To a Child Running With Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly Study Guide

To a Child Running With Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly by N. Scott Momaday

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

First published in the 1976 collection *The Gourd Dancer*, the brief poem "To a Child Running with Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly" contains many of the thematic and stylistic qualities of Momaday's poetry. The poem is set in New Mexico's Canyon De Chelly, where the poet lived briefly as a child. As his childhood home, as well as the site of ancient Anazasi cliff dwellings, and of the Navajo tribe's 1864 defeat and forced removal at the hands of the American military, the setting allows Momaday to explore his own Indian heritage. In addition, the poem serves as a joyous reminder of the intense and intimate feelings of belonging—a sense of place—which humans can experience in the natural world. Focusing on images of the canyon's tremendous natural beauty, coupled with the beauty and innocence of a small child, the poem blends two worlds—the human and the non-human —and brings a human presence back into the canyon to "embrace / The spirit of this place."

Author Biography

N. Scott Momaday was born in 1934 in Lawton, Oklahoma, to Alfred Morris Momaday, a Kiowa Indian, and Mayme Natachee Scott, who was part Cherokee. As an infant Momaday was named Tsoaitalee, or "Rock Tree Boy," after a 200-foot volcanic butte in Wyoming (known commonly as Devil's Tower) that is sacred to the Kiowas. As a youngster Momaday lived on several Navaho reservations and at the Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico, where his parents were teachers. He attended Augusta Military Academy in Virginia his last year of high school to take college prepartory classes that were unavailable at his local school. Momaday then studied at the University of New Mexico; it was there that he began writing poetry. After graduating with a degree in political science, Momaday spent a year teaching on the Jicarilla Apache reservation in Dulce, New Mexico. He returned to academic pursuits after being awarded a creative writing fellowship at Stanford University. He earned his master's degree in 1960 and his doctorate in 1963. Momaday's first published book, *The Complete Poems of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman* (1965), was originally his doctoral dissertation. In 1968 Momady published *House Made of Dawn*, the Pulitzer Prizewinning novel for which he is most famous. Although he has published nonfiction and novels, Momaday considers himself a poet foremost and has published several books of verse. His talent also extends to drawing and painting, and these works have been exhibited in various galleries.

Poem Text

You are small and intense
In your excitement, whole,
Embodied in delight.
The backdrop is immense;The sand drifts break and roll
Through cleavages of light
And shadow. You embrace
The spirit of this place.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-3:

In the poem's opening lines as well as in its title (an important piece of information, especially in a poem as short as this), Momaday both addresses and describes a child at play in the canyon. Perhaps the "small and intense" child may be the poet recalling himself as a young boy as he ran in Canyon De Chelly, or perhaps the poem is addressed to one of Momaday's four daughters. The language of these initial lines conjures up a sense of child-like joy: words such as "intense," and "excitement," and phrases such as "embodied in delight" capture both the sense of wonder and the limitless possibilities of childhood.

Line 4:

Here, the "backdrop" to which Momaday refers is both physical and historical. On a physical level, the canyon walls and other natural scenery form a natural backdrop which seems to dwarf the figure of the small child at play among them. But the Canyon de Chelly also provides a backdrop of history. The canyon was the home of the ancient Anazasi culture, whose cliff dwellings and rock paintings still grace the canyon walls. Centuries later, in 1864, the canyon was the site of the final battle between Navajo Indians and a military force lead by Kit Carson—a confrontation which resulted in the Navajos' forced removal from their home region. The rhyme scheme of the first and fourth lines of the opening stanza brings the child and the canyon's "backdrop" into immediate contrast; the child is "intense," the canyon's backdrop "immense."

Lines 5-6:

Here, a physical description of a portion of the canyon's landscape is used as a metaphor for the passage of time. The image of sifting sand, long used as a means of portraying the movement of history, is paired with description of another landscape feature which comes to stand for time's passing. The "cleavages of light / And shadow" reflected on the canyon's jagged walls may be seen to represent the passing of the many days ("light") and nights ("shadow") since the Navajo last occupied the canyon.

Lines 7-8:

The final lines return to the image of the "child running with outstretched arms" presented in the poem's title. Momaday's final phrase "You embrace / The spirit of this place," with its emphasis on the rhyme of "embrace" and "place," may signal the joyous return, after more than a century, of the Indian people to the canyon. A sense of belonging to a "place," the poem seems to suggest, involves much more than the

physical landscape; it must also take into account the "backdrop" of one's regional and cultural history.

Themes

Return to Nature

The child described in this poem is, presumably, too young to have gotten very far from nature in his or her short life and, therefore, could not have very far to go to return to nature. Still, as a representative of humanity, the child can be viewed as establishing a new bond with the natural surroundings of the canyon. The point of this poem is to draw a parallel between the child and the canyon. The child is "embodied in delight," and the canyon is lit "through cleavages of light / And shadow." The child is small and the canyon immense. The casual reader of these descriptions might see the child and the canyon presented as opposites, but there is nothing in the descriptions that would prevent these two main characters from coming together in the end.

Focusing on the child's excitement, Momaday invites his readers to see the canyon through the child's eyes, to appreciate the canyon's natural wonders as if seeing them for the first time. The canyon is a place of uneven and changing beauty, shown in its hilly floor and shifting patterns of light. Moving through the canyon provides a look at nature that is constantly new and fresh. Combining the changing surroundings with the child's point of view can return readers to the sense of wonder they once knew. For an adult reader who has, in the process of becoming mature, lost enthusiasm for the surprises nature has to offer, the child's perspective can offer a renewal. The child might not be returning to the canyon, but readers who think they have seen all there is to see can experience a vicarious return to nature while reading this poem.

