ideas of the first five lines culminate in line 6, where the narrator provides an independent clause to which the preceding dependent clause can be linked. (The end of line 5, □even now,□ is in essence an abbreviated restatement of all that appears in lines 1-5.) She proposes that no amount of study or awareness of cruelty can fully prepare one for the reality of what some human beings will do to others. This cruelty still occasionally □strikes you anew.□

Lines 7-9

Once the independent clause has been provided, the thought continues at the end of line 6 and the beginning of line 7. The narrator suggests that this renewed shock might lead those who feel that shock to think that they must have previously believed □that humanity / was fundamentally good.□ That is, if they had truly understood the extent to which men could be evil, they would not have been shocked at all. Thus, lines 7 and 8 together suggest that a belief in the fundamental goodness of humankind is perhaps a core part of most people's ideology, whether they realize it or not□again, otherwise,

they would not be shocked by the manifestation of evil. The narrator suggests that this fundamental belief in the goodness of human beings has not generally been influenced by more pessimistic views of humankind. Line 9 refers to the nineteenth-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, a pessimist who believed that people do not have individual free will but instead are subject to a vast and wicked will that is inclusive of everyone. Schopenhauer does not refer to this collective will as a god figure; rather, the source of this negative will is cosmic in origin, such that humankind is simply at the mercy of the surrounding world. In line 9, Addonizio summarizes Schopenhauer's philosophy as holding that humanity is □all blind, impersonal will.□

Lines 10-12

The narrator proceeds to suggest in line 10 that people have generally been positive enough not to accept the similar contentions of Thomas Hobbes, an early-seventeenth-century philosopher who also dismissed humankind's ability to control itself. In line 10, the narrator refers to followers of Hobbes as people who might □perversely□ and □gleefully□ accept a pessimistic view of life. These followers would find joy in being pessimistic about the future of humankind and its ability to govern itself. The five italicized adjectives presented in line 11 illustrate the □clear-sighted□ ideas put forth by Hobbes, who thought that each person should embrace determinism and do exactly as he or she desires. For Hobbes, this was freedom. Indeed, Hobbes thought that people are essentially self-serving, leading the narrator to mention the adjective □solitary.□ Hobbes also believed that in their natural state, people live in a state of chaos and incessant war. This is the □nasty□ and □brutal□ nature of humankind, which is thus often □short,□ or brief, in its existence. All of the words in line 12, □*solitary, poor, nasty, brutal, and short*,□ are devoid of hope for the future. These words contradict the optimism with which most people struggle to understand the world.

Lines 13-18

The first words of line 13 echo the last two words of line 5: □even now.□ Even now, the narrator again asserts, people can be shocked by terrible cruelty, even after having witnessed so many examples of humans being cruel to other humans. Line 14 refers to this new □terrible act□ that can be so horrible that we hear of it with disbelief. People are thus sent □reeling off,□ perhaps dizzy and unable to feel secure, as well as □overwhelmed.□ This feeling of helplessness leaves people unable to weep. Indeed, the □innocence□ that people did not know they still possess has been with them all along, as made evident by that horror too terrible to contemplate. At the end of line 17 and the beginning of line 18□where the sentence that has constituted the entire poem to this point finally comes to a close□the narrator asserts that even when one has become too cynical, too aware of horror to believe in the goodness of human beings, the desire to *want* to believe still exists.

Lines 19-20

In the continuation of line 18, the narrator suggests that the desire to want to believe in the goodness of humanity has been defeated. Addonizio uses the words □shattered□ and □irreparably,□ or beyond repair, stating that this hope might □seem□ to be gone completely. Yet human beings continue to exist, despite the horror of the world and their awareness of events too terrible to easily accept or understand. The acknowledgment of this horrible reality leaves human beings □afraid.□ In the final lines of the poem, the narrator contends that people will remain with this devastating fear that more surprising horrors, more terrible events to □know,□ will come about. That is the □knowledge□ of the title: the awareness that worse things may yet happen.

Themes

Fear

Addonizio's poem ends with an awareness of fear and an acknowledgment that the horrors of the past might well presage worse events in the future. She holds that one indeed has reason to be afraid, as the future will hold more to □know,□ more to grasp that will remind humankind that not all people are □fundamentally good,□ as is perhaps too often believed. Fear about what might still happen is prevalent throughout the poem; indeed, that fear is the central focus underlying the text. In spite of people's innate willingness to believe in the goodness of humankind, ample evidence of evil exists. The poet uses the word □afraid□ prominently, at the end of line 19, as she brings the poem to a close. Thus, the image that she leaves with her readers is a depressing reminder that while one may believe that no event could be worse than what has already taken place, the possibility of worse horror remains. This possibility is what creates so much fear.

Hope

Much of Addonizio's poem reminds her readers that hopefulness is a natural human condition. She acknowledges that despite the evidence of □human cruelty,□ people spend their whole lives □believing that humanity / was fundamentally good.□ This is an observation that cannot be supported by the events of the past, and yet hope perseveres. Addonizio cites the most pessimistic of philosophers, Arthur Schopenhauer and Thomas Hobbes, as examples of pessimism that people ignore as they continue to view life optimistically. Because of this natural inclination toward hope, humankind is □stunned□ when terrible events unfold. As such, when reality intrudes, people are □overwhelmed□ by the events that they are unprepared to accept. Yet in the face of horrific tragedies, people need hope in order to maintain a positive existence. Without hope, despair would overtake people's lives and diminish their ability to happily exist.

