What My Child Learns of the Sea Study Guide

What My Child Learns of the Sea by Audre Lorde

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Introduction

When Audre Lorde wrote "What My Child Learns of the Sea" in her daughter Elizabeth's first year of life, she was struggling to come to terms with her identity. The year of the poem's creation, 1963, found Lorde in her first and only marriage, a young mother, writing poetry while also working as a librarian. The United States at the time was in the throes of an energetic and contested civil rights reform movement during the final year of President John F. Kennedy's administration, just before its violent end. Set within the context of the times, "What My Child Learns of the Sea" reflects the anxiety and upheaval in Lorde's personal life. In this poem, Lorde explores the responsibility, legacy, and limitations she felt as a mother and daughter. Avoiding specific allusions to historical events, Lorde focused her imagery on the primal cycles of nature. The language of seasons, including manifestations of growth and decay, give the poem a resilience that transcends the time and place of its creation and ensures its continued relevance and thoughtfulness as an exploration of motherdaughter and parent-child relationships.

"What My Child Learns of the Sea" was published in 1968 as part of *The First Cities*, Lorde's first book. By that year, her daughter Elizabeth was five and Lorde herself turned thirty-four. With its publication in book form, "What My Child Learns of the Sea" reached a wider audience and became part of the turbulent and vibrant cultural and political scene. Between 1963 and 1968, the civil rights movement expanded from a mostly race-oriented effort into a broader societal upheaval that included an outcry for feminist and gay and lesbian rights and for dramatic changes in the status quo, aiming particularly for wider acceptance of diversity in American society. "What My Child Learns of the Sea" can be found in Audre Lorde's 1992 collection *Undersong: Chosen Poems Old and New (Revised)* and anthologized in *The Garden Thrives: Twentieth- Century African-American Poetry* (1996).

Author Biography

Audre Lorde was born on February 18, 1934, in Harlem, New York, the daughter of West Indianborn parents, Frederic Byron and Linda Gertrude (Belmar) Lorde, small-scale real estate managers. Lorde's parents named her Audrey Geraldine, but she dropped the *y* and her middle name by the time she became known to a reading audience. An early romantic poem by Lorde was published in *Seventeen* magazine when she was still a teenager. In 1954, Lorde attended the University of Mexico in Mexico City.

After her return from Mexico, Lorde enrolled at Hunter College, which was then a teachertraining school for women but since 1964 has been a co-educational institution and part of the City University of New York system. She graduated from Hunter in 1959 and proceeded to earn a master of science degree in library science in 1961 from Columbia University's prestigious School of Library Science. Soon thereafter, Lorde became a librarian at the West Chester County, New York, Mount Vernon Public Library, and in 1962, she married Edward Rollins, an attorney. Together, the couple had two children: Elizabeth Lorde-Rollins, born in 1963, and Jonathan Rollins. Lorde wrote "What My Child Learns of the Sea" during Elizabeth's first year. From 1966 until 1968, she became head librarian at the Town School, a small pre-kindergarten through eighth grade institution in New York City.

Lorde's life took a dramatic turn when *The First Cities*, her first book of poetry, was published in 1968. Awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, Lorde left her library position to become writer-in-residence for six weeks at the predominantly African-American Tougaloo College near Jackson, Mississippi. While there, Lorde met Frances Clayton, who became her longtime partner, continued writing poetry, and discovered that she enjoyed teaching. Back in New York City, Lorde taught writing and courses on racism as an adjunct at three colleges and published *Cable to Rage*, a second book of poetry in 1970. In that same year, she finalized a divorce from Edward Rollins. In 1972, she publicly proclaimed her lesbian identity. For the next twenty years, Lorde wrote and published poetry, essays, a novel, and a memoir, gave public readings, became politically active, and taught college English courses for part of that time.

In 1978, Lorde developed breast cancer and underwent a radical mastectomy that she wrote about in a manuscript subsequently published as *The Cancer Journals* (1980). In 1985, she moved to St. Croix in the Virgin Islands and became known locally by her African name, Gamba Adisa. She died in St. Croix on November 17, 1992, from recurrent cancer.

Lorde's awards and achievements include a nomination for a National Book Award in 1974 for *From a Land Where Other People Live*; cofounding The Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press; two National Endowment for the Arts grants (1968 and 1981); the naming of a poetry institute in her honor at Hunter College; and the Walt Whitman Citation of Merit. She was named Poet Laureate of the State of New York in 1991, a title she held until her death. Anthologies of her poetry include *Undersong: Chosen Poems*

Old and New and *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*. Other works include her novel *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*.

