



Fast Animal

By Tim Seibles

Reader 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. What is a metaphor? Find examples of metaphor in two different poems in *Fast Animal*. What makes use of metaphors so effective?
2. The poem "Terry Moore" features an adult narrator looking back at his teenage years. Compare and contrast the narrator as an adult and as a teenager. What are the differences and similarities between the teenagers and adults in the poem? Do you agree with this portrait?

Part 1 (Pages 1 - 24) Continued

3. Read the poem “Mad Poets Villanelle”. A Villanelle is a style of poetry where the 1st and 3rd lines of each stanza rhyme and, as the poem progresses, the rhyme in the 3rd line alternates back and forth. What effect does this rhyming structure have on the poem? Why might the author have chosen this style over free-verse or a different rhyme scheme?

Writing Prompt: In the poem “Vendetta, May 2006” the narrator is saddened by the fact that the comfort and happiness of his childhood was replaced by a society/government that he can’t trust. What are the things you like about being a child? What are the things you are afraid of in adulthood? Discuss whether the people in charge of you as a child and the people in charge of you as an adult are any more or less trustworthy than each other? Is there any way to change things or hold on to the comfort of childhood?

Part 2 (Pages 25 - 46)

1. The poem “Delores Jepps” is another poem about an adult narrator looking back on himself as a teenager. This time the teenage boy is oblivious to the social disorder and change happening around him because he is too distracted by a girl and the freedom of being young. Think about some of the major political and social events happening in the world today. How do you relate to the narrator in his time and place (late 60s-early 70s)? Do you feel the same as him? What events in your life and time will you look back on in the future and possibly regret not caring or acting?

2. In “Ode to My Hands” the narrator celebrates and reflects upon the nature and intentions of his hands. In the way he describes them, how do they remind you of human beings in general? How does it relate to the world around us? What are some similarities and differences in the way he portrays the hands and the way people are? Is the difference really that large?

Writing Prompt: The feeling of 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. Think about some of the things that are not to be trusted in the poems. Do you agree with the narrators? Write about a part of society you can’t trust and try to explain what about it is unreliable.

Part 3 (Pages 47 - 62)

1. In the poem “Allison Wolff” the African-American narrator talks about his infatuation with a Jewish girl. What does the narrator’s reflection of the girl and their encounters have to say about race relations in general? What is he mourning in the end? What does he wish could have happened? What does

Part 3 (Pages 47 - 62) Continued

this say about society? Are things the same today as they were then?

2. Think about the treatment of love in “Love Poem”. How does the author feel about love? What emotion do you get from the poem? Does this poem seem different from the others? If so, what sets it apart?

Writing Prompt: Another major theme in *Fast Animal* is the contrast between youth and adulthood. What are some of the similarities and differences the author explores? Weigh the pros and cons of childhood and adult knowledge. Which do you think the author prefers? Which do you think is better? Write a few paragraphs explaining your reactions.

Part 4 (Pages 63 - 88)

1. Many of the poems in this section mention sleep and the night. Why is sleep mentioned so many times? What power does sleep hold over the narrators of these poems? What is sleep used for in these poems? Is this a good or bad thing? Are people more knowledgeable about the world in the daylight or during the nighttime?

2. The poem “Blade, Epiphany” is the conclusion to a series of poems in *Fast Animal* that reference the fictional comic book/movie character “Blade” (the half-human/half-vampire who hunts other vampires). Why does the author bring up this character in his poems? Read the description of the character on page 27. What similarities and differences are there between human beings and the legend of Blade? How does the author identify with Blade? What has Blade realized about himself in “Blade, Epiphany”?

3. “The Last Poem About Race”, along with many poems in this collection, brings up the question of belonging and not belonging to certain groups or society in general. Why does the narrator of this poem not feel like he belongs? Why is he conflicted about this? Do you think the narrator of this poem will ever truly belong? What are things in your life that you struggle with belonging to? Is there anything you can do to change this?

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.

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.

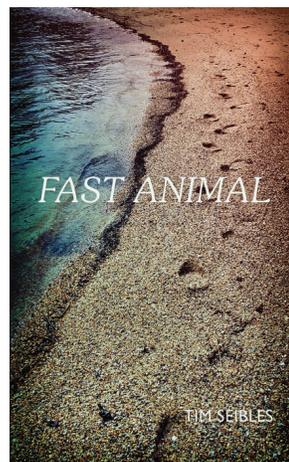
S2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

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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