

AMERICAN WOMEN: IDENTITY, CULTURE, COMMUNITY

Coordinator: Arlyne LeSchack

In this study group we focus deeply on five themes: Identity, Family, Relationships, Work and Politics. We read poems, essays and short stories by American women authors. Examples are "What do Women Want?" By Kim Addonizio on Identity, "Freedom Fighter" by Perri Klass on Family, "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere" by ZZ Packer on Relationships, "Baby Gotta Eat" by Kima Jones on Work, and "Recitatif" by Toni Morrison on Politics.

Reading is less than 25 pages per week allowing us to use the Great Books Foundation "Shared Inquiry" approach to text; each week's selection is followed by a series of questions including factual, interpretative and evaluative questions; these allow us to consider recent changes in thought and policy. This creates a text centered discussion with full participation by all members of the study group. (This a repeat of a study group offered 5 years ago.)

After 25 years as an Educator with the NYC DOE, **Arlyne LeSchack** joined the IRP in 2010. Arlyne has coordinated many study groups in literature and current events.

Readings:

Her Own Accord: American Women on Identity, Culture and Community (published by The Great Books Foundation, 2016, ISBN 978-1-939014-38-2. Also available as an ebook on Amazon.)

******* SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS *******

WEEK 1

Topic: Identity

Readings:

"What do Women Want" by Kim Addonizio;

"At Odds" by Julia Serrano;

"Rowing" by Anne Sexton.

Questions such as:

Why does the speaker say she wants a red dress that is flimsy and cheap? Why does Serrano believe she must choose between a female identity and her sexual attraction to girls?

WEEK 2

Topic: Identity, cont'd

Readings:

"Ending Poems" by A.L. Morales & R. Morales;

"Even the Queen" by Connie Willis

Questions such as:

Why is "Ending Poem" written in alternating lines of roman and italicized type? Is this story saying that liberation freed women or oppressed them?

WEEK 3

Topic: Family

Readings:

"I Go Back to 1937" by Sharon Olds;

"Freedom Fighter" by Perri Klass;

"Stories Don't Have Endings" by Janice Gould.

Questions such as:

Why does the speaker at first want to tell her parents, "Stop, / don't do it?" Why does she then change her mind? Why does Jan think of herself as a rebel, an iconoclast, a strange and estranged and angry freedom fighter?

WEEK 4

Topic: Family, cont'd

Readings:

"My Father's Chinese Wives" by S. T. Loh;

"The Box House and the Snow" by C. Henriquez.

WEEK 5

Topic: Relationships

Readings:

"A Boy My Sister Dated in High School" by Emily Mitchell;
"Apple Picking" by Laura Negrete;
"The Burning Heart" by Louise Gluck;
"Re-forming the Crystal" by Adrienne Rich.

WEEK 6

Topic: Relationships, cont'd.

Readings:

"Drinking Coffee Elsewhere" by ZZ Packer.

WEEK 7

Topic: Work

Readings:

"Mind-Body Story" by Nina Barrett;
"One Out of Twelve: Writers Who Are Women in Our Century" by
Tillie Olsen.

WEEK 8

Topic: Work, cont'd.

Readings:

"Baby Gotta Eat, Parts I-V" by Kima Jones;
"Lowering Your Standards for Food Stamps" by Sheryl Luna;
"Color Blind or Color Brave" by Melody Hobson.

WEEK 9

Topic: Work, cont'd.

Readings:

"Reeling for the Empire" by Karen Russell.

WEEK 10

Topic: Politics

Readings:

"Recitatif" by Toni Morrison.

WEEK 11

Topic: Politics, cont'd.

Readings:

"When the World as We Knew it Ended" by Joy Harjo;

"Bad Feminist: Take One" by Roxane Gay;

"Woodchucks" by Maxine Kumin.

WEEK 12

Topic: Politics, cont'd.

Readings:

"Reading Lessons" by Edwidge Danticat;

"Ways of Conquest" by Denise Levertov.