Plot Summary

In "What My Child Learns of the Sea," Lorde's speaker muses upon her daughter's future development and growing awareness as a person. One discovers that the speaker is the mother and that "my child" is her daughter. The poem, comprised of four stanzas, turns around the cycles of nature, but not in the typically accepted seasonal order of spring, summer, autumn (or fall), and winter. Rather, three seasons are introduced in the first stanza in this order: summer, spring, and autumn. The poem's title, reinforced by its repetition in the first line of the first stanza, introduces the key phrase "learns of the sea." The speaker's daughter will learn something about the sea and about life. She will learn about mystery, of the existence of "summer thunder" and "of riddles / that hide in the vortex of spring." Given that a riddle is something mysterious and difficult to understand, the speaker's daughter will move from a position of lesser understanding to one of greater comprehension, as if on a voyage of discovery and learning. Because a vortex, by definition, is a dangerous whirlpool, there is an element of danger that will be better understood. The speaker expects that her daughter will better understand these natural mysteries of sea and season "in my twilight." Though the concept of twilight embraces the half-light periods just before sunrise and just after sunset, used here, twilight represents the speaker when she approaches old age. Thus, she projects that her daughter will come to understanding when the speaker is aged. The final two lines of the first stanza introduce the idea of revision, an important part of learning. Because of the incorporation of new sense data, ideas, and reflection, one's initial ideas about the world are periodically revised. In this case, the speaker predicts that her daughter will "childlike / revise every autumn." As a metaphor, autumn can represent a person at or past middle age, but in this instance, it is modified by the word "every," indicating that actual yearly cycles are meant. What happens every autumn that would inspire revision to one's learning? In the United States, the school year begins anew every autumn, and students learn new things while revising what they have already learned from previous years.

The second stanza repeats the first line of the first stanza except for the phrase "of the sea." The speaker's daughter will learn as she grows older ("as her winters grow into time") mysterious things that the mature speaker has come to know. Specifically, the speaker refers to her daughter learning about something that "has ripened in my own body." The term "ripened" suggests maturity, full development. One refers to fruit as being unripe or green and not ready for eating, ripeness being the optimal time for eating, and over-ripeness too late. Ripening in one's own body refers to physical as well as mental development. Because "What My Child Learns of the Sea" deals directly with motherhood, the term suggests the development of a girl's body from childhood through adolescence to full maturity. In other words, growing from premenstrual girlhood to the years when most women are capable of childbearing, generally from the teen years into the early or mid-forties. The speaker's daughter will, as she grows older, understand that her mother bore her in her body and gave birth to her and that she herself might become a mother in the future. The stanza ends by saying that the speaker's daughter will see and understand, will learn what the speaker has learned. She will learn things

about her mother and herself. This learning will "enter her eyes / with first light"□though she already can see her mother from the time of first consciousness, clearer seeing will only come with physical and mental maturity.

In stanza three, the idea of menstruation and motherhood are reinforced through the words "blood" and "milk." The stanza builds on the second, suggesting that the speaker's daughter will grow beyond thinking of her mother as child bearer and nurturer to become, to the speaker, "a strange girl" who will "step to the back / of a mirror" and will soon be "cutting my ropes / of sea thunder sun." A mirror requires light to reflect images, and the second stanza ended with the notion of the speaker's daughter learning things the speaker knows by seeing "with first light." Stepping behind a figurative mirror, the daughter steps out of and away from her mother's image and cuts the metaphorical umbilical cord, distancing herself from some of her mother's mysteries. The speaker thus speculates that she will seem less magical and mysterious to her daughter as they both grow older. To the speaker, her daughter will become "a strange girl," no longer just a dependent child to be nurtured with milk.

The fourth and last stanza repeats previous seasonal references, autumn from the first stanza and winter from the second. The contrast between the daughter's learning and awareness with the speaker's distance is emphasized by the last line: "I stand already condemned." The speaker projects into the future the fact that her daughter will come into her own but that she (the speaker) will have had a profound impact. Even though her daughter will have come into her own, her mother will have been "condemned" by having left a lasting and unshakable impression. Specifically, the speaker's modeling of how to "taste her autumns" as well as "the words / she will use for winter" will remain with the daughter, despite her growing independence. The introduction of food and taste imagery beyond infant milk is suggested with the descriptive compound "toast-brittle," but this is counterbalanced by the following "warmer than sleep," a phrase that suggests a calm, warm sea and the protective womb before birth. If there is a moral to the poem, it is that once a mother, always a mother, and once a daughter□despite growing autonomy□ always a daughter. More generally, the same can be said about any parent-child relationship.

Themes

Growth and Development

"What My Child Learns of the Sea" deals in large part with the growth and development of both a mother and daughter through time. The speaker, as mother, mentions her own "ripening" as a way of comparing and contrasting the things that her daughter will learn both mentally and physically. Both the speaker and her daughter will continue to grow and develop as they grow older. The speaker has already developed into adulthood, so her daughter will only fully come to learn the kinds of things she knows when the speaker has reached her "autumn," or late-middle-aged years. Presumably, there comes a time in one's life (the "winter") when the learning process slows and one comes to terms with death. Early on, especially in infancy, the learning process is rapid and chaotic. Only during the "summer" and "autumn" years can one learn and reflect on a relatively even keel, incorporating new data.

Consciousness

Changes in consciousness over time are suggested throughout the poem. The speaker's daughter will move from a state of dependency on the mother to one of greater awareness. The speaker reflects her own self-consciousness by projecting changes in her daughter's way of seeing things as she grows older while at the same time recognizing her own perceptions. Her daughter will become more conscious as she ages, learning much from her mother but eventually coming to greater consciousness on her own. Consciousness and the articulation of self-reflective thoughts are presumably furthered along by reading and writing. Much of the daughter's basic vocabulary is instilled by the speaker. Therefore the speaker is "condemned" for "the ways" her daughter will comprehend life via her example, or model, and for "the words / she will use for winter."