Guilt and Innocence

The child's relative innocence is established in the way that he or she runs freely with arms outstretched, neither afraid nor self-conscious. The Canyon de Chelly, on the other hand, is a place half-shrouded in erratic, mysterious shadows. The very fact that the canyon has existed for tens of thousands of years and that the child has existed for just a few years says much about their disparate levels of experience. Experience is often used as a contrast of innocence: the innocent are often inexperienced.

There is much guilt traditionally associated with the Canyon de Chelly. The walls of the canyon are covered in places with pictographs, the paintings that were put there by the inhabitants who occupied the area hundreds of years ago. For the past three hundred years, since before America's War of Independence from England, the Navajo have lived in the canyon. The Navajos and the Anasazi who lived there before them have been victims of countless crimes by the Spanish, Mexican and American governments. The Navajo were assaulted, relocated, enslaved and robbed; before the area was protected by National Monument status in 1931, poachers, sometimes thinking to benefit the world's body of archeological knowledge, came and stole the architectural

treasures that represented the link between the canyon's present and the past civilizations who lived within it.

The contrast between child-like innocence and the ruthless history of abuse of the indigenous people who inhabit the Canyon de Chelly is implied in the difference between the title, which pictures the child's arms outstretched, and the last line, which shows the child's arms in an embrace. The former gesture is one of naive innocence, while the latter shows an acceptance of the truth that is within the canyon's spirit, regardless of the shadows that darken its past.

Freedom

This poem starts by picturing the child making one of the most open and free gestures possible, running with outstretched arms. The gesture shows no fear nor restraint upon the child's unbridled excitement. However, the child is not presented as running in an open space but between the high stone walls of the canyon, an environment that might suggest confinement. What allows the Canyon de Chelly to represent freedom, not limitation, in this poem is the immensity mentioned in the fourth line. The backdrop to this child is immense in the sense that the canyon is wide enough to allow an ample view of the sky and of the rocks and of houses at the base of the walls. The child's "backdrop" is also immense in a cultural and historical sense. The physical or cultural background *could* suggest a narrowing of the child's possibilities, inhibiting her or his freedom; instead, the child's excitement and delight indicate a great freedom rather than the confinement that a canyon might suggest.

Coming of Age

Many poems about children offer an observation regarding one of the basic truths about childhood: that childhood fades speedily as the child evolves into adulthood. In the child's running, Momaday seems to emphasize the child's propulsion into the future. Unaware of the adulthood toward which he or she rushes, the child is, as the poem's second line puts it, whole in his or her excitement. The child is not just filled with delight but *is* delight. On the other hand, the description of the Canyon de Chelly suggests that the canyon bears weightier matters in its spirit. The interplay of light and shadow implies the complexity of adult life that is still beyond the child.

What makes this a coming of age poem is the way that the child changes from being self-contained to looking to the larger scope of things. The canyon is immense, well beyond a child's grasp, but the child embraces the spirit of the canyon. The child shows an awakening self-awareness, as well as the recognition of a possible relationship with the canyon. The poem shows the first step in the process of coming of age, the realization that there is something desirable in maturity.

Style

Like many of Momaday's poems, "To a Child Running with Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly" is written in syllabic verse, meaning that the poem's lines are constructed using a given number of syllables, without regard to stress. In this case, each line of the poem contains six syllables. The poem's eight lines are divided into four-line stanzas called quatrains. Momaday employs a rhyme scheme of *abca bcdd*, meaning that the first line and fourth line, the second line and fifth line, etc., end in words that rhyme. This pattern of rhyme provides a symmetry within the two stanzas, but more importantly, it creates a bridge between them. The carryover of rhyme from the first stanza to the second links the subject of the first stanza (the child) to the subject of the second (the landscape of the canyon), setting the stage for their merging in the poem's two final lines.

Historical Context

Canyon de Chelly National Monument

The Canyon de Chelly is located in northeast Arizona, near where that state intersects with Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico. It runs thirty miles long on the Navajo Reservation. The red sandstone walls of the canyon are steep and high, rising to one thousand feet in claustrophobic narrowness in places. Though not the most scenic canyon in the area, the dwellings, paintings, and artifacts of the primitive people who lived there from the fifth century through the fifteenth century, all before the time that Columbus brought European culture to this continent, gives Canyon de Chelly special significance.

The Anasazi, the Basketmakers, whose civilization dates from the first century A.D., are the oldest recorded inhabitants of the canyon. They are the ancestors of the Pueblo tribes of the Southwest. Anasazi culture was vast and complex. Many of their paintings can be found on the walls of Canyon de Chelly, as well as in other places throughout Arizona and New Mexico. They were hunters and farmers, known for weaving baskets in intricate patterns of black and white. They lived in caves within the walls of the canyon and cultivated crops in the wide areas where the sun could reach the fertile soil on the base of the canyon. The stream that still runs along the canyon floor has seldom run dry, summer or winter, and seldom has irrigation been a problem for the Anasazi. Still today large jars for storing grain, left by the Anasazi, sit among the rocks of the cliffs. Among the oldest dwellings open to the public that were left by the Anasazi are the White House Ruins, a group of stone houses deep in the canyon at the base of a five-hundredfoot cliff. These ruins were occupied from about 1060 to 1275 A.D. and are among the oldest existing dwellings to be found in North America.

