

READING COMPANION

Starshine Road, by L. I. Henley

Sample poem:

There Is So Much to Say about Lightning

for example

it precedes earthquakes or follows them
by seconds or years

it makes a tiger leave its cage
it is the reason for misplaced keys &
it sounds like salt rubbing against salt
in a glass on the shelf

Because each new strike brings a new truth
we have not slept for years

& still we want to know
where will the next species
look to find us?

Not the ocean not the sky
in those places
there is no sign that we have lived there
only the signs of accident or sloth

Questions to consider:

1. Throughout the collection, Henley makes use of evocative titles (see pp. 2, 8, 39, 41, 57, and 71). Select one of these poems and explore how the title helps to create meaning in the poem. How does the title influence what you understand about the poem?
2. Henley often formats poems in interesting ways, utilizing space, italics, and symbols such as the ampersand and asterisk (see pp. 2, 8, 10, 35, 36, 48 and elsewhere). Select a poem with interesting formatting, and describe how the formatting affects your reading of the poem.
3. Read "Buying Food" (7) and notice the colors used. Consider how they help to develop the poem's imagery. What happens if the colors are removed from the poem?
4. Who is the speaker of "Dog & His Man" (10)? How does the language and syntax of the poem reveal the speaker? What effect does this speaker have on the reader?
5. After reading "Shoe Tree (A Poem in Twelve Parts)" research the shoe tree phenomenon. Why do you think Henley has used this image? Trace the image as it appears in each of the poem's parts. What do you notice?
6. This collection has a strong sense of place. Select three-five poems that are evocative of place and describe how they work together within the whole collection. In what ways does Henley create the sense of place? Why?
7. There are three Junk Pile poems (pp. 8, 41, and 66). Read them and describe their roles in the collection, in relationship to each other, and in relationship to the poems located before and after them.
8. What themes do you notice in *Starshine Road*? Where do you notice them occurring?

Writing prompts:

1. Title a poem "There is so much to say about _____" and imitate Henley's "There Is So Much to Say about Lightning" (50) by beginning with "for example". Consider imitating Henley's line lengths and structure.
2. Write a poem using an unusual speaker--a pet, or an inanimate object, for example (see p. 10).
3. Do you or someone in your family have a junk pile? Write a poem from "inside" the junk pile (see p. 41).
4. Consider places that are important to you. Write a poem using unusual spacing in which you create a strong sense of place. Avoid writing a literal description of the place. Instead, focus on the way the place makes you feel and on surprising imagery.

Other Perugia books that could pair with this collection:

Guide to the Exhibit, Lisa Allen Ortiz

Girldom, Megan Peak

Through a Red Place, Rebecca Pelky

Sweet Husk, Corrie Williamson

Areas of study in which to teach this title:

American Studies

Creative Writing/Poetry

Women's Studies

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