Innocence

Another theme in □Knowledge□ highlights the ability of human beings to maintain their basic innocence in the face of terrible tragedy. She devotes the first eight lines of the poem to an extended discussion of this innocence, inserting frequent repetitions of the word □even.□ □Even when□ and □even now□ imply that even in the face of so much evidence of humankind's cruelty, people retain an unwarranted innocence with respect to the world. Addonizio indeed uses the word □innocence□ to classify this ability to shift focus from horror, from □what people are capable of,□ to hope, despite the occurrence of tragedies that cannot be rationally justified or understood.

Love

The inclusion of □Knowledge□ in Addonizio's collection of poems *What Is This Thing Called Love* illustrates the complexities of that sentiment. One of love's greatest assets is its ability to endure, even when death or tragedy intervenes. In a way, love cannot exist without fear□fear that the object of that love will be injured or die. In the final lines of □Knowledge,□ Addonizio focuses on the awareness that terrible evil can occur, leaving people afraid that even more danger exists. The fear of losing those who are loved motivates much of that worry, and yet love is what turns people away from the pessimism of Schopenhauer and Hobbes and toward a fundamental belief in the goodness of humankind. Love connects us all and allows us to endure.

Understanding

Understanding is a theme in Addonizio's poem that unites the many other themes regarding love, hope, and innocence. Understanding requires an acknowledgment and an acceptance of the realities of the world. Horror and □relevant examples of human cruelty□ exist□but so does a belief in the goodness of humanity. The awareness of these differing elements of human existence fosters understanding of the complexity of human beings. Addonizio's poem points out that humankind remains innocent even in the face of its past experiences. This does not necessitate the ignoring of reality; indeed, several lines of the poem maintain that people are not □evading history□ or ignoring the news. That is, a willingness to accept evil while still maintaining hope does not suggest ignorance. Rather, humankind understands that evil exists, and while people may fear it, they must still find ways to live, love, and nurture themselves in a world filled with risk. Understanding that evil exists does not entail succumbing to fear. Addonizio suggest this very notion in line 19, when she writes that □you have to go on.□ Being afraid of danger is an important part of understanding the risks of living.

Style

Free Verse

Free verse is verse with no discernible structure, rhyme scheme, or meter. Free verse allows the poet to fit the poetic line to the content of the poem. Thus, the poet is not restricted by the need to shape the poem to a particular meter but can instead create complex rhythm and syntax. Free verse is not the same as blank verse, which also does not use a rhyme scheme. Blank verse almost always adheres to iambic pentameter, where each line contains ten syllables in the form of five iambic feet, each of which is composed of an unstressed syllable followed by an accented syllable. By contrast, free verse relies on line breaks to create a rhythm. Free verse is most often associated with modern poetry, such as with Addonizio's poem. Indeed, no pattern of rhyme or meter can be found in □Knowledge□; instead, the irregular line breaks give the poem a rhythm that is best appreciated in hearing it read aloud.

Line Breaks

Line breaks are a defining element of poetry. They can be used to impart varied meaning to lines, to focus the reader on certain ideas, to create rhyme or rhythm, or to lend a specific appearance to the poem on the page. Addonizio most pointedly uses line breaks to impart meaning and to emphasize ideas. The use of a dash at the end of line 11, as followed by the list of words in line 12 (□*solitary, poor, nasty, brutal, and short*□), emphasizes the importance of these words. Addonizio also uses the line break to build tension at the end of line 5, putting more emphasis on the words □even now.□ Placing the conclusion of the clause on the next line helps to sustain that tension.

Narrative Poetry

Narrative poetry is a form in which the author tells a story. Like a short story, a narrative poem generally has a beginning, middle, and clear ending or resolution. Not all narrative poems follow this formula, however; some narrative poems reflect the author's artistic interpretation of events. In these cases, the narration is less structured. Addonizio might have chosen to write a poem that recounted a specific frightening moment and then explained that this event left her frightened for the future. Had she done so, her poem may have been less powerful. Instead, she begins her poem with the disillusionment that she felt when she realized that the world in which she trusted had seemingly disappeared. No actual events are mentioned, but the fact that the narration concerns a certain event is implied. This approach allows Addonizio to universalize her artistic vision, which ends with the prophecy that worse events (also undescribed) are possible, such that the poem becomes more powerful to the reader.

Parallelism

Parallelism refers to a repetition in style or words within a poem. This device is one way to express several ideas of comparable importance in a similar manner or to establish the importance of a particular idea. Addonizio uses parallelism to set the tone of the poem and to create tension. For example, the opening words of line 1, "even when," are balanced with the closing words of line 5, "even now." Also, the opening words in line 1 are repeated as the opening words in line 2. Another example of this device occurs when the closing words of line 5, "even now," are repeated at the beginning of line 13. This use of parallelism focuses the reader's attention on these lines and signifies that they are important elements of the poem.

