

TEACHER'S GUIDE TO:

THE SOUTHEAST REVIEW

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND FOLLOW-UP EXERCISES

POETRY

1. KING'S QUEST – B.J. BEST (P 7)

For Discussion:

- *Nostalgia* – How does Best's poem evoke nostalgia in both the author and the reader?
- *Identity* – Is there an identity struggle latent in the speaker of this poem? Why or why not?
- *Imagery* – Explain how the imagery used affects the intensity of the poem.

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Fairytale* – Write a poem with your own interpretation of a fairytale. Be sure to make clear why you took this particular spin on an old classic, as evidenced via your own emotions and voice.

2. THE ODDS – JENNY BROWNE (P 8)

For Discussion:

- *Tone* – What is Browne's tone in this poem? Sarcastic? Wounded? Content? How does the author suggest many different feelings within the reader?
- *Numbers* – How do you feel about the use of numbers and statistics within the poem? Does it demonstrate a certain childlike innocence, or a more mathematical understanding and clarity?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Study Hall* – Think of an academic subject you have studied that you do not think relates to poetry. Now try and turn that seemingly un-poetic subject into verse.

3. his mother has a glass eye – MARCEL GAUTHIER (P 10)

For Discussion:

- *Structure* – Explain how the spacing of this poem assists in its overall meaning.
- *Voice* – Discuss the importance of voice in this piece. How does the speaker aptly convey his feelings of fascination for the woman?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Structure* – Explore the idea of playing with structure. List ways in which it can help or hinder a piece of writing. Think of one example of a poem you would like to write which can incorporate both visual and written structural elements.

4. SECOND-SKIN RHINESTONE-SPANGLED NUDE SOUFFLÉ CHIFFON GOWN – LANDON GODFREY (P 11)

For Discussion:

- *Sexuality* – How does the author characterize sexuality through a seemingly inanimate object?
- *Repetition* – Does the refrain of “tonight” evoke a kind of desperation and intensity within the poem? Why or why not?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Celebrity* – Think of your favorite celebrity. In what ways does that person seem glamorous? Write a poem where you explore the suspected inner-workings of a celebrity’s brain. Is glamour relative? Consider the differences between internal reality and the external package.

5. TEACHER – ELINOR BENEDICT (P 20)

For Discussion:

- *Metaphor* – Name at least three different ways in which the author uses the metaphor of a bird to express different concepts.
- *The Thing with Feathers* – How does the usage of the term “hope” exemplify the extents of the teacher’s ability? How does the author turn this abstract term into a concrete notion through the reference to Emily Dickinson?
- *Finalist* – Why do you believe this poem deserved to be a Finalist in the Poetry Contest?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Quote* – Think of your favorite quote. What emotions does it evoke with each read? Write a poem based on that quote, where an abstract emotion is characterized. Find various ways in which you can create different meanings through one characterization.

6. WHY I DON’T MENTION FLOWERS WHEN CONVERSATIONS WITH MY BROTHER REACH UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCES – NATALIE DIAZ (P 21)

For Discussion:

- *Beauty* – In what way does the author compare beauty to violence in this poem? How does this comparison create a societal commentary?
- *Brother* – How do the actions of speaker’s brother enhance the following story that he tells? Are the brother’s actions therefore justifiable? Why or why not?
- *Symbolism* – How does the author employ symbolism to evoke images of hatred and abuse?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Debate* – Choose a topic of frequent debate in today’s society. Write some lines of verse in which you challenge some aspects of this topic. Make your final line explore the limits of your societal commentary.

7. THE LIFESPAN OF A SPARROW – MICHELE ROZGA (P 26)

For Discussion:

- *The Familiar* – How is the poem a reflection of familiarity? Does the author challenge this by offering a counteracting claim within the text?
- *Theme* – How does the notion of discovery and coming-of-age weave its way throughout this poem?
- *Contest Winner* – Why do you believe this was the winning poem for the poetry division of the contest?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Nostalgia Isn’t What It Used to Be* – Reflect on the concept of nostalgia. Write a poem that includes familiar aspects of your own childhood that every reader can relate to.

FICTION

1. A NATURAL HISTORY – AIMEE BAKER (P 27)

For Discussion:

- *Art and Nature* – How does this work blend natural history and art? To what effect? How does the title of each section reflect this combination?
- *Color* – How does the author use color to convey both health and emotion?
- *Using History* – This story contains a famous, real-life character, John James Audubon. Consider the advantages of writing fiction about a figure who actually existed and who readers will recognize. How much research do you think is necessary?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Blind Yourself with Science* – Reflect on the joining of art and science. Write a story that blends these ideas without falling back on cliché.

2. RIVER RUNNER – JASON BROWN (P 34)

For Discussion:

- *The Baby* – Why do the other men laugh when Harry says, “Wife’s having a baby”? Why does Harry keep remembering his wife being pregnant?
- *Flashbacks* – In what way does the author use flashbacks? How does this influence the narrative?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Time* – Reflect on flashbacks. Write a story in which time is not linear, including flashbacks.

3. PRINCESS OF POULTRY, FRIEND OF THE FOWL – MIKE INGRAM (P 42)

For Discussion:

- *Race* – How does the author use race in this story? To what effect?
- *Originality* – In what way does the author approach the issue of originality? How does this idea mesh into a story about high school teenagers?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Racism* – Write about racism both subtle and pronounced.