There are Navajo dwellings in the canyon dating from the 1700s. The Navajo word for Canyon, *tseyi*, was difficult for the Spanish, who had controlled the area since the mid-1600s, so they pronounced the word "shay-ee," which they spelled Chelly. Navajo people still live there today. In fact, it is the only national monument in which people are an essential part of the ecosystem.

Ruth Underhill, a Navajo historian, tells the story of one branch of Canyon de Chelly that is called the Canyon of the Dead, or Canyon del Muerto. In the winter of 1804-1805, a party of Spaniards rode into the canyon to capture Navajos to work as slaves in the houses of Mexico, which included the area that we now call New Mexico. In retaliation, the Navajo sometimes captured Spanish children and made them tend to their sheep. In the winter of 1804-1805, there had been a period of peace between the two sides for some time when a Spanish raiding party led by Lieutenant Narbona arrived. The Navajo men had gone away on their own raiding party, and the women and children, left behind, were hidden in a cave high above the canyon behind a natural rock parapet that shielded them from sight from below. The Spaniards would have had no clue that anyone was in the canyon except that one woman, who was rumored to have been a

former slave of the Spanish, leaned over the wall and taunted them as they rode away, saying, "There go the men without eyes!" She was heard, and the search party slaughtered everybody. For years the cave, called Massacre Cave, was left with skeletons piled high upon the floor of the Canyon del Muerto.

The Navajo

Through linguistic similarities, archeologists can tell that the Navajo are related to tribes that are mostly concentrated in the northern regions of Canada. At some time, possibly over the course of centuries, they wandered southward, ending up in the Four Corners area of northeast Arizona in the sixteenth century. Here they raised crops and were a peaceful people until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Spanish raiders came up through Mexico, making a series of attacks on the Navajo to take their land and to carry their people off into slavery. The one positive influence of their interaction with the Spaniards was that from them they learned to raise livestock, such as horses, sheep and goats, which were easier to tend in the dry, rocky area of Arizona than were plants.

In the middle of the 1800s, the United States government took over the Mexican influence in the area. When the war fought between the United States and Mexico from 1846 to 1848 ended, the Rio Grande River was established as Mexico's northernmost border. In 1846 the Navajo signed their first treaty with the United States government, but the treaty was broken by 1849 when raids erupted between the Navajos and the United States. The fighting finally ended in 1863 when the federal government waged an all-out military assault, led by Kit Carson, and the Navajo eventually surrendered. Carson convinced them that the only way they could escape extinction was to go to Fort Sumner in New Mexico, a migration which was to become known in Navajo history as the Long Walk, a turning point in the history of the tribe.

Nearly 8,000 Navajo set out by foot to Fort Sumner. Many died on the way, and many more died in the terrible conditions that awaited them there. The soil was tough and barren, and the water was alkaline and hardly fit to drink. Other aggressive tribes picked fights with the Navajo. Finally, in 1868, the Navajo leaders signed a new treaty with the United States government and were allowed to return to a reservation that was just a small fraction of their original land in size.

The Navajo have prospered since returning to their land. The 1990 census lists them as the second largest tribe in America with a population of 21,198. They have expanded their land area and now use it for farming, livestock, and a flourishing tourist trade.

Critical Overview

Known primarily as one of America's most prominent Native American writers, much of the critical attention which Momaday has received has dealt with his place in the tradition of Native American literature. Barbara Strelke, in her essay entitled "N. Scott Momaday: Racial Memory and Individual Imagination," finds Momaday's writing significantly enriched by Indian artistic traditions. "Much of the beauty of the work," Strelke writes, "rests on the Indian tradition of art, song, and poetry. Concrete nature imagery is a characteristic of Native American poetry and Momaday's concise haikulike passages are 'Indian' in their care for detail and their economy in style." In his analysis of Momaday's collection *The Gourd Dancer*, entitled "Beautyway: The Poetry of N. Scott Momaday," Kenneth C. Mason also stresses the poet's Indian background as the basis for one of his most important themes. Mason states that "[t]hrough his skill and the power of his rhetoric Momaday is able to make the themes that emerge distinctly his own: death and time, the beauty of the land, and his Indian heritage." "To a Child Running with Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly" is discussed briefly by Matthias Schubnell in his study, *N. Scott Momaday: The Cultural and Literary Background*. Arguing that the poem takes its sense of joy from Momaday's return to the historic homeland of the Navajo, Schubnell finds that the poem can be seen as "a projection of Momaday's own wonder and delight into the figure of the child," and that "[t]he idea of 'spirit of place' is related to aesthetic and historical considerations in this poem."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is a writer and teacher of creative writing. In the following essay, he explores how the minimalist techniques that Momaday uses in "To a Child Running With Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly" help make its overall point.

In "To A Child Running With Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly," N. Scott Momaday attempts, as writers always should, to give readers a full experience using a minimum number of words. The poem identifies a real place, that people could go to, walk through, and imagine a child running through as they study the walls. The last line refers to "the spirit of this place." Readers sometimes feel that they might be missing out on some important aspect when they find out that the poem has a real-life point of reference. Knowing the canyon and its history helps a little, and readers who know the history of the Anasazi and the Navajo who have lived there might understand the aforementioned "spirit" better than those who don't, but prior understanding is not required or even much of a benefit. This poem is not asking readers to come to it with a knowledge of the Canyon de Chelly, it is *telling* readers what the canyon is like: the canyon is like a child with outstretched arms, running.