Historical Context

Addonizio's poem tells her readers about □some terrible act that sends you reeling off.□ Many such acts occurred during Addonizio's lifetime as well as in the years before her birth. As she observes in her poem, some events are so shocking that □even when you know□ what people are capable of doing to one another, these appalling acts defy belief. In many ways, the twentieth century was defined by a succession of genocides, including that of the Armenians in Turkey (1915-1918), Stalin's crushing of the Ukrainian revolt (1932-1933), the Japanese murder of Chinese in Nanking (1937-1938), the Nazi Holocaust (1938-1945), the Khmer Rouge's slaughter of Cambodians (1975-1979), the Rwandan slaughter of Tutsis (1994), and the massacre of Muslims in Bosnia (1992-1995). Through these events, upward of seventeen million people were killed simply because they were of a particular race or ethnic group or because they practiced a particular religion. Many acts of individual terrorism also occurred. The Palestine Liberation Organization was responsible for the murder of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, as well as many attacks in the Middle East. Also, the Irish Republican Army carried out various attacks in Great Britain. By 1995, terror was no longer limited to areas outside the United States. That year an American terrorist blew up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people.

The first several years of the twenty-first century were also characterized by death and terrorism. On the morning of September 11, 2001, nearly three thousand people died in attacks on the World Trade Center, in New York City, and the Pentagon, in Washington, D.C., along with the crash of a hijacked plane in Pennsylvania. These incidents of terrorism seemed more shocking than those of previous centuries, and as Addonizio suggests in the final lines of her poem, such events leave people frightened that □there is more to know.□ The September 11 attacks led to the U.S. involvement in a war in Afghanistan against the Taliban, who were at the time that nation's ruling faction. The Taliban, a name derived from an Arabic word for □religious students,□ was originally composed of revolutionaries who fought the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989). Once they gained control of most of their nation, the Taliban instituted strict Islamic rule, even while a civil war continued against the Northern Alliance, who also controlled part of Afghanistan. The Taliban was closely aligned with the militant organization al Qaeda and allowed that group's religious fundamentalist leader, Osama bin Laden, to establish training camps for terrorists. Al Qaeda was responsible for the events of September 11, 2001.

Although the Taliban eventually was ousted from Afghanistan, many members remained in hiding and continued to plan terrorist activities. Indeed, attacks took place in Istanbul, Turkey, and Casablanca, Morocco, in 2003; in Madrid, Spain, in 2004; and in London, England, in 2005. Other attacks were executed throughout the world, and although no additional terrorist attacks were launched in the United States after 2001, warnings of possible attacks have sporadically arisen. These warnings have heightened public awareness, but they also have fostered feelings of vulnerability and fear. As Addonizio tells her readers, examples of human cruelty are □endlessly apparent□ and serve to remind people that they have reason to be afraid. The final line of her poem leaves

readers with what is almost a warning□that □one day□ people will witness even worse examples of human cruelty.

Critical Overview

Critical reviews of Addonizio's fourth collection of poetry, *What Is This Thing Called Love*, were mixed. In *Publishers Weekly*, an anonymous reviewer states that the collection is written in a style that is □two parts confessional, one part standup comedy, and one part talking blues.□ The reviewer also notes that □Addonizio's in-your-face persona and her avoidance of technical difficulty should help her attract the wide audience she explicitly invites.□ A more favorable review of Addonizio's book was published in *Booklist*. The reviewer, Donna Seaman, claims that □Addonizio's poems are like swallows of cold, grassy white wine□ in that they □go down easy and then, moments later, you feel the full weight of their impact.□ Seaman also observes that Addonizio's poems are □finely crafted and irreverent□ as well as □timeless in their inquiries into love and mortality.□ According to Seaman, the poems are □rife with mystery and ambivalence, and [are] achingly eloquent in their study of the conflictful union of body and soul.□

Diane Scharper's review of *Love* for *Library Journal* was less enthusiastic. Scharper compares Addonizio's collection to Anne Sexton's collection *Love Poems* (1969) and declares that Addonizio is □neither as sharpedged nor as passionate as Sexton.□ Rather, Addonizio's poems are □lukewarm and 'cool' at their best□ and are best suited □for larger public libraries.□ William Logan's review in *New Criterion* was even more negative. In an article that is largely an attack on modern poetry, Logan begins by referring to Addonizio as □a hot babe who can bang out a sonnet on demand.□ This comment is not meant to be flattering, as the remainder of the review makes clear. Logan claims that Addonizio's poetry is □part of the latest contemporary manner□ha! ha! poetry can be just as dumb as television, too!□ Logan continues his review with the comment that □too many of Addonizio's poems are made in Betty Crocker style, all helpful hints and ingredients whipped in a jiffy for a dish tasteless as a stuffed pillow.□ Logan concludes by suggesting that the problem with modern poetry is that too often the poet does not have anything to say. None of these reviews mention □Knowledge□ specifically, instead focusing on the collection of poems as a whole.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Metzger Karmiol has a doctorate in English Renaissance literature and teaches literature and drama at the University of New Mexico. In this essay, she discusses Addonizio's poem as a conduit to understanding the common sentiment of fear and the emotional toll exacted when the illusion of safety no longer exists.

