



etruscan press

Museum of Stones

By Lynn Lurie

A Study Guide for Students

Synopsis

The unnamed narrator in *Museum of Stones* carries the name of every mother who has stared into the face of her newborn with no idea of what is about to unfold. Everything in the narrator's life is refracted against this singular event, often giving way to memories at a dizzying speed. The interconnections of time, place, and emotion flood her thoughts as she moves through her daily routines. All of it relates back to the moment of him. An elegy for a life lived, *Museum of Stones* is also an elegy for the lives she will not live, because, now, after his birth, everything reflects and reverberates against the sound and content of her son's voice. She works, sometimes struggling heroically, to connect the pieces of herself to form a complete whole. And when her collage is done, there is the hope that no fault lines are threatening.

Like a spell cast over mother and son, *Museum of Stones*' terse scenes reveal a possessive/obsessive world of a love that must be released. An exceptional child, the boy collects far too many rocks, invents a garbage recycler that runs amok, and does not "play well." The extended family is cruel and dubious. His mother takes their relationship to painful extremities, threatening her own sanity and health, in a wrenching yet often funny account that culminates in a terrifying trip in a rubber boat fleeing Peruvian revolutionaries.

About the Author

Lynn Lurie is the author of two previous novels, *Corner of the Dead* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), winner of the Juniper Prize for Fiction, and *Quick Kills* (Etruscan Press, 2014), which Brian Evenson described as "filled with quiet menace."

An attorney with an M.A. in international affairs and an M.F.A. in writing, she is a graduate of Barnard College and Columbia University. She served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador and currently teaches creative writing and literature to incarcerated men. She has served as a translator and administrator on medical trips to South America providing surgery free of charge to children, and has mentored at Girls Write Now in New York City.

Study Questions

Knowledge Section

1. Identify Lynn Lurie's writing style in terms of content, voice, and personality.
2. Identify and discuss the overall themes of *Museum of Stones*.
3. Several narrative threads run through *Museum of Stones*. For each narrative thread, write a paragraph that briefly outlines it.
4. Compile a list of the characters. What do you notice?

Comprehension Section

1. Interpret the line, "Stones erode, chip and cleave, yet remain essentially the same" in terms of the book's themes.
2. Compare and contrast the medical resources and outcomes in the United States and South America. Discuss how socio-economic status impacts physical and mental health.
3. Read the first page and the last page. Compare and contrast the imagery. How has the tone changed? Has the narrator changed?

Application Section

1. Discuss the ways the narrator's upbringing influenced the choices she makes.
2. How does Lurie employ color to affect mood and tone?
3. In what ways does the narrator demonstrate the same behaviors as her son displays?

Analysis Section

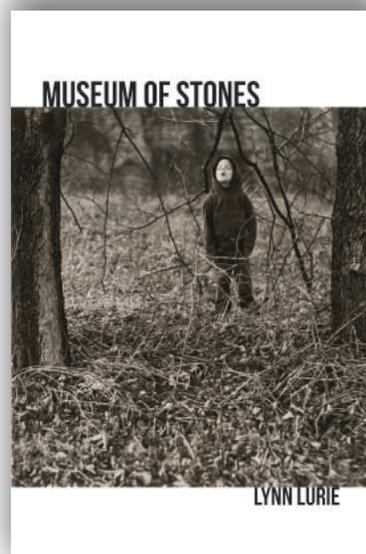
1. Why does the narrator choose not to name the characters?
2. Why do you think the narrator feels compelled to leave her lover, the Blonde?
3. Animals are featured prominently throughout *Museum of Stones*. Choose two animals and discuss their role and symbolism for the characters.

Synthesis Section

1. Hypothesize what life will be like for the narrator beyond the end of the book. What will life be like for her son?
2. Rewrite a scene from the book from the son's point of view.
3. Select a passage that resonates with you. Rewrite the scene in another poetic form.
4. What is your initial reaction to *Museum of Stones*? Do you feel sympathetic to the narrator? Why or why not?

Evaluation Section

1. Critique the narrator's characterization of herself and others.
2. Assess why the narrator felt the need to share this story.
3. How has the narrator's journey impacted you?



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