Within the compact space of these eight short lines, Momaday has packed a world of information about geography, Native American history, and children, using each as a catalyst for understanding the others. The poem would not be able to give up any more information if it were twice or three times or ten times as long. This is the principle behind minimalist poetry and behind minimalist art in general: capturing readers' full attention to each detail by giving little that will distract them.

Momaday's poem looks like a little rectangle, a brick of words, but readers should not mistake its apparent utility for a lack of artistry. It is one of the most basic of artistic points, though often forgotten, that poetry exists to give some defined shape to the words that an author chooses to use to capture ideas. The words are, without a doubt, important, and a poet who does not radiate a love for the various ways meanings interlock cannot hope to keep hold of any reader who might happen by his or her work. But the poet's love of wordplay is no more than the essayist's, the novelist's, and maybe even the journalist's. Writers should love their tools; readers can tell if they don't. Poets, in addition to caring about what their words amount to, care about how they are arranged on the page. N. Scott Momaday has written in many genres and has garnered critical acclaim for almost every style he has used. He knows when to express his ideas in quantity and when to express them with style. The striking thing about "To a Child Running" is that it makes its firm style practically inconspicuous.

With a long, epic poem, readers can marvel at the poet's "grand scheme." The talent on display is much more impressive when the scale is large, and thinking about the poet's achievement is like ruminating over how architects fit the pyramids together to last. Even while considering a medium-sized poem, one can get lost in considering the myriad choices that the author has gone through. If the poem has a traditional structure, then the author can be assumed to have shaken and reworked all of the ideas and the

words used for them to make the thoughts fit the prescribed boundaries. If the poem is in free verse, without rhyme or a set rhythm scheme, then an even greater question arises about how the author knew the right place to end each line.

More elusive, though, and more fascinating, is the poem, like this one, that lasts just a few lines and then is over, exerting its distinct style quickly and unforgettably. Like an eighteenth-century minimalist painter, the poet of the short form forces audiences to stop, stare, squint, and come back several times if there is to be any hope of taking in all of the implications that are presented. Momaday is working with just two simple items here—the child and the canyon—and to make readers consider the full implications of each, he has to convince them, consciously or not, that this piece is well thoughtout. He wins confidence from readers by exerting control. The lines all have six syllables, and the stanzas both have four lines. It is hard to feel that this is a poem that just fell out onto the page the way that it popped into the author's head, and so readers sit up and take notice of every word.

When Momaday was a student at Stanford, his mentor, the esteemed poet Yvor Winters, encouraged him toward formal poetry, including syllabic poetry, which uses the same number of syllables in each line regardless of the rhythm formed by degrees of accentuation. In "To a Child Running," syllable-counting offers just enough control to keep readers focused. With the readers' minds engaged, Momaday is able to open up the possibilities that result from loving word play. For instance, in a longer poem, a word like "immense," as a description of the backdrop, might be lost like just another cobblestone in the pavement; "cleavages" might just seem like a clever, but not a particularly poignant, way of describing the erratic pattern of sunbeams in a canyon; and the use of the word "this" in the last line might not draw so much attention to itself. In a longer poem, the four-line stanzas would just be taken for granted, and the poem would not be able to fold back upon itself, springing back to the "you" with which it started so quickly and so powerfully. A longer poem would also disperse Momaday's use of rhyme across a greater area, diluting its effect.

The poem's use of rhyme is somewhat like its use of rhythm but even less formal, helping to tie the whole together and to assure readers of the author's control but popping up as a surprise when it appears. There are rhymes, but there is not an overall rhyme scheme. "Immense" at the end of the first stanza refers back to "intense" at the end of the first line. "Excitement," in line two, is echoed with "delight," in line three. The long "o" sound, as well as their places at the ends of a line and a sentence, bind together "roll" and "shadow." The most conspicuous use of rhyme comes at the end of the poem, where the last two lines form a rhyming couplet, "embrace" fitting neatly against "place," leaving readers with a greater sense of formality when they finish than the poem actually has. Throughout the poem, rhymes pop up occasionally, not unlike the way that coincidences pop up in real life, but in these final lines, there can be no mistake that the poet is manipulating his words to give a small snapshot of the large world.

Momaday is not really doing anything too new here. The model for minimalist poetry has to be Japanese haiku, whose practitioners have produced thousands of meaningful

variations within one simple design. Staying within one form, haiku writers avoid the worry of teasing audiences to guess how they came up with any sort of new style. It could be argued that Japanese society was conducive to such a delicate and formal way of thought that could produce and appreciate such focus, especially in the Edo period (1600-1868) when the greatest haiku writers of them all lived. The Japanese patience and openness to subtle experiences is evident in other traditional art forms, including horticulture and Kabuki theater. This sort of immersion into the miniature is not a common part of American culture.

