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The Poisonwood Bible

BY BARBARA KINGSOLVER



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Author Study**

Objectives: Organizing facts
Creating a brochure

Activity

Barbara Kingsolver has written twelve novels and numerous essays and short stories. Her first novel, *The Bean Trees* (Harper Collins, 1987) is studied in high school and college classrooms across America. *The Poisonwood Bible* (Harper Collins, 1998) has been referred to by many as her Magnum Opus.

Use the Internet and other appropriate resources to research Kingsolver's life and work. Use your research to create a tri-fold biographical brochure. It is preferable to use a computer with document design software, but you may lay it out by hand in a pinch.

Include the following information:

- A brief biography
- Her educational background
- Her family background
- Her inspiration to write and her influences
- Where she lives now and her concerns/interests
- A list of her novels and other work
- Illustrations and one author photo

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book One: Genesis**Orleanna Price****Haiku Symbolism**

Objectives: Identifying symbolism in a literary text
Writing an original Haiku

Activity

As you shall see, Orleanna's encounter with the rare okapi serves the narrative framing, foreshadowing, and symbolism of the novel. Taken in the context of this section alone, however, it is a powerful symbol of elusiveness, freedom, and fear. It eloquently punctuates the fact that, like the okapi, Orleanna and her children are rather rare and exotic creatures who must tread cautiously, lest they be trapped and extinguished.

Write a Haiku, three lines of five, seven, and five syllables respectively, based on the symbol of the okapi or Orleanna's feelings about it.

Sample Haiku

Okapi twitches
He surrenders his surprise,
Looks away and drinks

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book Two: The Revelation**Entire Section****Symbolism**

Objectives: Recognizing an author's use of symbolism
 Extracting meaning from a literary text
 Identifying anthropomorphism

Activity

By this point, Kingsolver has introduced several animals and imbued each one with an idea. Using an animal to embody an abstract idea is called anthropomorphism. Think Easter Bunny or Chuck E. Cheese.

Identify what you think each of the following animals represents. It may symbolize more than one idea.

We've done the first one for you.

Okapi – It embodies the idea that survival is fragile; it represents the desire to protect one's freedom; it symbolizes the fact that Africa is unconquerable.

Parrot Methuselah – _____

Mongoose – _____

Chameleon – _____

Baby Owl – _____

Lion – _____

Chickens – _____

Green Mamba Snake – _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book Two: The Revelation**The Things We Learned: Rachel****Style/Dialect**

Objectives: Recognizing dialect as an element of an author's style
Understanding language as revelatory

Activity

While Ruth May can communicate with the local children without language, and Adah prefers to use speech sparingly, Rachel merrily and thoroughly butchers the English language. The effect of her running roughshod over her words is quite comic. For example, she speaks of Anatole's scars thusly, "It gave him a mysterious air, like a putative from the law." Later she describes the ladies' hairdos as "spectacular."

Moreover, for someone who lacks the ability to string words together properly, she has managed to master the art of sarcasm, albeit in the form of run-on sentences: "It is hard to muster up the proper respect for a chief who wears glasses with no glass in them (he seems to think they raise his intelligence quotient), and the fur of a small animal clasped around his neck, a fashion trademark he shares with the elderly church going ladies of Georgia, charmed I'm sure."

Review Rachel's propensity to play with language, use her Southern slang, mix her metaphors, and speak and use run-on sentences until you think you've got a idea of how she speaks. Then write five comic, sarcastic, insulting, and complaining journal entries for her based on each of the following topics:

- A recollection of an event from her childhood in Bethlehem, Georgia
- What she thinks of her father Nathan Price
- A conversation with her mother Orleanna Price about her birthday
- An interaction with one of her sisters
- Thoughts on her future

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book Four: Bel and the Serpent**Orleanna****Character/Plot**

Objectives: Examining characterization in relation to plot
Synthesizing information from a literary text

Activity

In *Book Four*, Kingsolver skillfully uses Orleanna Price's narrative to sum up the political injustices perpetrated against an honorable man who ruled a ripe, rich country. Each lost its life blood at the hands of greedy white men, in the name of democracy, and the country has been in turmoil ever since.

In her narrative about the Americans and Belgians having Patrice Lumumba forcefully removed from his elected office and eventually beaten to death, she mentions a South African mercenary pilot who owns a radio and responds to the code words, "The Rabbit has escaped." The pilot is Eeben Axelroot; and he serves as a great example of how Kingsolver seamlessly weaves the lives of her characters into the tapestry of Congolese history.

Imagine you are an author, and you want to create a work of historical fiction. What time period would you choose. How many years would you cover? What historical figures would you choose to mingle with your fictional characters?

Draw up a one-page outline for your proposed saga. Include possible titles, characters, historical events, genre (thriller, mystery, romance, political allegory, etc.), essential plot points, settings (locations, time period, etc.), and your target audience or demographic (teens, single young women, professional men, etc.). Also, make sure you include a paragraph detailing why this new book will be a best-seller.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book Five: Exodus**Entire Section****Foreshadowing****Objective:** Recognizing an author's use of foreshadowing to build suspense**Activity**

With each of Orleanna's reminiscences, the reader learns a little more about her suffering. She has lost a child, and now we know which one. All along, Orleanna's grief stricken narratives have foreshadowed Ruth May's death, the painful climax of the novel. Another example of foreshadowing is the death of Methuselah. After Nathan releases him into the wild, he is eaten by a wild cat. His fate foreshadows the fate of the Congo: after it is granted freedom, it becomes prey for greedy foreign predators.

Use the chart below to document three other events from the novel, which were hinted at before they actually happened.

FORESHADOWING CHART

Event From <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i>	Hint or Clue that Foreshadows the Event in Quote

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book Seven: The Eyes in the Trees

Found Poem

Objectives: Recognizing diction as an element of an author's style
 Extracting ideas from the text
 Writing poetry

Activity

Kingsolver paints incredibly vivid and emotionally evocative images by deftly wielding her language brush. In this section, the spirit of Ruth May has become one with the forest. Echoing her mother's words, she tells her to listen, "...being dead is not worse than being alive. It is different, though. You could say the view is larger." From the vantage point of her larger view, she advises Orleanna to let go of her burden of guilt, and walk into the light.

A "found" poem is a poem made up entirely of phrases, sentences, or quotations found in the text. It allows you to play with someone else's words in order to create something original.

Review Ruth May's narrative in *Book Seven*, and look for images and language that appeals to you. Use it to create a found poem of your own. The poem may reveal something about Ruth May, or it might be totally unrelated to the story, which is one of the best parts of writing a found poem.

Your poem should be at least ten lines long. The lines do not need to rhyme, but they certainly may. You can arrange the phrases in any way you like and change the punctuation, but do not deviate from Kingsolver's actual words. Give the poem a title, which may or may not come from the book.

Here is a poem composed entirely from the first two chapters of Book Six.

Something in America

What was it like over there?
 Watching fungus eat up the dead bodies,
 Like hot butter off the griddle:
 Wits half cracked.
 We were not in charge.
 Life roars by you like a flood:
 Astonishment, dumbstruck, calamities, sold into slavery, riots.
 The priests were dismayed—
 Bad dreams, the old blue hopelessness—
 Rattled and shook with fever,
 A thousand years old.
 A war leaves holes.