



GIRL WORK by Zefyr Lisowski Teaching Guide

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Book Description

In *GIRL WORK*, Lisowski delves into the darkest aspects of identity, sexual trauma, and grief by innovating how poetry plays across a page. Unique typography and an exploration of how culture fades into personal experience make this a one-of-a-kind read for anyone eager to contend with the harrowing underbelly of girlhood.

Discussion Questions

1. Identify the central themes and recurring motifs or symbols that appear throughout the manuscript.
2. What specific themes, subjects, formats, etc. link the poems with shared titles (*Girl Work*, *To Be a Girl Is Always to Be a Dead Girl*, *Poem Only About Beauty*)?
3. Discuss the role of beauty in the book. What are its different meanings throughout? How is beauty portrayed as both something to seek and something to reject?
4. While girlhood is the dawn of a person's life, Lisowski uses metaphors surrounding death to describe it. Do the poems paint girlhood in a positive or negative connotation overall? How does this challenge society's definition of girlhood?
5. What is the significance of the well? What does it represent? How does it relate to death?
6. Identify the ways in which *GIRL WORK* portrays the dissociation from one's body. Are they effective and why?
7. The author repeatedly asks: "Do you know what you did?" in several poems. Who do you think they are addressing and what is significant about the placement of the question throughout the book?

8. “Poem Only About Beauty” plays with word formatting and layers stanzas over one another. What feeling did it evoke in you and how would the meaning of the poem change if the formatting was altered?
9. “Remembering Is A Kind of Work Too” uses em dashes throughout it. Discuss how punctuation can be used as a poetic device in general and what it signifies in this specific poem.
10. Lisowski uses the word “girl” instead of “woman” throughout the text. What implications does this syntax have and how does it change the meaning of each poem?
11. Being transgender often comes with a dichotomy of having an unwanted spotlight vs. being ignored/shunned. How does Lisowski illustrate this idea?

Writing Exercises

1. Write about what beauty means to you. Pay attention to the language you use. Does it have a positive or negative connotation? Write about yourself being beautiful and then someone else’s beauty. How do you describe them differently?
2. Write a few short poems all with the same title, but make them all vastly different from one another. How can you play with a single title to give it multiple meanings? Do the poems build off of one another or are they separate entities?
3. Lisowski uses details of sensory experiences (E.g., soft hands to the touch, tastes of peppermint and lavender, the smell of cedar wood) instead of chronological actions when recounting significant experiences. Utilize this technique and others employed by Lisowski to create a poem about a major event in your life.
4. What picture does the book paint of fatherhood? Consolidate the essence of a father expressed in “Girl Work” in a thesis statement like you would for a persuasive paper.
5. The poem “Charybdis” invokes a figure from Greek mythology. Write a poem of your own that incorporates a creature from a myth of your choice.
6. The color pink is used frequently as a symbol in the book. Write a poem that turns the symbolic expectation of a specific color on its head.