For an American poet, it is particularly unnatural to produce a short, tight poem, to aim for the pureness of artistry that a little piece entails. America is a country based on expansion, on working around rules, not within them. The belief in unlimited expansion, which started with the settlers' move westward across the continent, continues today with the exploration of space and the growth of the stock market, which for some people confirm the hope that the best thing is to keep on the move, producing more and more. All people see things differently, but the general mood that defines this country has always been set by a belief in freedom rather than in self-control. In the arts, especially, intellectual boundaries are seen as extraneous rules to be broken, more than as challenges. American art of the nineteenth century was defined by its attempts to imitate European standards. In the twentieth century, when America developed a unique identity, structure became a thing defined by internal rules, not by such externals as meter and rhyme.

Historically, the link between the ancient haiku form and what Momaday does with predominantly free verse is probably the imagist movement, which flared up quickly at the beginning of the twentieth century and burned away just as fast, leaving a lasting impression on all of American poetry. Imagist poetry, which descended from the French symbolists of the 1800s, was concerned with, as the name implies, imagery. Japanese haiku had a marked influence in the way that it allowed images to speak for themselves without being explained. As a literary movement, imagism opposed the confining use of structured forms. Because they tried to get objects to speak for themselves, imagist poems are often brief, like William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow," which is sixteen words, or Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," which is only two lines. There are examples of all lengths that represent this school of thought, though. In his book *The Imagist Poem: Modern Poetry in Miniature*, William Pratt defines the imagist poem as "a moment of revealed truth, rather than a structure of consecutive events or thoughts. The plot or argument of older poetry is replaced by a single, dominant image, or a quick succession of images: its effect is meant to be instantaneous rather than cumulative." This certainly applies to the way that "To A Child Running" works its effect, although Momaday, writing sixty years after the imagist movement was at its prime, worked under newer rules that were not so strict about avoiding structure.

Imagism's influence is still felt in almost all of contemporary American poetry. The American tradition of freedom is nicely served by the imagists' movement against poetic rules; the emphasis on concrete imagery has come to be accepted as being what is poetic about a poem. As such, Momaday's poem is a pure example of a late-twentieth-century American poem.

Momaday, unfortunately, is not usually one of the first people thought of when lists of American poets are compiled because he is usually hidden at the front of the folder reserved for the sub-category of Native Americans. This kind of stereotyping in the arts is a disservice to Americans, who need their country's talent revealed, not hidden. It is a source of annoyance to Momaday, who has said that he would rather be thought of as a writer *and* as an Indian, but not narrowly defined as an Indian writer. "I don't know what that means, exactly," he told Dagmar Weiler in a 1988 interview, regarding the subject of being an Indian writer, "and I don't identify with it at all." People reading "To A Child Running With Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly" may feel that they need to understand the people who have lived there in order to catch the poem's entire spectrum, and this may be true, but such background knowledge is not absolutely necessary. Just as one does not need to know, when looking at a miniature model, whether the thing that it represents actually exists to marvel at the artist's ability to create any form of reality on such a small scale, neither does one need to know the Canyon de Chelly or its history to grasp the power of what happens when this child and the canyon become one.

Source: David Kelly, in an essay for *Poetry for Students*, Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Hart, a former college professor, has lived with Native Americans and studied their traditional ceremonies. In the following essay, she discusses reader-response theory in reference to the poem, "To a Child Running with Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly."

There is no one right way to interpret a poem any more than there is one right way to view a sunset. The experience of the sunset, as of a poem, will be different for each individual who witnesses it. To passively accept someone else's interpretation is like viewing a sunset with eyes closed while listening to another person describe it. That being said, a poem can be enhanced by examining different factors that might be hidden behind the words and images, thus broadening the knowledge base of the reader. In respect to N. Scott Momaday, it is particularly important to look also at his perspective on culture and the art of storytelling in order to experience a different way of looking at literature and the world.

Momaday's "To a Child Running with Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly" is a poem whose subtle details could easily be overlooked. The entire poem consists of eight lines that together hold thirty-five words. Each word is short, and each image is simple, at least at first sight. It is what the words imply that imbues them with special consequence. In other words, it is significance that gives even the simplest image depth. For instance, someone from the city asked to go into the country to see a sunset might reply, "What is so important about a sunset? It's no big deal. The sun sets every day." But even for the most cynical person, if that particular sunset meant the end of a love affair, or maybe the beginning of a new one, it would give the sunset a special significance; and it would become a big deal.

So what might be the significance behind Momaday's poem? Is it possible to guess what Momaday was thinking? Of course it is, but is that the reason poems are read—to guess what the author means? That might be part of the reason. Poems, like all art forms, are a way of sharing experience, communicating ideas, and sharing emotions. But when it comes to interpretation, just what is being interpreted? Is it what the author means, or is it what the reader feels? Or is it a combination of both? According to a type of literary criticism called reader-response theory, the meaning of a poem exists somewhere in the transaction between the reader and the text, not from the text alone. In other words, the interpretation of a poem is based both upon the images that the author portrays and upon the intellectual and emotional reaction that those images cause in the reader.

On the first reading of "To a Child Running with Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly," the images might appear to be a recollection of Momaday's childhood. Momaday used to live in the area around Canyon de Chelly, and in his writings he refers to this canyon as one of his favorite places. He might have thought of the poem while sitting on the rim of the canyon walls. Maybe he saw a child running deep down inside the canyon. The child might have reminded Momaday of when he was young, living in

the country, free from the responsibilities of adulthood, free to run with excitement. The child's outstretched arms could have signified openness and innocence to Momaday.