Introspection

The entire poem shows introspection via the speaker as mother. Like an inner mirror, introspection helps a person reflect upon her or his life. In this case, the speaker (and presumably Lorde) examines her role in life as a mother and, by implication, as a daughter, too. When the speaker imagines her daughter standing behind a mirror and "cutting my ropes," she imagines her daughter as "a strange girl" who has found the ability to reflect about herself on her own. The speaker thereby implies that this is a necessary, if painful, stage for any daughter or child as the child reaches a certain level of maturity.

Instruction and Learning

The theme of learning runs strong through the poem. The speaker's daughter will learn much about the world from observing her mother. She will "revise every autumn" what she learns, implying a connection to the conventional American school year from kindergarten though college or university. She learns or will learn about her own body and of her place in the world. She learns much from her mother, but she will eventually learn things not taught her by her mother as well. Certain types of learning, such as learning a foreign language, can best be achieved at an early age, while general wisdom about life may deepen with age.

Nature and Its Meaning

The meaning and mysteries of nature permeate throughout each of the four stanzas of "What My Child Learns of the Sea." The sea, the human body, the seasons, ripening, regeneration, and mortality are all touched upon. The sea, thunder, autumn, winter, and forms of light are all mentioned twice. Nature represents cycles that are part of and beyond the individual person. The sea can represent both the womb and spirituality; it also represents the unconscious aspects of the human mind, such as dreaming. Nature embraces a wide range of phenomena that can be peaceful or dangerous. Terms such as "vortex" and "thunder" tend to evoke images of danger. Nature is full of "riddles" and reflects the mysteriousness of life.

Style

Subject

Two people, the speaker and her daughter, provide the comparison and contrast that propels "What My Child Learns of the Sea" along. The themes of motherhood and the cycles of nature interrelate strongly with these two people. What at least partly separates human beings from other animals on Earth is their advanced learning functions and ability to self-reflect. The speaker and her daughter live, nonetheless, in nature and are subject to its mysterious forces from infancy to death. Though the speaker and her daughter are the subjects, the entire poem is restricted to the speaker's point of view, her reflections on the world, and her imagination about the future.

Symbol

Specific aspects of nature, such as weather and seasonal time, represent both themselves and changes in human consciousness. Symbols such as "blood" and "milk" represent specific functions of female human biology, but they also represent maturation and motherhood. The symbol of the mirror, combined with allusions to light, emphasize the idea of self-reflection and changing awareness of self-image and identity. The symbols of "twilight" and "winter" are used to emphasize middle and old age, respectively. The "sea" often symbolizes the womb, spirituality, and the dream state, but it can also represent any actual large body of water such as the Atlantic Ocean or the Caribbean Sea.

Historical Context

In 1963, when she wrote "What My Child Learns of the Sea," Lorde lived and worked in New York City. The times were rife with protest and change. American participation in the Vietnam War was just beginning to escalate, so most mass protests in the United States at the time aimed for civil rights reforms. John F. Kennedy responded positively to the civil rights movement and used the powers of the federal government to support the reform movement organized by such powerful and persuasive leaders as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. Many of the civil rights reform pressures in 1963 sought to overturn discriminatory policies used primarily against African Americans, but these pressures subsequently broadened and flowered to embrace a wide range of similar issues. In the midst of this movement that would bring significant change in American society, Lorde gave birth to her daughter Elizabeth, the first of two children, and took a short break from her salaried job as a librarian. "What My Child Learns of the Sea" reflects her anxiety as she looked into the future. With all that was happening in the country, what would be her role? By the time of the publication of "What My Child Learns of the Sea" as part of Lorde's first book of poetry in 1968, socio-political changes in the country gave her an opportunity to become a publicly acknowledged poet, supporter of cultural diversity, and proponent of a wide variety of civil rights.

Because "What My Child Learns of the Sea" is not set in any obvious time or place (there are no specific historical references), it can be viewed both within its historical and cultural context and on its own, giving it usefulness as a barometer of Lorde's feelings in 1963 and a transcendent quality not requiring historical anchoring. However, it becomes of added interest when one learns more about Lorde's transformation from a librarian who writes poetry into a public speaker, teacher, and published poet, from a married woman to an outspoken lesbian and feminist. The poem helped her on her way through these dramatic life changes. Its publication in 1968 as part of *The First Cities* practically coincided with Lorde's residency in Tougaloo College near Jackson, Mississippi, a primarily African-American institution then in the thick of the often violent battle for civil rights. With the launch of her book and her stint outside of New York City, Lorde gained enough confidence and experience to divorce her husband and wholeheartedly join the reform movements of the early 1970s. In a sense, "What My Child Learns of the Sea" is a self-reflective precursor to the massive changes that would happen in her life, partly as a result of its publication in book form.

