



Fast Animal

By Tim Seibles

A Study Guide

Synopsis

The poems in *Fast Animal* by Tim Seibles explore the contradictions of being a human being. Through work that alternates between reflective, angry, ironic and passionate, Seibles dissects the experience of a maturing consciousness in a world that constantly keeps humans from growing and exploring. His iconoclastic poetry dissects race, religion, government and society in a manner that forces readers to question who they are and where they are headed in the end.

Author Bio

Tim Seibles was born in Philadelphia in 1955. He has received fellowships from both the Provincetown Fine Arts Center and The National Endowment for the Arts. He also won the Open Voice Award from the 63rd Street Y in New York City. Most recently, he spent a semester as Poet in Residence at Bucknell University, a post awarded annually by the Stadler Center for Poetry. His poems have appeared in numerous literary journals including *Indiana Review*, *Black Renaissance Noire*, *Huizache*, *Cortland Review* and *Ploughshares*. His poem, "Allison Wolff," was anthologized in Best American Poetry 2010.

Tim lives in Norfolk, Virginia, where he is a member of the English Department and MFA in writing faculty of Old Dominion University. He is a teaching board member of the Muse Writers Workshop. He also teaches part-time for the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast MFA in Writing Program, a low-residency program which features writers from all over the country.

A highly active ambassador for poetry, he presents his work nationally and internationally at universities, high schools, cultural centers, and literary festivals. He has been a featured author in the Vancouver International Writers Festival in Vancouver, Canada, in the Calabash Festival in Treasure Beach, Jamaica, and in the Poesia en Voz Alto Festival in Mexico City.

Reasons to Include This Book in the Classroom

- Tim Seibles uses beautiful diction and language in his poetry, which can be used as a model for the students' own poetry.
- The poetry in *Fast Animal* encourages students to question the world around them and understand things for themselves. This practice will further develop critical capabilities both in life and in the reading of poetry.
- The poems in *Fast Animal* can be used as a springboard for important social issues such as race, government, economic disparity, etc.
- Tim Seibles employs metaphors and extended metaphors throughout his poetry that force students to draw on previous experiences while reading.
- The students will have the opportunity to read a book length collection of poems by one artist and savor it as a whole, intact piece of literature while also examining closely specific poems, lines, and words.

Study Questions and Writing Prompts

Part 1 (Pages 1 - 24)

1. Compare and contrast the poems "Later" and "Born". What is being said about the progression of consciousness in this sequence of poems? Why did the author sequence them in reverse order?
2. In the poem "Wound" Tim Seibles states, "consciousness turned like a fast animal to the blood on my face." Considering the title of the collection is derived from this line, what does the image say about Seibles's view of consciousness?

Part 1 (Pages 1 - 24) Continued

3. In the poem “Terry Moore” the adult narrator reflects upon his teenage years. Think about the portrayal of adults and teenagers in this poem. What is the author’s intention for the contrast? Discuss whether maturation negates the person one used to be or whether it refines that identity.

4. There is a line in “Vendetta, May 2006” where the narrator ponders, “Maybe this is the moment to abandon metaphor?” What is the function of metaphor in poetry? Does it help to obscure or emphasize a point? When and why should it be used?

5. There is much talk of language in “Ode to This For That”. What is Seibles trying to convey about language; how is it developed and how is it used? What can language encapsulate and where does it fall inadequate? Is language limited in theory or execution?

Writing Prompt: Throughout his poetry, Tim Seibles develops a motif of inevitability. Find examples of the “inevitable” in *Fast Animal* and write a few paragraphs discussing ways to change or alter destiny.

Part 2 (Pages 25 - 46)

1. What are Seibles’s intentions with his recurring conceit of Blade, the half-human/half-vampire? There is a clear question of identity raised in the poems about Blade. Who/what are his perceived enemies? What is he trying to accomplish? Why would the author choose to write a series of poems about a pop culture character? Why choose this particular one?

2. What is the function of the rising sun at the end of “Dawn”? As the narrator’s rumination of death comes to a close, what does he realize? What are the contradictions that arise in his thought pattern?