One of the ways in which poetry speaks to its reader is through its ability to reach deep inside that reader and stir memories, and sometimes fears, of an event or time already past. Film does this, of course. Sitting in a darkened theater also gives filmgoers the opportunity to immerse themselves in a world they might otherwise never experience. For the film audience, however, the experience will be the same, or at least similar, for each person viewing the film. That is, unless a film is extremely abstract, most viewers will respond with similar emotions. Most people will react to the villain and identify with the heroic lead in the same manner, or perhaps the plot will be familiar in some universal way and thus instantly recognizable to the audience. Regardless of the content, a connection, a common experience, is fostered among the members of the audience. Poetry creates a connection between art and audience as well, yet a difference exists with respect to the commonality of experience. With poetry, each reader's experience will be unique, as a poem can suggest various images or realities, depending entirely on each reader's individual experiences.

Addonizio's poem □Knowledge□ is a prime example of a poem that can mean different things to different people. Is the poem about terrorism as mass murder, or could it be about the particularly cruel murder of just one innocent victim? It might also be about the random murder of office workers by a deranged individual. Regardless of the specific intent of the poem, which only Addonizio can address, the knowledge that a new danger has emerged in the world, even when that world is strictly a personal one, will have an impact on every person who reads the poem.

For some people, □Knowledge□ may bring forth images of the many genocides of the past fifty years□the Holocaust, Rwanda, Bosnia□all of which left legacies of hate and horror in the late twentieth century. For others, the poem will suggest a more immediate, personal tragedy, such as the death of a child or spouse as a result of the actions of another person. Interviews with Addonizio suggest that the poem was possibly inspired by terrorism. For those who have lived under the threat of terrorism since 2001, Addonizio's poem recalls the devastating destruction of the World Trade Center complex on September 11 of that year. Her opening line, □Even when you know what people are capable of,□ may leave readers recalling the shock they felt as they watched and then rewatched the collapse of the twin towers on that sunny morning. That tragedy was clearly not an accident but the deliberate murder of thousands of innocent people. The resulting shock was profound in large part because of the absolute evil of the event.

Indeed, evil speaks to Addonizio. In a November 2000 interview for the literary newspaper *Poetry Flash*, she explained to Leza Lowitz that evil is □one of the things I obsess about. Evil and suffering and power□all of that.□ She further noted that the

□whole question of good and evil□ is a theme she pursued ever since she became aware that, eventually, innocence □is going to be crushed, somehow.□ According to Addonizio, people have to come to an understanding of the cruelty of the world □in order to survive.□ This is an important theme in □Knowledge,□ which ends with the suggestion that everyone will soon know that innocence has no place in this world. Although this interview predated the terrorism of 2001, Addonizio's words suggest the kind of response that she might have had to that attack.

Throughout □Knowledge,□ Addonizio sustains a dialogue that explores feelings of disbelief in the face of events so horrific that innocence must surely be eradicated. She ends her poem with the warning that although □there is more to know,□ there is also reason to be afraid. The fear that □one day you will know it□ is what many people experience each time another terror alert is announced, each time a new message from terrorists is released, and each time another bombing occurs, even in some far-off country. In a fall 2001 interview with Tod Marshall for his book *Range of the Possible: Conversations with Contemporary Poets*, Addonizio related that a month after the September 11 attacks, she went to see a museum exhibit on torture. This exhibit and the World Trade Center destruction combined to throw her □into complete despair about the innate evil of our species.□ She became aware that the modern world has brought about new risks; she told Marshall, □Here we are at war again, and there are real dangers to our survival.□ This fear of not surviving is projected in line 18 of □Knowledge,□ where Addonizio writes that □hope has been shattered now.□ In line 19 she asserts that once that hope is gone, people have very good reason to be □afraid.□

In a profile published in the *San Francisco Reader*, Jerry Karp claims that Addonizio □has an uncanny ability to apply fresh and urgently personal perspectives to recognizable moments of crisis and calm.□ This is precisely what she has done with □Knowledge.□ In referring to an incident so horrible that people find it difficult to comprehend, she has articulated□whether intentionally or not□the grief, disbelief, and fear that gripped the United States in the years following September 11, 2001. Karp quotes Addonizio as remarking that she is □interested in communication, and in talking about things that are common to people's experience,□ such as □love and loss and death and time and feeling afraid.□ The emotions of hope and fear are also part of love; thus, the appearance of a poem about the loss of innocence in a collection of poetry titled *What Is This Thing Called Love* is perhaps appropriate. Falling in love and sharing someone else's life puts a lover at risk of heartache and loss. Terrorists do not care about the loves of those whom they kill, but empathy for those who lost loved ones in the terrorist attacks is part of the common emotional experience of that day.