Critical Overview

Audre Lorde is generally presented as displaying a poetic voice that blends feminism, lesbianism, and Caribbean and African-American concerns in a passionate way. Clarence Major, in *The Garden Thrives: Twentieth-Century African-American Poetry*, places Lorde in a pantheon of African-American writers such as Etheridge Knight, Sonia Sanchez, and Amiri Baraka, who developed in the 1960s and who "tried to give lyrical expression to the complex personal, social, and political issues" of the time. Lorde was personally and professionally befriended and supported by fellow poet Adrienne Rich. According to critic Beverly Threatt Kullii, as quoted in Andrews, et al., Lorde's *The First Cities*, her first published book of poetry (including "What My Child Learns of the Sea"), "was cited as an innovative and refreshing rhetorical departure from the confrontational tone prevalent in African American poetry at the time." Publication of the first edition of Lorde's *Chosen Poems: Old and New* in 1982 (which also includes "What My Child Learns of the Sea") "cemented her reputation." As of the mid-1990s, only a few years after her death, Lorde was considered "an influential and serious talent." Lorde can be found on the world wide web, where she is celebrated in web sites devoted to a wide variety of topics and causes ranging from poetry, feminism, lesbianism, and African-American cultural heritage.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

France is a librarian and college counselor, who teaches history at University Liggett School and English at Macomb College near Detroit, Michigan. In the following essay, France analyzes the prophetic nature of the poem from both a biographical and a textual perspective.

In "What My Child Learns of the Sea," Lorde employs both cyclical and linear imagery to explore the mysteries of human identity from a female perspective. Seasons and weather come in recurrent cycles, while daughters, like sons, typically proceed along a trajectory that takes them from the ignorance and innocence of infancy□via a path of learned experience□toward an awareness of mortality and, finally, to death. All girls and women are daughters, but not all daughters become mothers. In this poem, the speaker is evidently a mother contemplating the changes that will occur in her daughter's awareness and perspective as she grows up.

If one considers "What My Child Learns of the Sea" from the perspective of Lorde's actual life, it works in a number of ways as a sort of prophecy or prediction of the future, especially if one focuses on what "ripened in" Lorde's "own body." First, Lorde gave birth to her daughter Elizabeth around the time she wrote the poem, making her a mother to her daughter, as well as a daughter to her own mother. At the same time, she was struggling with her sexual identity, for though married, she would eventually divorce her husband and redefine herself as a lesbian who identified and oriented herself sexually□exclusively□with women. What also came to ripen in her body was what eventually killed her: breast cancer, a disease that destroyed her via that which had also produced "the milk . . . given" to her daughter. The poem probably also reflects Lorde's self-identity as the child of her own mother, who had been born on Grenada, an island surrounded by the sea and subject to seasonal hurricanes and storms. Lorde herself lived out the last years of her life on St. Croix, another island in the Caribbean, and had her own house visited and damaged by the powerful natural energies of Hurricane Hugo less than two years before she died of recurrent cancer.

But what if one considers "What My Child Learns of the Sea" from the interior vantage point of the text only? Setting aside external biographical facts and focusing on the text, one may still feel the prophetic qualities of the speaker, who in the last line says, regarding her daughter's future outlook, "I stand already condemned." This speaker assumes that her daughter will grow up to be independent of her, to move eventually from "riddles / that hide in the vortex of spring" in her early years to become "a strange girl" who metaphorically cuts the emotional umbilical cord of dependency to become her own person and separate self. Spring traditionally represents the childhood and adolescence of a human life. The speaker's child, after surviving the wild mysteries and riddles of her springtime, will, as she crosses into summer, or early adulthood, be able to demythologize her mother and see the world through the reflection of her own mirror. It is important in her development that she see for herself rather than see everything reflected through the eyes of her mother. In other words, the speaker's child will learn, and grow, and develop into an adult, and a relative power shift will occur. The child, until

this time dependent on her mother for lifeblood and "milk," will be able to emerge as an independent person. This is essential if she is to reach what psychologists call self-actualization, reaching toward fullest potential as an adult. She will no longer think of her mother as all-powerful. The speaker realizes and laments this. She is also saddened by the fact that with growing awareness, her daughter will come to recognize her own mortality, that she, like her mother, will eventually reach her "winter" and die, for this reinforces the speaker's own sense of mortality. To the speaker, autumn represents the season when one can reflect, can become "childlike," can "taste . . . warmer than sleep." Ideally, a woman in the autumn of life is allowed to productively pursue her dreams and still remain healthy enough to be able to distract herself from the inevitable approach of the final season. In the poem, despite the speaker's sadness, the daughter's learning process is essentially healthy.

To fully develop as a person, a daughter must ultimately forge her own identity, one that is distinctly separate and not merely an extension of her mother's; this Lorde did. She eventually proclaimed a new adult identity to the listening world, years after the publication of "What My Child Learns of the Sea," an identity that embraced many elements. Calling herself "a black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet," and feminist, she evidently came to recognize and develop those elements most important to her core personality. Knowing this, one can return to the poem and consider Lorde's developing identity. Her mother had sent mixed messages about being black and of being at least partly of African lineage via the West Indies; her mother had apparently favored her lighter-skinned sisters. Seeing oneself in the mirror according to society's mores reinforces one's self-identity. If one places Lorde's mother into the role of speaker in "What My Child Learns of the Sea," Lorde herself becomes the "strange girl" who metaphorically steps to the back of her mother's□and white-dominated American society□symbolic reflecting mirror, cuts its ropes, and lets it fall crashing to the floor. This cutting is the willful act of a warrior, one who has grown to refuse the socially accepted ways of seeing things. The cutting of the ropes is the first action taken by one ready to challenge and fight against them.

