Voodoo Libretto: New & Selected Poems
By Tim Seibles

A Study Guide

Reasons to include in the Classroom

*Voodoo Libretto*, both subtle and forthright, meticulous and raw, will appeal to the newfound poetry reader and the seasoned poetry critic. By using many different poetic techniques, and experimenting with form, there is much to be gleaned from *Voodoo Libretto* in terms of craft. This collection is a clever but emotionally rich interrogation of life experiences, inviting the reader to see how truth is revealed in even the smallest details of our daily lives.

Author Bio

Tim Seibles earned his B.A. at Southern Methodist University and his M.F.A. from Vermont College of Norwich University. Most recently, he was appointed poet laureate of Virginia in July 2016. He has received fellowships from both the Provincetown Fine Arts Center and The National Endowment for the Arts. His most recent collection of poems, *One Turn Around the Sun* (Etruscan Press, 2017), was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award. His book of poems, *Fast Animal* (Etruscan Press, 2011), was named a National Book Award finalist and received the PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award. Seibles was also awarded the triennial Theodore Roethke Memorial Poetry Prize for *Fast Animal* in 2014. A highly active ambassador for poetry, Seibles presents his work nationally and internationally at universities, high schools, cultural centers, and literary festivals.

Content (cont’d)

4. What do the details in “Double Dutch” tell us about the speaker’s setting?
5. What is the significance of the lemon ice cream?
6. What socioeconomic event is taking place in “The Word” and how does this affect the speaker?
7. What is the rhyme scheme of “Third Wish” and what is this form called?
8. In the poem “The Dragon,” he says, “There is the cracked joy of being mortal and knowing it.” Do you believe this is a true statement? Why?
9. In the poem “Meep,” what is the speaker longing for? What are some examples that detail this longing?
10. How do the poems in the section “from Body Moves” differ in tone to the poems from the section “from Hurdy-Gurdy”?

Prompt: Read the poem “After All” and write a poem detailing a time you felt isolated. Be sure to show the place you were in and use the details of the setting to express this isolation.

11. Read aloud “The Ballad of Sadie LaBabe.” Then research and read the poem “Molly Means” by Margaret Walker. How are they similar?
12. Visit the YouTube video featuring Seibles’ reading of “The Ballad of Sadie LaBabe.”
13. In what ways does the speaker in the poem “Slow Dance” relate to his students?
14. What does the poem “Stories” reveal about the speaker and his outlook on life, how he feels about himself, and where he is going in life?
15. How does the poem “What Bugs Bunny Said to Red Riding Hood” utilize voice and persona?

Prompt: In 500 words describe how using the voice of someone else or a famous character could enhance your writing.

Study Questions

Content

1. Research *Voodoo Libretto*. What is it, and why is it significant?
2. What is the tone of the poem “Big Mouth” and how does it affect the meaning of the poem?
3. What do the caesuras in “Who Knows (a chant)” reveal beyond what the poem is saying?
Content (cont’d)

16. How does the point of view in the poem “Meep” differ from the point of view in “Commercial Break: Roadrunner, Uneasy?”

17. In “What The Wind Says” who is the “You” and what is being kept from them?

18. How do the images of “Pepsi jingle, the newspaper, these insects, this evening, that cigarette” relate to the images presented earlier in the poem “This Is The Reason?”

19. In “Culture” how many times is the Wave mentioned and what is the significance of the repetition of this phrase?

20. Read “Kerosene.” What were the LA Riots, and why were they significant?

21. What is meant by the phrase, “The weather is not so good”?

22. In the poem “Good Hair,” whose words are in the italics?

23. Research each italicized quote, and name which speech they derived from.

24. How does the phrase “Good Hair” correlate with how the speaker feels about himself?

25. How has the speaker’s outlook on the world changed up until this point in the collection?

26. Name some specific examples of the speaker using past experiences to find truth in his present life.

27. In what ways does what the speaker doesn’t know/understand, affect him just as much, if not more than what he does know/understand?

28. Read “The Further Adventures of Tooter Turtle.” How does using pop culture references help this poem more than using a real-life experience?

29. What does the speaker compare his first kiss to in the poem “First Kiss”? List at least 5 specific metaphors or similes used in this poem.

Digging Deeper (cont’d)

Prompt: Look up the form of a villanelle. Review the villanelles in this collection and write your own villanelle.

3. In what way has the poetic form changed or stayed the same throughout this collection? What insight does that give to the narrative arc of the collection?

4. What is the mood of the poem “The Dollars” and what about the poem gives it that mood?

5. In the section “With No Hat,” the poem itself is recognized as the subject of multiple poems. What could the personification of “the poem” mean?

6. What kind of resolution does the speaker come to after the final poem?

Prompt: Write a poem where the subject of the poem is the poem itself. Think about how your poem wants to interact with the world, what it wants to mean, how does that poem reflect or not reflect its writer.

Overall Thoughts

1. In what way does your outlook on racial issues change from adolescence to adulthood?

2. How is Seibles able to weave each section together, even though they were written in different periods of his life?

3. How can poetry be a useful tool of self-discovery?

4. There are many different influences which shape what we believe about the world. What are some of those influences based on the text, and in your personal life? Which of these do you believe is the most important?

5. How do poems that are emotionally complex or controversial deepen a reader’s engagement with life?

Writing Prompt: Write 500 words about something you thought as a kid, which you later found out to be false or only part of the truth. How did that revelation make you feel? Do you feel you would have been better off knowing the whole truth as a child? Are there some things better realized as adults than as children?
Standards for the English Language Arts (compiled by NCTE and IRA) (cont’d)

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. 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.

3. 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).

4. 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.

5. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

6. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

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