3. Compare and contrast the poem “Delores Jepps” with “Terry Moore”. Think about the sentiments expressed and what the adult narrator realizes about his teenage years. What limits the narrator of “Delores Jepps” both as an adult and as a teenager? In which period was he better off?

4. Read “The Last Dragon”. Seibles speaks a great deal about “the glow” and “knowing without knowing.” What is the correlation between the two? What does it mean to have this type of unconscious consciousness? How is this different than the other types of consciousness mentioned in Seibles poetry?

Writing Prompt: Distrust plays a large part in the poetry of *Fast Animal*; the narrators seem to be distrustful of many things, particularly in what people are expected and told to believe. Write a few paragraphs tracing the thought patterns of several narrators in the poems. What are they distrustful of?

Part 2 (Pages 25 - 46) Continued

From where is their sense of distrust derived? Is each origin similar or different?

Part 3 (Pages 47 - 62)

1. Read the poem “Allison Wolff”. Do the narrator’s feelings toward the girl change as he gets older? What does the reflection of the girl and their encounters have to say about race relations in general? What is he mourning in the end?

2. What does the narrator mean in the poem “Sorrow” when he says “It’s not the same as sadness, though sorrow has sadness in it—the way lost holds losing”? What is his definition of sorrow in the poem? What makes the narrator feel sorrow? What makes the narrator ultimately sad?

3. In the poem “Edge” Seibles writes, “In a small park daylight pulled its knife.” Why would the author use such violent imagery in conjunction with the day? Think back on moments in the poetry where daylight or the sun is used. What is Seibles saying with this treatment? Is daylight a protagonist or an antagonist in this collection?

Writing Prompt: Time plays a large role in the poetry of Tim Seibles. Pick a few of the poems and analyze the progression of time throughout. What effect does time have on the narrators? How does time impact society? Does time move fast or slow for Seibles? Write a few paragraphs discussing the perceived importance of time in the poems and the speed at which time moves.

Part 4 (Pages 63 - 88)

1. Each section of *Fast Animal* features a different villanelle. Identify the structure of a villanelle and examine the use in each section. Why did the author choose these particular poems for the format? What effect does it have on how the poems are read? Could it have been written in a different way and still accomplish the same thing?

2. Think about the treatment of sexuality in “Donna James”. What power does sex hold for the narrator of the poem? How do the actions of the narrator and Freddy’s sister differ? Sexuality is an omnipresent issue in *Fast Animal*. What is its function, not only in this poem, but throughout the collection? What does sex provide or deprive for the narrators of the poems?

3. “The Last Poem About Race”, along with many poems in this collection, brings up the question of identity. How does the narrator of the poem define himself? Can he do it? In what ways has America’s cultural identity shifted? How has it stayed the same? Has the narrator’s identity changed along with it?

Part 4 (Pages 63 - 88) Continued

4. Think about the poem “A Song”. What effect does the use of language and structure have on this poem? How does the form correlate with the tone/content of the poem? Why does it differ so much from the rest of the collection?

Writing Prompt: *Fast Animal* is broken into four different sections. Why did the author choose to do this? How are the poems in each section related? Think about the order of the sections and the flow of the poems. If you were to reorder these poems, how would you do it? Write a few paragraphs discussing the sequence of the poems and why they were structured this way.

Standards for the English Language

Arts (as compiled by NCTE and IRA)

Standards: Included are reference to educational standards or guidelines, created by various national and educational organizations in the major subjects areas related to the connections presented in the teacher’s guide.

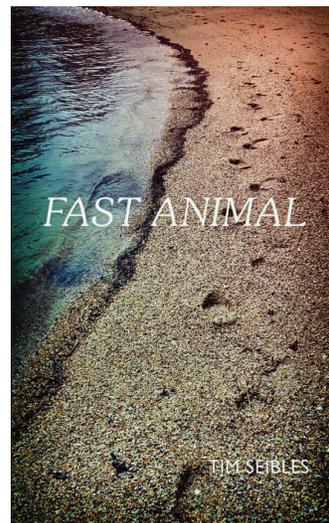
S2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

S3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

S5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

S11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

S12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).



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