Lorde, by becoming a mother, performed the one role widely accepted by many elements of any society. But in all other ways, she challenged the status quo. She discerned the "riddles / that hide in the vortex of spring" and found the "words" to "use" that would condemn the received social norms transmitted through her mother. Being black meant she was treated as a minority in American society; being feminist put her in the vanguard of her time; being a lesbian and warrior threatened widely accepted ideals of male roles. Lorde is quoted by Margaret Homans in the 1991 publication *African American Writers* as saying: "I learned to speak the truth by accepting many parts of myself and making them serve one another." As a poet, she was able to tap all of these identities. In "What My Child Learns of the Sea," Lorde is just beginning to formulate her answers to the riddles she found in the spring of life. She has entered autumn and can reflect and see forward.

Because of its origin at the time in Lorde's life when she had arrived at a unique forward-looking and backward-looking nexus, "What My Child Learns of the Sea" can be interpreted as a riddle or prophecy that cuts both ways. It reflects upon her position

in the world, one that is both cyclical, like the seasons, and linear. Coming from a lineage that ties her through blood to her mother and all the mothers before her, she has helped continue the cycle of human life by giving birth to a daughter; yet her awareness of the linear progression of her life and that of the life of her daughter projected into the future, gives her a sadness derived from the knowledge of mortality. With so much yet to do, mortality seems all the sadder. Still, through "What My Child Learns of the Sea" and other poems and writings, Lorde's vision will carry on. As Lorde explained to Claudia Tate in an interview for *Black Women Writers at Work*: "I write not only for my peers but for those who will come after me, to say, I was there, and I passed on, and you will pass on, too." Like the speaker's child, Lorde passed through life, learning, revising, ripening, condemning the past, and cutting the ropes of old ways of seeing.

Source: Erik France, Critical Essay on "What My Child Learns of the Sea," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Hill is the author of a poetry collection, has published widely in literary journals, and is an editor for a university publications department. In the following essay, Hill suggests that the mother's feelings toward the daughter in this poem are a positive reaction to the poet's negative and hurtful relationship with her own mother.

Critics and readers in general widely accept that Audre Lorde's poetry provides a strong voice for black women everywhere and for all women with feminist views and/or a lesbian lifestyle. Arguably, her work is both staunchly political and direly personal as she addresses the issues of women's and gay rights, as well as the battle with cancer that would take her life decades after she began to write. But these subjects, vital as they are, do not define the real heart of Lorde's creative inspirations as a poet. Her work often explores relationships between people□men and women, female lovers, and mothers and daughters, in particular. The latter is especially poignant in her work, as she frequently writes about her own daughter and the unconditional love, encouragement, fear, and anxiety that all come with raising a child. Lorde was always forthcoming in the prose she wrote and in interviews when she addressed her own childhood and relationship with her mother. Apparently, her mother was less than encouraging to the young Audre, even resenting her and attempting to repress her inquisitive nature and creative tendencies. But once she became a mother herself, Lorde was determined not to do the same to her own children. "What My Child Learns of the Sea" is evidence of that conviction.

In a interview with critic and editor Claudia Tate, published in *Black Women Writers at Work* in 1983, Lorde had this to say in response to Tate's question, "For whom do you write?":

> I write not only for my peers but for those who will
> come after me, to say I was there, and I passed on,
> and you will pass on, too. But you're here now, so
> do it. I believe very strongly in survival and teaching.
> I feel that is my work.

This sentiment is echoed beautifully in "What My Child Learns of the Sea," in which the metaphors reflect a mother's coming to terms with her own mortality and with the aging of her daughter into a woman who will face the same someday. The "survival and teaching" in this poem are actually accomplished through letting go□through the speaker's willingness to accept that the child she has given life to will one day grow into "a strange girl [who] will step / to the back of a mirror / cutting my ropes," and become her own unique, independent person. It is not an easy task for a mother to acknowledge that her daughter's individuality is more vital "than blood / or the milk" she has provided to sustain and nourish the child's life. But, Lorde knows from her own experience that anything less is repressive and detrimental to both physical and emotional well-being. She finds it better to make the ultimate motherly sacrifice of setting the child free, not as a way of abandoning her daughter, but to give her the leeway to learn on her own and

make her own choices. This may also be seen as the ultimate act of unconditional motherly love.

The nature metaphors that pervade "What My Child Learns of the Sea" imply the bond between a mother and daughter that should be natural, but which, of course, does not always seem to be. In spite of her own childhood experiences, though or perhaps *because* of them Lorde sees her role as a mother as providing a connection between "sea and thunder and spring," while at the same time understanding her child will learn the connection, but then "revise [it] every autumn." This method of teaching is like handing a child a book with much useful information in it, but also with many blank pages on which she can write her own thoughts and responses to that information. Education, as well as love, it seems, is enhanced by the freedom to discover it on one's own.

Even though the strongest message in this poem is the importance of teaching a child about life with as few ropes and boundaries as possible, it does not mean that powerful ties between a parent and child are less important. On the contrary, the entire premise of "What My Child Learns of the Sea" stems from a very close bonding between mother and daughter, one so close that the knowledge passed from the speaker to the child has already "ripened" in her own body. Like the blood and milk she has given so that her daughter may live, her *teachings* also take on a physical characteristic. In this sense, what the child "learns" is as real and tangible as a ripened piece of fruit that the mother may give her daughter for nourishment. The bond is so strong that the threat of separation is no threat at all. Instead, the mother understands the natural course of life's passing, that she has secured her daughter enough with love that the child will grow to carry on her own life safe in that knowledge even though her mother is no longer there. Whether the last line of the poem is a reference to the poet's acknowledgement of her diagnosis of cancer or simply a metaphorical allusion to an older human being making way for the young, it is probably not intended as harshly as it sounds. Yes, "condemned" is a severe word, but most likely the speaker refers only to death as a natural part of life. There is sadness here, but not bitterness.