The commonality of experience is what appeals to Addonizio; as such, she wants her poetry to be accessible, which is why so many people can find meaning in □Knowledge.□ In the interview with Marshall, she states that she is not interested in creating poetry that does not effectively communicate a message. She believes □in narrative, in story□ and not □in destroying meaning.□ In telling Marshall that she believes that □language was developed over millions of years as a way to communicate,□ Addonizio clarifies why a poem like □Knowledge□ works so well to capture the emotions of her readers. Readers understand the disbelief and the feeling

that although □endlessly apparent / and relevant examples of human cruelty□ have come to pass, people can still be sent □reeling off, too overwhelmed / even to weep.□ The experience of horror on September 11, 2001, was shared by everyone who could turn on a television set and watch the events replayed endlessly. Even after witnessing the towers fall a dozen or more times, one could still be shocked at □what people are capable of.□

Addonizio's poem reminds her readers of this shock because of its clarity. The poet makes no effort to deliberately obscure meaning or create a level of complexity that only literary critics might comprehend. Instead, the poem and the emotions articulated are easily accessible. This is what Addonizio told Ryan G. Van Cleave she wants her poetry to accomplish in an interview published in the *Iowa Review*. Van Cleave titled this interview □Kim Addonizio: A Poet with Duende.□ Something with *duende*, a word with Spanish origins, is irresistibly attractive. That label would please Addonizio, who tells Van Cleave that while there is □nothing wrong with difficult poetry,□ she □can't write that kind of thing.□ She wants her poetry to be easy to understand, though not simple; she wants to write well, and she wants her poetry to be complex □where life is complex.□ She accomplishes this with □Knowledge,□ which captures not just an event but also the emotional toll of that event.

The ability to tell a story that speaks to readers and perhaps changes the world is a rare gift. In an interview with Jalina Mhyana for the online literary magazine *Rock Salt Plum Poetry Review*, Addonizio discusses the importance of writing political poems, stating that □it's everyone's responsibility to tackle injustice, one way or another.□ She believes that poetry is one way to illuminate and perhaps bring an end to injustice. Whether a poem like □Knowledge□ can bring an end to the horrors of terrorism cannot be predicted. But it is clear that poetry such as Addonizio's can help readers understand the commonality of experience. A poem can help a reader contemplate the emotions of the moment, the fears that transport people when they are reminded of the risks they face, and the possibility that certain types of innocence will never again exist□and indeed, □Knowledge□ fits that description quite well.

Source: Sheri Metzger Karmiol, Critical Essay on □Knowledge,□ in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Critical Essay #2

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature. In this essay, he explains that Knowledge breaks from the common poetic practice of using direct experience to convey thoughts and emotions, managing to be powerful even while filled with abstract concepts.

Throughout the twentieth and now the twenty-first centuries, poets, critics, and teachers have held the position that sensory experience is the standard by which to judge effective poetry. Beginning writers, in search of the techniques that will make it possible for them to communicate effectively with their audiences, are continuously exhorted to □show, don't tell.□ Beginning readers, who are not trained in the skills needed to extract meaning from the raw situations presented, end up confused and wishing someone would explain to them the mysteries of a poem that refuses to make clear its point.

This emphasis on physical imagery derives principally from the theoretical scaffold built by the poet T. S. Eliot, who, in his 1919 critique of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (quoted in Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*), proposed that effective writing relies on an □objective correlative□: that is, he suggested, a specific object or sequence of events must be used, instead of generalized and vague language, to evoke consistent responses from all readers, regardless of their personal histories. Eliot's point, which has since his time become almost universally accepted, is that it does no good to write with words that talk about ideas or emotions, because they mean different things from one person to the next. For example, one reader might imagine that the phrase □I hate this□ to mean a burning, seething animosity toward whatever the object is, while another reader might take the phrase to imply just a mildly strong dislike. To convey the desired message, the writer would be better off showing an action toward the hated object, such as glaring, striking, or destroying. Abstract terms are too removed from actual human experience to make readers feel emotions deeply: a poet trying to communicate on a level that strikes readers emotionally would do better to write in terms of things that can be seen, heard, felt, smelled, and tasted. These are the ways all people, regardless of their intellectual practices, know the world.

While this is standard practice in modern poetry, there are, of course, exceptions: rules are made to be broken. One particularly successful exception to the rule about showing and not telling is Addonizio's □Knowledge.□ Readers who have a general familiarity with Addonizio's work know that she is best known as a sensualist, a writer not afraid to address her poetry to the basic, less-refined aspects of human behavior, particularly erotic behavior. As such, she might be expected to use physical imagery even more than the average poet in relating to the audience. But there is a social aspect to behavior that erotic poetry must address, and to the degree that this is her subject matter, Addonizio is something of a sociologist. She concerns herself with objective reality, of course, but there is also a strong vein of the theoretical throughout her poetry. This is taken to an extreme in □Knowledge,□ where the subject matter is the process of abstract intellectualization itself: despite the basic tenant of the objective correlative, this

is a poem that cannot reach out to readers by bringing them to a common ground in the physical world.

The poem concerns the acquisition of abstract knowledge: the kind that is not gained from immediate personal experience but is instead brewed within an individual's mind, developed by musing on implications echoing from previous experiences. Over the course of twenty lines, Addonizio discusses the capacity of humans to arrive at shocking realizations, so shocking that they can change a person's view of the world. But the poem itself does not contain anything shocking. Instead of hitting readers hard with the direct experience of the sort of □terrible act□ that can remind one of long-lost innocence, move one to tears, and make one reconsider one's deepest cynicism, she merely refers to an act and tells readers to accept that the act is indeed terrible. Each reader is free to imagine what that terrible act might be. When Addonizio gives a list of □clear-sighted adjectives□ cribbed from the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, it contains words that are not comfortable, but that does not mean that they are powerful, either. □*Solitary, poor, nasty, brutal, and short* □ may bring to mind the unwanted facts of life, but they are not words that force readers to take life's horrors to heart.

