

LESSON FOR ADONIS'S "CELEBRATING CHILDHOOD"

Read "Celebrating Childhood" by Adonis at:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/55321/celebrating-childhood>

Discussion questions for "Celebrating Childhood":

Draw your version of the imagery in the first stanza. How would you describe the feeling of that imagery?

Considering that feeling of the first stanza, does the introduction of "madness" in the second stanza seem surprising? Does this idea connect with any other description later in the poem? Does Adonis present imagery about childhood that might seem conflicting, and why?

Some of Adonis's imagery seems strange to the adult or young adult mind, but the imaginative playfulness that he employs would not be so strange for a child. What are some other examples of playful, imaginative, childlike imagery in the poem?

Why do you think Adonis says his body was "an idea?"

Adonis says, "Love and dreams are two parentheses. / Between them I place my body / and discover the world." How is it possible to discover the world between love and dreams? What exists between love and dreams?

Make a list of all of the images that Adonis uses to describe childhood (note that he doesn't always use the word "childhood" directly; he may simply include an image and expect us to infer its connection to childhood). Looking at the list, describe how Adonis feels about childhood.

Making Connections:

Consider the playful, imaginative, childlike imagery Adonis creates. The associations he makes between images and ideas may seem strange, perhaps random, to the adult or young adult mind. Read this article from the intellectual multimedia platform Big Think and learn more about how children experience and process imagery differently from adults, especially noting "synesthesia" and Pablo Picasso's famous statement, "It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child." Link: <https://bigthink.com/think-tank/see-like-a-child-paint-like-picasso>

Also, considering Picasso's statement on what it takes for adults to rediscover the playful and complex ways that children can synthesize imagery, view and think about some of his art, along with that of Paul Klee and Marc Chagall, noting their childlike elements. Here are some links which include biographical information and examples from their work:

Pablo Picasso: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/pablo-picasso>

Paul Klee: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/paul-klee>

Marc Chagall: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/marc-chagall>

Writing Activities:

A ghazal is a form of poetry, Arabic and Persian in origin (with deep ties to Islam), in which loosely related couplets present philosophical questions, observations on profound truths, and imagery of loss and love (both earthly and divine). These loose associations and the mixture of abstract, specific, and personal imagery often produce an other-worldly effect in a ghazal. In Arabic or Persian, there are also specific technical requirements, but contemporary ghazals and translations tend to focus on the expected content more than the techniques.

Find examples of contemporary and classic ghazals here:

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/browse#page=1&sort_by=recently_added&forms=290

Adonis's poem, though not specifically a ghazal, likely draws upon common features of the ghazal in the way that some of the stanzas loosely relate to each other and echo philosophical sentiments found in the imagery. One such example is the couplet "If the moon were a house, / my feet would refuse to touch its doorstep." Write a ghazal, specifically using this couplet as inspiration.

Example:

If at My End, I Will Begin

after Adonis

If the apple was a star, my eyes would refuse its shifting light.

If the night sky was a fort, I would lock myself in with a book.

And what if the last page refused to say which way the heroine went?

Then I would read from right to left to return her to the start.

If at my end I am afraid, I will color a picture.

If then, I will begin.

—Kyle Vaughn