In the use of the word *intense*, Momaday might have wanted to express the concept that in childhood everything seems intense. Children's minds are fresh. Each experience is new and whole, uninterrupted by layers of habits that tend to dull the adult mind that has witnessed bright, summer days so many times before. The child, for Momaday, might represent not only a child filled with delight but, even more importantly, a child who embodies the whole concept of delightfulness. In relationship to the child, the backdrop of the high, rugged, ancient walls of the canyon are immense; and it is the immensity of the great walled canyon that intensifies the child's smallness.

Those are the images that Momaday uses in the first stanza of this poem. These images appear rather obvious and are easily interpreted in a fairly straightforward manner. But something changes in the second stanza that makes continuing this simple interpretation a little more quizzical. At the end of the first stanza, Momaday switches his focus from the child to the natural setting. In the first few lines of the second stanza, he continues the same line of vision as he looks at the hills, noticing the shadow play of light and darkness in the drifting sand. What could Momaday be seeing? What do the sand drifts and the shadows mean?

He uses the word *break* in reference to the sand drifts. In the next line, he uses the word *cleavage*. These are rather harsh words in some sense of their definitions, but both words are also somewhat ambiguous. The poem says that the sand drifts "break and roll." The word *roll* softens the "breaking" part of the image. Ocean waves break and roll, gently and smoothly. And the word *cleavage* has two opposite meanings: one, to cut away; and another, to cling to. Or maybe, as some interpretations have suggested, Momaday uses both the drifting sands and the light and shadow to represent the passage of time. This makes sense especially in respect to the last line of the poem.

In the last line, Momaday returns his gaze and speaks directly to the child. He tells the child, "You embrace the spirit of this place." Is that why the child's arms are outstretched? Is the child trying to wrap his arms around the trees, the rocks, the memories, the history and the spirit of Canyon de Chelly? Or does Momaday want to convey a different meaning of the word *embrace*, such as "to encompass"? Or does he use the word *embrace* to suggest that the child understands? And what is there to understand about the spirit of this place? What is the spirit of Canyon de Chelly?

The spirit of Canyon de Chelly is, like poetry itself, different things to different people. To some, it is a national monument in Arizona. It is a canyon with sheer walls that rise up a spectacular thousand feet to scenic overlooks. It is a quiet, beautiful place for tourists to hike, a place to spend a summer vacation.

To another group of people, Canyon de Chelly is an archeological site, where at one time in 1902 a man named Charles Day built a trading post and hunted the grounds, looking for ancient, Native American artifacts, which he then sold to museums. More

recently the United States government has protected the area, and now, to a group of legitimate scientists, Canyon de Chelly is a place where they can uncover history.

To the Navajo people, Canyon de Chelly is home. It is on the valley floor of this canyon that the Navajo people farm the land and raise sheep and goats. The Navajo people have lived in Canyon de Chelly for over three hundred years, except for a dramatic period of six years between 1862 and 1868 when they were rounded up by Colonel Kit Carson and forced to leave the canyon. Carson then marched them on what has been referred to as the Long Walk, a four-hundred-mile walk to the Bosque Redondo in New Mexico. Many Navajo people died. It is estimated that twelve thousand Navajos began the Long Walk. Six years later only seven thousand Navajos made the Long Walk back home.

Prior to the Navajos, the Anasazi (a Navajo word for "ancient ones") lived in Canyon de Chelly. They lived in and around the canyon area for a period of about two thousand years. The ruin of their culture and their dwellings is the reason the archeologists are there. It is also the reason that the canyon has been designated as a national monument.

Now, the questions that remain might go something like this: Is Momaday's poem referring to all of these various definitions of the canyon? When he talks about the spirit of this place, is he referring to the spirits of all of these people and to all of their well-intentioned as well as ill-intentioned acts? Does this child who is running represent the Native American culture as well as the white culture? Is Momaday thinking about the ancient Anasazi as well as the modern tourists? Or is it none of this? Or is it more than this? And where are the answers to all these questions?

In an interview in the *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, Momaday says that most of us have come to expect answers. He then adds that "many things are not given us, and for the Western man this jars a little bit because we want to know. We expect to be told. We don't expect loose ends in a story. But in Indian tradition, it's not that way at all. There are always loose ends." Despite his belief in loose ends, Momaday does offer some suggestions on how to find answers. In his book *The Man Made of Words*, he says, "Stories are pools of reflection in which we see ourselves through the prism of the imagination." Momaday's thoughts reflect a sentiment that is closely related to reader-response theory —if there are answers to be found, they are to be found somewhere inside the reader.

Since one of the major images of this poem is centered on the landscape, it is important to understand how Momaday looks at the earth:

"Very old in the Native American worldview is the conviction that the earth is vital, that there is a spiritual dimension to it, a dimension in which man rightly exists□. In the natural order man invests himself in the landscape and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own most fundamental experience. This trust is sacred□. The Native American is someone who thinks of himself, imagines himself in a particular way.

By virtue of his experience, his idea of himself comprehends his relationship to the land."