The benefit of this is that readers can fill in the poem with their own sense of what is shocking. The drawback is that the poet loses control of the meanings that readers take from it. Abstract language raises the likelihood that the different possible readings will produce interpretations of the poem that are not within the range of the poet's intention. Because the poem is built on abstractions, it can mean different things in different circumstances. Addonizio seems to welcome this span of meaning, taking the risk of diverse feelings about the poem as a price that has to be paid if one is to explore the topic of abstract thought at all.

One reason □Knowledge□ is able to operate without giving any of the specific □endlessly apparent / and relevant examples of human cruelty□ that it talks about is that it is carefully, meticulously structured. The words that make up the poem may not be the jarring physical experiences that Eliot required, but they are indeed evocative of a certain kind of intellectualism that people use to avoid thinking of reality's horrors. When Addonizio refers to the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's phrase about □blind, impersonal will,□ she uses words that sound as if they should mean more but end up hollow. All of her references to philosophy, in fact, serve to establish the world of this particular poem as being far removed from experience. Other words that Addonizio has chosen, including □terrible,□ □overwhelmed,□ □innocence,□ □hope,□ and especially □quotidian,□ are so abstract that they do not even pretend to come close to hands-on experience. If the poem were trying to follow Eliot's theory, it might be deemed a failure, but Addonizio makes it clear with her word choices that she has no interest in being held to such a basic rule.

While the words used in □Knowledge□ might be overly intellectual, Addonizio gives the poem a musical cast that makes art of them. For one thing, the use of □even□ throughout the first half of the poem makes the poet's controlling hand obvious. It acts as a sort of musical refrain, clarifying the distinction between art and thought. Addonizio also makes strong use of the second-person □you□ voice. Common enough in poetry,

the second-person form of address is seldom as necessary as it is in this poem, where the poet needs to do all she can to make readers connect personally with the presented ideas. Finally, there is the poem's unmistakable, undeniable sense of rhythm: Addonizio does not deal here with any standard pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, but the frequent caesuras, or pauses, give the words a lyrical cadence that abstract language about an abstract subject generally lacks. Addonizio makes use of anything that can slow the reader down□commas, dashes, periods, and line breaks□to make readers feel her verbal artistry even if they are not aware of feeling it.

After so many decades have passed by with writers being told to □show, don't tell,□ it is only right that a talented poet should feel free to flout that rule. In a poem like □Knowledge,□ in which the subject matter is itself abstract thought, Addonizio is practically obliged to tell and not show. Stripped of the techniques that give poetry its immediacy and make it a moving experience□that is, unable to appeal directly to the senses□Addonizio uses other poetic devices that subtly remind readers that this is, after all, a poem and not an essay. The fact that she does not feel the need to show, and is successful without doing so, is a clear indicator that in art rules are made to be broken.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on □Knowledge,□ in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Critical Essay #3

Holmes is a freelance writer and editor. In this essay, he considers the contrast between the tone and content of Addonizio's poem.

One of the advantages of the poetic format, in relation to standard prose, is that it generally allows for a greater range of expression in fewer words. Many novelists have certainly defied the conventions of syntax so as to communicate their ideas most effectively. In *Lonesome Traveler*, Jack Kerouac, the icon of the beat generation, crafted sentences spanning entire paragraphs and characterized by indifference to proper grammar and the widespread use of hyphens to reflect the digressive rhythm of his thoughts and actions. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, the Nobel Prize-winning Colombian Gabriel García Marquez concludes with a forty-nine-page chapter that consists of a single sentence punctuated almost exclusively with commas, as indicative of the manner in which the main character gets swept up in his own life. With poems, meanwhile, a reader may expect to need to spend considerable time with the text in order to grasp nuances of form and language. Addonizio's twenty-line poem □Knowledge□ consists of only two sentences, the first of which is seventeen and a half lines long. As such, the reader may expect that unconventional structure to serve a particular purpose, and the contemplation of that purpose may prove enlightening.

Indeed, given the length of that first sentence, □Knowledge□ has an undeniable breathless quality about it. Addonizio repeats a number of words and phrases, perhaps less to specifically emphasize those phrases than to impart a certain emotional enthusiasm. The first and second lines both begin with □even when,□ while □even now□ appears in lines 5 and 13, □even□ in line 15, and □now□ in line 18. The term □as though□ appears in lines 6 and 8, and □thought□ appears in lines 8 and 16. Apart from the title, the word □know□ appears in lines 1 and 2 and twice in the last line. Meanwhile, readers cannot forget that they are being addressed by the narrator of the poem, as □you,□ in some form, appears sixteen times. Thus, the reader may imagine the narrator to be delivering the poem with particular effusiveness, as if unable, or unwilling, to separate her thoughts into smaller, more coherent units; in interviews, Addonizio has professed her fascination with the social setting of the bar, and one might imagine her passionately addressing a friend at length over a drink in the manner of this poem.