4. EVENNESS - MATHEW GOLDBERG (SHORT SHORT FINALIST) (P 60)

For Discussion:

- *Concepts* – In what various ways is the concept of “evenness” explored throughout this short short story?
- *Imagery* – How does the narrator use metaphors and imagery to describe various household chores, and thereby characterize his father?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Chores* – Make a list of a few of your least favorite chores. Create a quick, anecdotal account of how fulfilling this chore exemplifies one specific personality trait.

5. MR. POTATO HEAD REVEALS HIS SECRETS - MAUREEN A. SHERBONDY (SHORT SHORT FINALIST) (P 66)

For Discussion:

- *Nostalgia* – In what ways are childhood nostalgia challenged in this short story?
- *Politics* – How does the author create a political commentary by musing on the creation of a toy? What message do you believe the author is trying to convey through the observation of childlike “innocence”?
- *Contest Finalist* – Why do you believe this short short was chosen as a contest finalist?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Naiveté* – Think of a situation where you, as a child, were blissfully ignorant to the ramifications of a particular societal event. This could be cultural or domestic. Explore the differences between your understanding then and now through adult eyes.

6. THE ELECTRONIC AGE - MARK MCBRIDE (SHORT SHORT CONTEST WINNER) (P 68)

For Discussion:

- *Repression* – How does the author compare an embarrassing incident to repressed physical desires? How does the narrator explore this likeness throughout the short short?
- *Technology* – In what ways is technology characterized within the text? How does it reflect the monotony of everyday life for the narrator?
- *Contest Winner* – Robert Olen Butler, the judge for the Short Short Contest, has a very specific aesthetic when it comes to writing short fiction. Butler insists upon the importance of the presence of yearning, that a character must desire for something rather than merely be presented with a problem. Can you pinpoint the yearning in “The Electronic Age,” and why do you believe Butler chose this story as the winner of the World’s Best Short Short Story Contest?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Electronic Device* – Choose your favorite electronic device. Write a short story where you explore the significance and limitations of your technological choice; make certain your character yearns for something unrelated to the electronic device itself.

NONFICTION

1. THE BEDSIDE TABLE: DOWNTOWN DISTRICT, PLUS THE GREATER METROPOLITAN BEDSIDE AREA AND ENVIRONS – ANDREW HUDGINS (P 70)

For Discussion:

- *Library* – What is the author’s reasoning for having such a significant amount of checked-out library books? Do you think that the author’s logic is valid?
- *Lists* – This essay is written in a list format. Is this effective? How does this impact your experience with the piece?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Experimental Genre* – Write about how you can or cannot relate to the author’s collection of read and unread books. Consider, too, how you developed your own reading style. Are you the type of reader who once beginning a book must finish it as quickly as possible to discover how it ends? Do you read at least one chapter a day, or do you only read when assigned to do so?

2. HOLLIFIELD'S INSOMNIA – MAHLON JOHNSON (P 75)

For Discussion:

- *Quote* – Why do you think the author chose to include a quotation at the beginning of the essay? What is its effectiveness?
- *Terminology* – Consider the author's use of medical terms. Does Johnson's use of such terms serve to validate his experience, or is it at all alienating to a reader in a non-medical field?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Discovery* – Johnson tells us that a popular phrase in the world of medicine is, "Serendipity is the hand maiden of great discoveries." Write to agree or disagree.

3. EXEMPT – C.D. MITCHELL (P 89)

For Discussion:

- *Restraint* – In writing, teen pregnancy is often viewed as a taboo subject because of its tendency toward melodrama. How does Mitchell show emotional restraint and still effectively write about his experience becoming a teen parent?
- *Secrets* – How does the author use secrecy to drive the narrative?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Monologue* – The author ends by saying, "we had a lot to talk about." Consider a time in your life when you may have been faced with a similarly difficult situation; write the ending to your nonfiction piece using mostly dialogue.

4. CUT SCENE – JESSE WATERS (P 105)

For Discussion:

- *Masculinity* – Compare and contrast the two definitions of manhood that the author describes. Discuss how the author emphasizes the fact that cultural beliefs and practices influence these differing definitions.
- *Rite of Passage* – After the ceremony in Kenya, the boys must survive in the wild for a month on their own. During this time, "You hunt together, and fish together, something is different." The author is emphasizing the fact that they are working together by using italics. What is the significance of hunting and fishing together? Does this influence the definition of Kenyan manhood that the author is describing?
- *Pacing/Language* – How does Waters use language to convey the pain a male feels during a ceremony? Does the pace of your reading change? If so, is this effective? Why or why not?
- *Landscape* – Waters describes both the country of Kenya and Stream's bruise as a "sunrise" with "reds and yellows." Is the author comparing the nation to Stream's bruise? If so, why do you think Waters does this?

Follow-Up Exercise:

- *Beliefs* – Think of a certain belief that you have. Research how people in a different part of the country, or even world, think about your same belief. In a short, nonfiction narrative, write about the differences and similarities that you discover.
- *Round Table* – In a group, discuss your experience researching other cultures' beliefs. Do their beliefs surprise you? Does knowing the beliefs and practices of another culture influence how you view the world?
- *Gender* – Consider the Jewish American definition of manhood that the author discusses. Write to agree or disagree with that idea of manhood. Create your own definition for manhood or womanhood and write a short essay about defining gender.