It is not unusual for poets to use the seasons of the year to represent time passing or to lament the aging process, and most run the risk of becoming trite with such a common metaphor. In this poem, however, Lorde manages to employ the seasons in a subtle, yet telling manner, avoiding banality and presenting an effective touch. Part of the accomplishment lies simply in the order or lack of order in which the seasons are listed. Instead of the typical spring-through-winter narrative, this poem runs summer, spring, autumn, spring, autumn, winter. There seems to be no cohesive pattern and yet the discordant presentation gives the message more credence. Life is not a pat movement from one pre-set stage to another but, rather, is interspersed with moments and events that may make a young person feel very old or an elderly individual glow with the freshness of youth. In "What My Child Learns of the Sea," the speaker, or the poet herself, knows all too well that life's "winter" can arrive early and that someday her daughter will face that season herself, hopefully at a much older age than the mother. She also playfully asserts that whatever the daughter makes of her "summer thunders" or the "riddles / that hide in the curve of spring" she will take the time to "revise" when

she reaches the autumn of life, or at least when she *feels like* autumn. Notice that when this third season of the year is mentioned again toward the end of the poem, it is described as either "toast-brittle or warmer than sleep," all depending on how her child, then grown, will "taste" it. Autumn, it seems, can be just the harbinger of winter or it can still bask in the warmth of the summer just gone by.

When a poem is as heartfelt and personal to the poet as this one is to Lorde, it is difficult to separate biography from creativity, but in "What My Child Learns of the Sea" she incorporates the two so well that a reader does not know where one ends and the other begins. Perhaps there are no stopping or starting points, just a continuous mixture of real feelings and intriguing verse. Lorde's claim that she wrote for "those who will come after" her ring thoughtfully true in this poem, as the words she passed on to her daughter reflect that dedication and conviction to the fullest. Clearly, the poet not only overcame a strained, less-than-nourishing relationship with her mother, but succeeded in turning it about-face into a steadfast, loving connection with her own child.

Source: Pamela Steed Hill, Critical Essay on "What My Child Learns of the Sea," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

MacDonald is an instructor of English Literature and media studies. In this essay, MacDonald considers Lorde's poetry in light of her feminist political ambitions and strong belief in both the "Black mother in us all" and the need to understand the difference.

"What My Child Learns of the Sea," is, like most Lorde poems, a controlled emotional frenzy full of carefully constructed metaphors and cleverly placed images. Moreover, the politics that Lorde advocated in the 1990s are already clearly evident in her poetry in the 1960s.

Audre Lorde's poetry is filled with both a controlled rage and an optimistic voice. As Maggie Humm notes in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*, Lorde certified that she was a "Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two." Indeed, this self proclamation is deliberately without punctuation in order to ensure that racism and homophobia are not given the chance to privilege one term over the other. Consequently, as one might imagine, Lorde spent her life fighting racism and homophobia through her work. Poetry was but one weapon with which Lorde chose to fight this battle.

"What My Child Learns of the Sea" was written in 1963 and published originally in 1968. The images of earth, Mother Nature, and motherhood within the poem are significant to both Lorde personally and to Black feminism as a discourse. Crucially, Lorde has a history of invoking motherhood as an image in her work and consequently makes reference to "the Black mother in us all," a concept similar to the poet Adrienne Rich's "Lesbian continuum"; both concepts invoke the spirit of community among women while still highlighting the difference of experience, thus they have become well used terms within contemporary feminist discourse.

Indeed, the literal mother and the mystical mother (of nature, of spiritualism, etc.) is one of enormous power and significance among Afra- American and African and Aboriginal cultures that venerate the image of mother. Lorde herself argued against the perception that Black matriarchy was a "social disease" in the 1960s and saw this issue as one that took away from Black women's strength and energy. Acknowledging Lorde's issues with mothering, Maggie Humm notes: "this source of energy Lorde locates in the semiotic□in motherbonding. . . . Many of her poems explore divisions and hatred between mothers and daughters." Thus, it is on the topic of racist oppression that Lorde spent her life working against and helping to bring to the forefront of feminist discourse and criticism.

The 1960s was a time when feminist discourse, theory, and literature were challenging the notion of origin□of specifically male and female authorship and of authority. Feminist criticism itself began to play a large role in the women's movement for the first time during the 1960s and 1970s, leading to the now popular slogan coined by Lorde's contemporary Adrienne Rich, "the personal is political." This concept certainly fed into major feminist literature of the period and Audre Lorde's work is no exception.