Yet the content of the poem seems to belie that impression regarding the tone. The □you□ of the poem is assigned a fair degree of personality. This subject is understood to be socially aware, being familiar with the □endlessly apparent / and relevant examples of human cruelty□ from both historic and current events. The subject is also versed in philosophy, having studied the German Arthur Schopenhauer and the Englishman Thomas Hobbes. The narrator initially suggests that the □you□ has spent his or her □whole life believing that humanity / was fundamentally good□; however, in further suggesting that this subject has □never chanted perversely, almost gleefully□ the list of negative adjectives associated with Hobbes, the reader has no choice but to believe that the □you□ has, in fact, chanted those adjectives just so. That is, the

adverbs □perversely□ and □gleefully□ seem to have been chosen to reveal that the □you□ did once sink into such a pessimistic state of mind. The remainder of the poem suggests that despite the worldly knowledge already possessed by the subject, she may still find innocence she did not know she still possessed to be □shattered□ by some additional revelation.

Given the intricacy of character assigned to this □you,□ the reader may understand the person in question to be the narrator herself, in the sense that one may address another as □you□ merely to universalize one's own experiences. Indeed, in an interview with the *Rock Plum Salt Poetry Review*, regarding a poem found in one of her earlier collections, Addonizio remarked, □If you take the 'you' as a second-person narrator, then it's potentially the writer.□ She further stated, on the other hand, that she hoped that the reader would □start to feel like the 'you' is you . . . on some level.□ Thus, she establishes here that she has been inclined to employ the second person as a way of depicting herself while also connecting with the reader.

From there, however, the reader may notice inconsistencies regarding the subject. As noted earlier, the □you□ is said to be versed in the cruelties of history and the work of at least two renowned intellectuals. Addonizio herself was born in 1954, making her fifty years of age at the time of the poem's publication. Thus, not only did she live through the politically disgraceful and widely inhumane Vietnam War, but she also would most certainly be familiar with the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust of World War II. While one could be aware that these wars took place without realizing the extent of the atrocities therein, the reader may have difficulty believing that the macabre Addonizio would lack that knowledge. (In □One Nation under God,□ also from *What Is This Thing Called Love*, one stanza, presumably with heavy sarcasm, reads, □And speaking of executions. How many / have there been lately? Not nearly enough.□) With respect to the philosophers, understanding the scope of their work necessarily requires a certain distancing from the emotional trials of humanity, which makes their being mentioned in this poem somewhat counterintuitive. In an interview with the *San Francisco Reader*, Addonizio remarked, □I'm interested in communication, and in talking about things that are common to people's experience.□ In □Knowledge,□ if she means to speak of innocence and to connect to people with lingering innocence, the two philosophers are likely to be entirely unknown, weakening whatever connection she is seeking□unless, of course, she is seeking merely to impress her readers by mentioning such names.

Given the scope of understanding of both history and philosophy that the reader may reasonably expect Addonizio to have, the breathless, enthusiastic narrator originally envisioned, in light of the grammatical structure of the poem, would seem to be a fiction. No one familiar with the Holocaust, beyond the factual circumstances, could be genuinely □stunned□ by any modern-day atrocity, unless he or she lacks the imagination to truly understand the extent of the horrors of World War II. Given Addonizio's age and poetic and intellectual experience, one may be unable to imagine her being at all naive.

Different readers may draw different conclusions from the evident contrast between the tone and content of □Knowledge.□ The more skeptical reader may simply perceive

Addonizio as disingenuous, indirectly portraying herself, through the ambiguous □you□ of the poem, as more emotionally innocent than she actually is. Another reader may interpret the tone of the poem to be substantially more complex than can be understood from the text alone. That is, if Addonizio were to read the poem aloud, she would perhaps employ inflection that the reader could not have anticipated; instead of emphatic, her reading might be understated, or melancholy, with pauses and pacing more protracted than the absence of terminal punctuation would indicate.

Yet another reader, perhaps favorably considering the poet's professed desire to communicate as effectively as possible with her readers, may conclude that she has adopted the perspective of the poem's narrator precisely because she believes that that sense of breathlessness will heighten the average reader's emotional response. In an interview with *Poetry Flash*, Addonizio stated, □I'm very attracted to formal verse because it's a way to put the brakes on the material; it's very comforting and ordered. Actually, I think it fits my personality very well, since I'm somewhat schizophrenic. I have a lot of chaos in me as well as a great need for order and structure. Using set forms can be a way to address that.□ Thus, while □Knowledge□ is not an exceptionally formal poem, Addonizio perhaps envisioned its extended-sentence structure as most reflective of the sentiments she wished to convey, whether the sentiments are genuinely hers or not.

In the same interview, she commented with respect to her work, □There's a kind of tension between the impossible and the desire for something.□ That tension may be evident here, in that while she indeed already knows enough about the world to no longer be □stunned□ by □some terrible act,□ she still idealizes the notion of innocence. The first sentence, spanning almost the entire poem, ends with the word □hope,□ which is then repeated three words later. Perhaps in her own sustained yearning for the state of innocence that all people pass through in the early years of their lives, Addonizio simply wishes to connect with those who are still especially innocent. She may wish to do this not only for her own sake but also to warn such people that one day they, too, will know better than to expect all human beings to deem life as sacred as they do.

