

Worksheet 5. Hopi Poetry Analysis (teacher version)

Hopi culture and its people are deeply connected to the environment of the dry mesas in Northern Arizona. Corn farming is an important part of this connection because in order to grow corn in a dry environment with a short growing season farmers have to have a full knowledge of their crops, fields, and the weather.

Hopi people grow six types of corn, which have different purposes: white, blue, yellow, red, purple, and sweet corn. Hopi people sometimes use the figurative language to describe the importance of corn in their culture (i.e., “corn is life” and “corn are our children.”)

As you read and analyze your assigned poem by Hopi poet and artist Ramson Lomatewama, notice the ways Lomatewama’s language describes individual places as well as his larger environment. In addition, notice how he also describes his close relationship to corn.

Directions:

Step 1. Read your poem aloud.

Step 2. Read it again to yourself. **Circle** important words or characters that explain what is happening.

Step 3. Underline examples of figurative language.

Step 4. Answer the following questions.

Poem title _____

The following examples relate to three poems:

“**Birth**”; “**Birth of a Song**”; “**After the Rains**”

1. What is happening in your poem?

“**Birth**”

Corn is sprouting, growing with long tassels. The solstice is coming (the longest day of the year) and the author is waiting for rain, which he believes his elders will bring.

“**Birth of a Song**”

The author is telling the listener to go into the cornfields and sing happy songs so the rain will come. If they do this, he is telling them that the rain will fall on the corn, nourish it, and the corn will be happy and grow.

“**After the Rains**”

Language of Place: Hopi Place Names, Poetry, Traditional Dance and Song

The author has been working hard in the fields (“my hoe is caked”) and it is the end of the day (“reflect the red of the setting sun”). Rain has fallen and clouds are moving away to the east. As the author walks away on the road, he sees a rainbow that seems to follow him home. He notices its beauty and speaks to the rainbow with silence.

2. List examples of figurative language from your text and explain their meanings.

“Birth”

“Young corn...showered by rays”
Lots of sun is shining on the corn.

“They grow in happiness”
The corn is healthy and the author thinks it must be happy.

“Silky tassels grow long, like my hair, in search of new beginnings.”
The corn silk is growing, making new life.

“Tomorrow, itaha taawa travels the longest day.”
Tomorrow the sun stays in the sky for a long time; it is the solstice.

“Birth of a Song”

“dawn has ascended”
Morning has come; it is light outside

“with happy hearts you will sing”
Lomatewama is telling the listener that they should sing with positive energy and spirit, with a happy outlook.

“the young corn with happy hearts”
Lomatewama is telling the listener that as they sing to bring the rain, the corn will be nourished and also grow with positive energy, healthy and happy.

“After the Rains”

“the rainbow dressed in beauty walks with me”
The rainbow is beautiful and seems to move with the author, accompanying him as he walks on the road.

“silence will speak for us”
The author notices the company of the rainbow that seems to be walking with him and believes that the silence between the author and the rainbow is a kind of conversation.

3. How does this poem describe the place Lomatewama lives in?

“Birth”

It is sunny there in the cornfield. It is warm, the corn is happy. It is dry; the people pray for and wait for rain. Lomatewama feels connected to the land and sky because he calls the sun “his uncle,” demonstrating intimacy and familiarity.

“Birth of a Song”

It is beautiful there, especially in the morning. The corn is in rows and clouds will come from all directions and rain on the cornfields. People sing to their corn and sing to their rain out in the fields.

“After the Rains”

There are red sandstone cliffs that seem to glow when the sun sets. The mud in the fields must be sort of clay like because it cakes on the author’s hoe. There are dark clouds moving across the sky, which also has a beautiful rainbow. The roads are dusty and not paved. It is beautiful.

4. How does this poem describe corn or Lomatewama’s relationship to corn?

“Birth”

Lomatewama is paying careful attention to how the corn is growing, changing, and coming out of the ground. Lomatewama is also paying close attention to the weather; he is waiting for the solstice and praying for rain to come to his corn.

“Birth of a Song”

Lomatewama believes that the listener should go into the fields happy and positive and sing happy songs to the corn and to the clouds. Lomatewama believes that the songs will bring the rain, which will bring happiness to the corn. He believes that the people share their happiness with the clouds and the corn. Corn farming in other cultures might not include walking among the cornfields, singing with happiness to the sky and corn, but in Lomatewama’s Hopi culture it does. This shows a more intimate connection with the sky and corn, where one’s spirit and happiness can be transmitted through song to the plants.

“After the Rains”

Corn is not mentioned explicitly in this poem, but Lomatewama mentions he is somewhere working with a hoe, most likely a field. Because the hoe is caked, he must have been working hard and long in the field. A hoe would also be used to either prep fields for planting or to weed, so whatever plant—maybe corn—he is caring for, he is working hard to make sure it grows well. If it is a corn field, or any sort of growing field, it is beautiful, quiet, and a place that Lomatewama spends time working in and caring for.

5. Make a sketch that depicts the details present in the poem.

Sketches will vary.

“Birth” It will likely include images of corn growing, corn with tassels, the sun shining down, people praying for rain with pipes in their hands.

“Birth of a Song” It will likely include images of corn growing well and strong, corn growing in rows, people walking among the rows, clouds gathering in the sky, rain falling on cornfields.

“After the Rains” It will likely include images of red sandstone cliffs; a sunset; dark clouds moving across the sky; the author with a hoe in his hand; a dusty road; and a beautiful rainbow seeming to “walk with” the author.