"What My Child Learns of the Sea" is divided into three stanzas and has several meanings among its lines. However, at all levels, the poem addresses the challenges that all women face as well as their experiences□both past, present, and future. The first stanza highlights this struggle through the use of natural images: the sea, the seasons, the weather, and time. Contrasting the warmth and safety of summer with the dangerous anger of thunder, Lorde illustrates the concept of unpredictability and goes on to highlight questions and uncertainty that "hide" throughout the many corners of life: "What my child learns of the sea / of the summer thunders / of the riddles / that hide in the curve of spring." While there is both an angry and discontented tone here, there is also the faint glimmer of hope. While she acknowledges that her child will learn of these struggles through naivete, she will also challenge them herself on her own terms: "she will learn in my twilights / and childlike / revise every autumn." Moreover, the child of whom the poem speaks can be seen as a metaphor for all women who are the children of the Great Mother. It is all women who must learn their own experience, follow their own path, and discover in retrospect that the riddles of life must be faced.

While the voice of the poem is ambiguous□ real mother/Great Mother, real woman/all women□ it is in the second stanza of the poem that Lorde's politics can be seen most clearly: "What my child learns / as her winters grow into time / has ripened in my own body / to enter her eyes with first light." Here, the child/woman has learned and grown wise with her years. She has felt the changes through her body and her knowledge has ripened to "enter her eyes with first light." Light is the provoking term here, as it is a symbolic metaphor which Lorde continually used throughout her life in her personal politics and fight against racism. She saw racism as an invisible enemy, but one that, for Black women, permeated their existence from the day they were born (from "first light"). Light, for Audre Lorde, is a metaphor that illustrates the lack of Black awareness and the marginalization of invisible women who are unseen within dominant white culture□ even within feminist white culture. Humm notes that "Lorde's use of the imagery of light, her attention to the very different experiences of Afra-American and Australian Aboriginal women suggest that a Black feminist critique can have global implications." This globalization of recognition for Black women's experience in white (feminist) culture was an agenda Lorde kept throughout her life and one which is certainly seen among her poetry.

The final stanza of the poem can be seen to have several levels of meaning. On the one hand, the final stanza is a tribute to the initial cutting of the umbilical cord which all mothers face, as well as the growing sense of loss as a child grows older: "cutting my ropes." The mother of the poem has given both milk for nourishment and shed blood for protection. Despite all, the child will emerge, a separate being, to taste her own autumns, walk her own paths, and choose her own words with which to describe her experience. The mother of the poem stands "already condemned" because she cannot assume her child's experience. Because, when all is said and done, one can never understand another's oppression.

On a deeper level, the final stanza of the poem is a message to all women and a political statement about difference. "[M]ore than blood / or the milk I have given" are powerful lines which speak to the historical struggles and tragedy of Afra-American and

Aboriginal peoples with Lorde is all too familiar. The image of shedding blood for a child is both literal (as in the birth process) and more profound (as in for protection against danger, for the right for freedom and individuality, for knowledge). The struggle against oppression and the recognition of difference are issues that permeate not only the poem, but all of Lorde's work. In *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*, Chris Weedon gives an in-depth analysis of the politics of difference and spends a considerable amount of time on the politics of Lorde herself. Weedon highlights the concern of Black lesbian feminist writing within the white middle class academy and notes that "one of the strengths of early second-wave feminism in the west was its emphasis on consciousness raising and the politics of the personal." She goes on to recognize Lorde as one of the key figures in raising this awareness for Black lesbian women. Lorde maintained that difference was key in the understanding of personal struggle and that oppression could not be understood at only one level (that is, the level of experience for white middle class American women). Thus, in "What My Child Learns of the Sea," the voice / child/mother will either taste her autumns "toast-brittle or warmer than sleep"□to each their own, but be aware.

The epiphany of the poem exists in the lines "one day a strange girl will step / to the back of a mirror." Perhaps it is the child who steps forth, the mother herself looking back at the child she once was, or all women who one day look into the mir- ror and see a strange girl before them. All three are possible and the ambiguousness of the poem's subject is purposeful. It is all three images that the mirror reproduces in its profoundly stagnant reflection.

The mirror is highly significant here as it has become an image throughout literature which is a profound patriarchal symbol and oppressor of women. Issues surrounding mirror myths (beauty myths), metaphors for myths (ponds, water, sea, etc.), and the literal physical mirror itself have become the subject of much critical debate and the source of much feminist criticism since the 1960s. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (among others) consider the image of the literary woman in *Mad Women in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. Importantly, they pivot their analysis of the nineteenthcentury woman writer on the image of the mirror. Similar to Lorde's poem, Gilbert and Gubar use the image of the mirror as a metaphor for self analysis, and further, like Lorde herself, they see a woman writer's self contemplation as beginning with a searching glance in the mirror of a male inscribed literary text. Where those "eternal lineaments [are] fixed on her like a mask." In other words, she begins her self analysis with preconceived notions□notions created, maintained and solidified in male dominated literary texts.

Specifically Gilbert and Gubar make reference to Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's nineteenth-century poem "The Other Side of the Mirror" and Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* in which women discover that they are prisoners of the mirror. Like Lorde's speaker in "What My Child Learns of the Sea" the woman represented in Coleridge's poem is one who sits in horror as she cannot recognize the image before her in the mirror. Try as she might to escape the image reflected in her looking glass□an image constructed by her social surroundings and estranged from herself□she realizes that she is but a vision, a shadow who cannot escape her domination. Similarly, in the

Snow White story, intriguingly the mirror is the essential metaphorical and literal image: on the one hand, the metaphorical mirror which women are trapped and on the other, the literal mirror in which one's imperfect (for it cannot ever be perfect) image is both ensnared and reflected. Thus, Gilbert and Gubar argue that "to be caught and trapped in a mirror . . . is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self."