Source: Michael Allen Holmes, Critical Essay on □Knowledge,□ in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Adaptations

Swearing, Smoking, Drinking, & Kissing (2004) is an audio CD of poems read by Addonizio and Susan Browne, with musical accompaniment, produced by Dan Brown and available from Speakeasy Literary Audio.

Topics for Further Study

Take the first line of Addonizio's poem □Knowledge□ and use it as the first line of your own poem. Your poem should contain at least twenty lines and should continue Addonizio's line to whatever conclusion fits your own subject or ideas. Your poem may mirror Addonizio's technique, in that it can be free verse, without a specific rhyme scheme. Your poem should also incorporate a similar style. For instance, try to create a lengthy dependent clause that leads into the main point of the poem.

Research the history of al Qaeda and its relationship to the Taliban. Write an essay in which you discuss your research and the roles that the United States and the former Soviet Union played in the creation of the conflict in Afghanistan. Be sure to include information about how the Taliban became associated with al Qaeda and the role of Islamic extremism in Afghanistan's history.

Write a report in which you compare the philosophical ideas of Arthur Schopenhauer and Thomas Hobbes. Then create a poster that details the differences and similarities of these two men's ideas and present the poster and your report to your class.

Nelly Sachs also wrote poems about the horrors that men inflict upon one another, such as in her book *The Seeker and Other Poems*, published in 1970. Select at least two poems written by Sachs and compare them to Addonizio's poem. Consider the similarities and differences found in the verse of these two women. Write an essay in which you discuss the different ways in which they give voice to death and fear. Be sure to include quotations from the authors' poems in your essay.

What Do I Read Next?

The Philosopher's Club (1993) is Addonizio's first collection of poetry. This small book of fewer than eighty pages is filled with a diverse collection of poems on topics ranging from death to teenage drinking to the world of Anne Frank, a victim of the Holocaust. Here, too, are poems about aspects of women's lives, including the love a mother feels in carrying her daughter to bed and the realization that as daughters grow up, they also grow away.

Jimmy & Rita (1996) is a verse narrative by Addonizio, focusing on the lives of a young boxer and a prostitute.

Addonizio's collection *Tell Me* (2000) was nominated for a National Book Award. It is similar to her other collections in that the poems are sometimes based on her own experiences and are very realistic in their subject content, ranging from divorce to love to spending too much time in a bar.

Addonizio cowrote *The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry* (1997) with Dorianne Laux. This book is designed as a textbook for writing poetry, with topics such as choosing a subject and crafting an actual poem.

What We Carry (1994), by Dorianne Laux, is a collection of poems covering topics as varied as the innocence of childhood and life at forty. Like Addonizio, Laux writes poems about real women and their experiences, and her work is equally accessible. She does not rely on poetic devices that might confuse readers, instead using her poetry to tell stories about ordinary people in such a way that everyone can understand her messages.

In his novel *September 11 from the Inside* (2003), Rubram Fernandez presents a fictional account of what experiencing the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, might have been like. Fernandez tries to recreate the stories of those who were on the hijacked planes as well as those who were in the attacked buildings, blending historical details with fictional characters.

Dear Zoe (2005), by Philip Beard, is the story of a young girl whose sister dies in an automobile accident on September 11, 2001. While the rest of the world focuses on the attacks against the United States, Zoe's older sister tries to separate her grief at her sister's death from the larger grief of the nation. This book specifically targets young adult readers.

Further Study

Behn, Robin, *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises from Poets Who Teach*, Collins, 1992.

This book is ideal for anyone who wants to learn to write poetry. The book consists of a series of exercises designed to help would-be poets find their own poetic voices and begin writing.

Germin, Pamela, *Sweeping Beauty: Contemporary Women Poets Do Housework*, University of Iowa Press, 2005.

This appropriately titled collection focuses on what women most often do in the home: housework. Many of the poems will make readers laugh, but many more will cause readers to sit up and take notice of the exceptional women poets who have written them, turning even housework into art.

Giunta, Edvige, *Writing with an Accent: Contemporary Italian American Women Writers*, Palgrave, 2002.

This book examines the ways in which Italian American women poets use their poetry as a way to identify and explore their Italian heritage. Although the author mentions Addonizio several times, none of her poems is discussed in depth.

Mullaney, Janet Palmer, ed., *Truthtellers of the Times: Interviews with Contemporary Women Poets*, University of Michigan Press, 1999.

This collection of fifteen interviews includes a broad spectrum of women's voices, with diversity of race, ethnicity, and age. Although Addonizio is not among them, the poets speak of topics that interest all women poets, such as women's stories and women's survival as writers.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, W. W. Norton, 2004.

This book presents an unbiased, well-researched study of these terrorist attacks by a foreign entity on U.S. soil. The work is very readable, is written in easy-to-understand prose, and provides one context for understanding the fear that Addonizio mentions in her poem.

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BOOKRAGS

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

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Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. “Richard Wright: “Wearing the Mask,” in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

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Editor, Poetry for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331–3535