This passage suggests Momaday's belief that man and the landscape are one. This concept, he claims, is more apparent, or more real, to Native Americans because they have lived on the same region for so many thousands of years. They are connected to the ancient ones through stories that have been handed down to each succeeding generation, and therefore their connection to the ancient ones and to their homeland is strong. Many Native Americans are aware of their lineage, knowing their ancestors' names six or more generations back. Momaday has said that he is always surprised and disappointed to find out that many non-Native Americans know very little about their ancestry. He also questions the effects of the technological revolution, which has uprooted people from the soil. "We have become disoriented," he says, and "[have] suffered a kind of psychic dislocation of ourselves in time and space. We may be perfectly sure of where we are in relation to the supermarket □ but [it is doubtful] that any of us knows where he is in relation to the stars □"

Momaday's connection to the land is sacred, and he has specifically referred to Canyon de Chelly as one of the sacred places on earth: "If you would know the earth for what it really is," he says, "learn it through its sacred places." When asked to define *sacred*, he responded, "Sacred transcends definition. The mind does not comprehend it □ It is □ to be recognized and acknowledged in the heart and soul. Those who seek to study or understand the sacred in academic terms are misled □ It is beyond the mechanics of analysis."

Momaday also says that poetry is the crown of literature. Maybe in some ways poetry is sacred. Maybe poetry is meant to stimulate the imagination and is meant to be recognized, not through rational thought, but through the heart and soul. Maybe the purpose of Momaday's poem is to pose questions without giving answers, leaving spaces, like the spaces in Canyon de Chelly, for the imagination to run as freely as the child running with outstretched arms. And then again, maybe it's not. Finally, Momaday says: "We are what we imagine ourselves to be." Maybe the same holds true for Momaday's poetry.

Source: Joyce Hart, in an essay for *Poetry for Students*, Gale Group, 2001.

Adaptations

PBS Home Video has a videocassette of their 1992 documentary *Momaday: Voice of the West* available. It is part two of the five-part Western Writers series.

Narrated by Momaday, the videocassette *White Man's Way,* which examines a government program for schooling Indian children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is available from the Native American Public Broadcasting Consortium.

An audiocassette titled *The Indian Oral Tradition: Peter Nabokov Interviews N. Scott Momaday* was released in 1969 by Pacifica Tape Library.

Momaday is featured on a videotape titled *More Than Bows and Arrows: The legacy of the American Indians,* released by Camera One in 1994.

N. Scott Momaday Reads Two Poems and Two Novel Excerpts is a 1983 audiocassette available from American Audio Prose Library.

N. Scott Momaday: A Film by Matteo Bellinelli is available on cassette. It was released in 1995 by Films for the Sciences and Humanities.

Momaday's vast knowledge of his land was used as a source for Ken Burns' eight-part documentary for the Public Broadcasting System. This series, called *The West,* is carried by many public libraries.

At http://www.achievement.org/frames.html readers can find the transcript of an interview conducted with Momaday on June 28, 1996, in Sun Valley, Idaho (see N. Scott Momaday, Ph.D., Pulitzer Prize for Fiction link).

CBS News Audio Resource Library and Encyclopedia Americana co-produced an audiocassette called *Traditional Arts and the Future of the American Indian* with Momaday looking at contemporary Indian life as well as cultural heritage and ending with a reading of some of his poems.

Topics for Further Study

Observe someone who does not know you are watching them and write a poem about what you see. Use the same rhyme scheme as Momaday uses (*abca bcdd*).

Compare the ideas expressed in this poem to those expressed in William Wordsworth's "My Heart Leaps Up." What do the two poems tell you about youth? About nature? Does the fact that they were published 175 years apart affect how you understand their meaning, or not?

What is the "spirit" of the canyon that the poem mentions in the final line? What specific words does the speaker use to make you understand that spirit?

Compare and Contrast

1976: Office work is revolutionized by the introduction of the Wang computer, which allows secretaries to type information that appears on a cathode ray tube, then edit it, then print it with a printer using a typewriter-style "daisy wheel."

Today: After a generation that has grown up with typing skills in order to operate computers, Voice Recognition Software is becoming increasingly sophisticated, threatening to make keyboards obsolete.

1976: Citizens Band radios, previously a tool for truckers and cowboys, becomes a fad for the middle class. 11.3 million radios are sold, allowing strangers all over the country to talk to one another via code names, or "handles."

Today: Cellular phones offer the same ability to call someone from the road; computer chat rooms offer the same anonymity in conversations.

1976: After a ten-year moratorium on capital punishment, the Supreme Court finds that the death penalty does not constitute cruel and unusual punishment, allowing states to begin executions again.

Today: With improved DNA testing and other evidence, eighty-seven people who were condemned to be executed have been proven innocent. The idea of another moratorium is being debated again.

1976: The Church Report, prepared by a committee led by Congressman Frank Church, shocks America with news of abuses of power by the Central Intelligence Agency, including illegal spying on American citizens and involvement in assassinations of the leaders of foreign countries. Congress votes on legislation to limit the CIA's activities.

1993: A bomb at the parking garage of the World Trade Center in New York kills six people and forces 100,000 to evacuate the premises. The conviction of Muslim fundamentalists the following year makes it clear that America faces terrorist attacks from outside.

Today: The powers of the CIA have been expanded, but skeptics still point to the Church Report as a warning that power can easily be abused.

1976: Four new nuclear reactors start producing electricity in the United States.

1979: Two hundred thousand citizens of Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania, have to evacuate their homes when damage to the nuclear reactor core threatens a nuclear meltdown.

1986: An explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in the Soviet Union releases radiation that travels in the atmosphere, measured as far away as Scotland. Authorities estimate that as many as 20,000 people will have their lives shortened by exposure to radiation.

Today: The number of nuclear power plants in the United States is decreasing as old ones are decommissioned and no new ones built, but they are still responsible for three times as much electricity as in 1976.