This frightening concept is one that appears often in feminist literature as the image of woman, her relationship with her person and the representation of her body and self becomes more prominent in feminist discourse. Not unlike the mother/daughter relationship in Lorde's poem, Snow White is, of course, a potential replacement for the Queen□a younger version of "woman," a freshly and newly beautiful woman to replace the older and now (sexually) used "mother." However, while Lorde invokes this powerful mirror image for her feminist purposes in "What My Child Learns of the Sea," the woman in Lorde's poem does not simply gaze into the mirror in hopelessness. Rather, significantly, she steps to the back of it, defying it, "cutting [the] ropes" or the chains that have tied her there and shattering the frozen image with her movement.

Audre Lorde worked through her poetry to define herself and capture her own experience as a Black gay woman in America who grew up with the knowledge of race always at the forefront of her life. In the film documentary *A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde*, Lorde's acceptance speech for the New York State poet 1991-1993 goes a long way to understanding her poetry:

I've been asking myself . . . what does it mean that a
black, lesbian, feminist, warrior, poet, mother is
named as the state poet of New York? It means that
we live in a world full of the most intense contradictions,
and we must find ways to use the best we
have□ourselves, our work□to bridge those contradictions.

Source: Deneka Candace MacDonald, Critical Essay on "What My Child Learns of the Sea," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Adaptations

A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde, a documentary directed by Ada Gray Griffin and Michelle Parkerson, was first broadcast by PBS as part of its POV series on June 18, 1996. It is available from ThirdWorld Newsreel (www.twn.org).

Reading Their Work: Audre Lorde & Adrienne Rich, a double cassette tape, is available from the National Women's Studies Association as item #AA16 (www.nwsa.org).

Topics for Further Study

The sea (particularly the Atlantic Ocean) and its power had a profound impact on Lorde's sensibilities. Her parents were from Grenada in the West Indies, and she resided in the Virgin Islands for the last seven years of her life. In 1991, Hurricane Hugo devastated her small house. Research and analyze the good and bad effects of weather and the sea on the inhabitants of one of these islands.

The mother-daughter relationship is a crucial element of "What My Child Learns of the Sea." Analyze ways that parents affect their children's lives. Interview a friend and her or his parents or find an autobiography or memoir that examines the author's family. Report on your findings.

Lorde became a strong feminist as an adult, and she also combated racism. Examine ways that issues of race and gender have interrelated during the civil rights movements of a particular time period.

Until relatively recently, little was written about breast cancer. Locate a copy of Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* and compare what she wrote with current medical treatment, ideas about prevention and early detection, alternative therapies, and ways that people respond to the disease. What common threads do you find?

Time spent teaching at Tougaloo College changed the course of Lorde's life by helping her find her calling as poet and teacher. Using the Internet or other resources, research Tougaloo and other predominantly African-American colleges. Is the mission of such schools socially beneficial? Likewise, are single sex schools beneficial? Weigh the pros and cons for each.

Compare and Contrast

1960s: The Civil Rights movement in the United States is bitterly contested. Reforms are made but many people are slain during the process, including major public figures John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert F. Kennedy.

Today: The Civil Rights movement is largely confined to consolidating and protecting gains already made, combined with legal challenges and organized protests attempting further reforms, particularly in the area of gay/lesbian rights.

1960s: The first major open gay/lesbian movement is sparked by the Stonewall Riots in New York City, and *Midnight Cowboy*, the first major movie to depict gay lead characters, is released.

Today: Gay and lesbian characters on cable television shows such as *Queer as Folk* and *Sex and the City* reflect wider acceptance of gay/lesbian citizens and a more open discussion of sexuality and gender expectations among an interested public.

1960s: Feminism's "Second Wave" advocates massive reforms in academia and the general work place as well as a reshaping of cultural values and a redefinition of gender roles.

Today: As with civil rights in general, feminists focus on consolidating gains and also electing more women to public office.

What Do I Read Next?

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) foreshadowed the "second wave" of feminism that arrived in the United States in the 1960s with an analysis of Western gender roles.

Nancy Friday's *My Mother/My Self* (1977) explores the psychological inter-relationships between mothers and daughters in a provocative but accessible way.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, first published in 1963, helped usher in the "second wave" of feminism. Friedan explores the conflicting pressures on adult women at the time.

Audre Lorde's poetry volume *The Black Unicorn* (1978) embraces African deities and myths and reinforces her lesbian identity.

In *The Cancer Journals* (1980), Lorde describes in detailed nonfiction form part of her harrowing battle with breast cancer.

Further Study

Clark, Darlene, and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America*, Broadway Books, 1998.

Clark and Thompson provide an historical overview of the changing roles of African-American women from colonial times to the mid-1990s.

Lorde, Audre, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Crossing Press, 1984.

This collection of nonfiction writings explore Lorde's engagement in public life, following themes of alienation, diversity, conflict, and the need to find common ground, especially among the historically oppressed.

□, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Crossing Press, 1982.

This fictionalized treatment of Lorde's childhood gives considerable insight into her upbringing and developing sense of identity.

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BOOKRAGS

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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:

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