

READING COMPANION

Grayling, by Jenifer Browne Lawrence

Sample poem:

Look Out

When a tree falls in the forest,
when the wind blows hard across
the alders, when the wind shakes
a cluster of abandoned eggs
in darkness. When dried grass,
when dandelion floss woven between pulled twigs –
when the wind comes early we lose our footing.

The sway overcomes
the jackstraw slope and the sapling
wedged between mottled trunks
becomes your ladder,
the corrugations of a leaf as the creases
in your father's forehead
where he lies
in fluorescent halls.

When through cracked lips

Is it

as easy as that?

you know he's talking about
how to climb that tree.

Questions to consider:

1. Look up the definition of the collection's title word, "Grayling." Pick two poems that vividly tie into the title, and describe how each fleshes out the meaning of the collection as a whole.
2. Do a close reading of "On the Day of Her Father's Funeral," and then a close reading of "Snow Image." How do these poems' forms contrast? What ties them together? And how does each poem enhance (or inform) the whole collection? (You may also refer to other poems like "Homage to the Hatchery" and "Sirius" to illustrate and expand upon the same point.)
3. How does Jenifer Browne Lawrence use fishing as a recurring symbol? Find at least two example poems to support your ideas.
4. How does Jenifer Browne Lawrence use birth and death as a theme that runs through the book? Look at "The Sister Next to Be Born," "On the Day of Her Father's Funeral, Six Birds On the Line," and "Miscarriage."
5. Reread the last poem of Part 1, "Year of the Dog," and the first poem of Part 2, "The Last Dog That Unburied Herself." Why do you think the author chose those poems in their respective places in the collection? What does the subject symbolize? How do the two poems relate, and how do they differ?
6. How does Jenifer Browne Lawrence address womanhood throughout *Grayling*? Pick three poems that illustrate this to support your ideas.
7. Look through the book for poems that allude to religion, such as "Sacrament" and "Dishes of Salt." Consider how and why the following biblical verse is used in "Dishes of Salt": "Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, 'This is what the LORD says: I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.'" - 2 Kings 2:12.
8. Compare and contrast the poems, "Whose Hair Swings Like a Wind-Coarsened Mane (Prelude)" and "Whose Hair Swings Like a Wind-Coarsened Mane (Reprise)." Consider their positions in the collection, and how the meaning of horses resonates throughout the book.

Writing prompts:

1. Write a prose poem as Jenifer Browne Lawrence does in the poem "Miscarriage," using the first line "A sorry April" as your starting point. Substitute "April" for either a different month, or any category of keeping time (i.e. a specific year or day).
2. Write about an "unwanted childhood memory," as Lawrence references in the poem, "Whose Hair Swings Like a Wind-Coarsened Mane (Reprise)."
3. Using the sea or a body of water as your poem's setting, write a poem using at least two kinds of fish, or other sea beings, as Jenifer Browne Lawrence does in the poem "Sedna at the Juneau Cold Storage Dock." For readers not near or familiar with bodies of water, select an alternative natural setting and use at least two animals or insects in a similar way to the poet in her poem.
4. Write a poem in couplets, using multiple species of animals and plants (dog, bird, fish, moss, dandelions) to illustrate one main theme, as Jenifer Browne Lawrence does in the poem "Stuntwoman."

Other Perugia books that could pair with this collection:

American Sycamore, by Lisbeth White

Each Crumbling House, by Melody S. Gee

Girldom, by Megan Peak

Through a Red Place, by Rebecca Pelky

Areas of study in which to teach this title:

Ethnic & Gender Studies

Women's Studies

American Studies

Creative Writing/Poetry

To order *Grayling*, or any Perugia Press title, you may do so through the bookshop on our website: perugiapress.org. For questions about bulk order discounts, course adoption, desk copies, or Jenifer Browne Lawrence's availability for readings and book talks, contact Editor/Director Rebecca Olander at 413-537-2588 or editor@perugiapress.org.