1976: Genetech is formed as a commercial company to find ways to profit from the use of genetic engineering.

Today: Genetically altered medicines are common, and products with recombinant DNA can be found in the produce section of any grocery.

What Do I Read Next?

Momaday's anthology, *In The Presence of the Sun: Stories and Poems, 1961-1991*, includes other works that were published along with "To a Child Running With Outstretched Arms in Canyon de Chelly," such as "The Gourd Dancer" and many other fascinating pieces.

Momaday's poem "Old Songs Made New" is just one of the pieces by Native Americans included in the 2000 anthology *Song With the Heart of a Bear: Fusions of Native and American Poetry, 1890-1999.*

Campbell Grant has written a book full of photographs that give readers a sense of the wonders that inspired this poem. The book, *Canyon de Chelly: Its People and Rock Art,* was first published in 1978 by the University of Arizona Press and is still available.

Navajo author Lucy Tapahonso grew up on Navajo land in Shiprock, New Mexico, in the 1950s and 1960s. Her 1987 book of poetry, *A Breeze Swept Through,* captures the flavor of modern reservation life.

The anthology *Growing Up Native American* collects works from noted Indian authors of the past two centuries who write about their childhoods. Included are Leslie Marmon Silko, Black Elk, and Louise Erdrich.

Besides being a poet, N. Scott Momaday is famous for writing in all fields. His first book, the novel House *Made of Dawn,* won the Pulitzer Prize for 1969.

One of the most famous and influential books in Native-American literature is *Black Elk Speaks,* first published in 1932 and revised in the late 1960s. Black Elk was a witness at the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876 and the massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1890. Since Black Elk did not read or write English, his story was written for *Black Elk Speaks* by John G. Neuhardt.

Leslie Marmon Silko is one of the most famous Native American authors writing today. Her 1997 book *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today* expresses anger and hope and defines what life is like among the Pueblo tribes of the Southwest now.

Many readers have gotten a sense of what life is like on the Navajo reservation today by reading the detective mysteries of Tony Hillerman, including *A Thief of Time, Coyote Waits,* and *The Fallen Man.*

Further Study

Anderson, Scott Edward, "A Review of *In the Presence of the Sun: Stories and Poems, 1961-1991*," in *Bloomsbury Review*, Volume 13, No. 7, July-August, 1993. pp. 14, 22.

Scott gives an overview of thirty years of Momaday's career, finding that the later poetry does not live up to the early promise.

Bolton, Jonathan W., and Claire M. Wilson, *American Indian Lives: Scholars, Writers and Professionals*, Facts on File, 1994.

One chapter of this book is devoted to Momaday, but the surrounding context, about Native American intellectuals throughout history, is equally fascinating.

Momaday, N. Scott, *The Names*, Harper & Row, 1976.

This is not a memoir in the sense that we are used to, since Momaday goes back to several generations before he was born for part of the story. We learn about the culture as well as the man.

Schubnell, Matthias, *N. Scott Momaday: The Cultural and Literary Background*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1985.

This is one of the most concise intellectual studies of Momaday and the influences from which he developed.

Simonelli, Jean, and Charles D. Winters, *Crossing Between Worlds: The Navajos of the Canyon de Chelly*, School of American Research Press, 1997.

Simonelli, an anthropologist, presents her research on this particular area with photographs by Winters.

Wilson, Hunter, Jr., *Canyon de Chelly in Pictures: The Continuing Story*, K. C. Publications, 1999.

Although something of a travel guide, the illustrations in this book give readers of the poem a good sense of what the canyon is like.

Woodard, Charles L., *Ancestral Voices: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday*, University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Momaday is an articulate speaker, especially with questions to prompt him, so this volume provides a good sense of his way of seeing the world.

Bibliography

Bosque Redondo—Destination of the Long Walk, www. zianet.com/snm/redondo.htm (1998).

Canyon de Chelly, www.navajoland.com/cdc/ (1998, 1999).

Canyon de Chelly National Monument: Archaelogical Investigations Site Report, www.desertusa.com/ind1/ du_cdc_arc.html (October 1997).

Mason, Kenneth C., "Beautyway: The Poetry of N. Scott Momaday," in *South Dakota Review*, Vol. XCIII, No. 2, Summer, 1980, pp. 61-83.

Momaday, N. Scott, *The Man Made of Words*, St. Martin's Press, 1997, pp. 39, 114, 169.

_____, Dagmar Weiler, "M. Scott Momaday: Story Teller," in *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Spring, 1988, pp. 118-26.

N. Scott Momaday, Ph.D. Interview, www.achievement. org/autodoc/page/mom0int-5 (June 28, 1996).

Pratt, William, *The Imagist Poem: Modern Poetry in Miniature*, Penguin Books, 1973, p. 29.

Schubnell, Matthias, "The Aboriginal Poems," in *N. Scott Momaday: The Cultural and Literary Background*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1985, pp. 218-39.

Strelke, Barbara, "N. Scott Momaday: Racial Memory and Individual Imagination," in *Literature of the American Indians: A Gathering of Indian Memories, Symbolic Contexts, and Literary Criticism*, edited by Abraham Chapman, New Amerian Library, 1975, pp. 348-57.

Thornton, Russell, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1942*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.

Underhill, Ruth, *Here Come the Navajo!*, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1953.

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Poetry for Students*.

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

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
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:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

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.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

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.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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