

Sinister Wisdom

A Multicultural Lesbian Literary & Art Journal

Sinister Wisdom 47 Teaching Guide

Sinister Wisdom Teaching Guides ***Sinister Wisdom 47: Tellin' It Like It Tis'***

Summary: *Sinister Wisdom 47: Tellin' It Like It Tis'* (Summer/Fall 1992) compiles creative work entirely by lesbians of color. The writing in this issue reflects the relationships lesbians of color have with each other, reclaims culturally-specific herstories, and creates a space for lesbians of color to express themselves. The essays, stories, art, and poetry explore the intersection between lesbian identity and race, ethnicity, and nationality.

Themes:

Themes and correlated writing in *Sinister Wisdom 47: Tellin' It Like It Tis'*:

- Lesbian Love
 - “The Swimmers” by Toni P. Brown p. 7 and “Island Dream” by Ana Bantigue Fajardo p. 41-42 are poems celebrating multicultural lesbian love.
 - “Black Orchid (Barrio Stories),” by Edna Escamill, p. 78-82 tells a story about lesbian love.
- Immigration
 - “Finding Out the Secrets: An Interview with Eva Ayala – Mexican Lesbians in the U.S.A.” p. 11-18 by Terri de la Peña reflects on differences between lesbian dynamics in Mexico versus the United States.
 - “Freedom to Travel” p. 124-127 by Irene D R documents racist policies and procedures directed toward lesbians of color.
 - “Journey in Progress” p. 61-68 by V.K. Aruna contains journal entries of a South Asian woman who comes to the United States.
 - “Not Just Another One of Those Identity Poems” p. 118-120 by Mi Ok Bruining is about an adopted Korean child growing up in the United States.
- AIDS
 - “Learning to Live with AIDS” p. 25-27 by Margarita Benitez narrates the lack of resources for women with AIDS in the 1980s and early 1990s and the difficulty of having lovers after being diagnosed with AIDS.
 - “cuentos invertidos” p. 122-123 by Mara Gálvez-Bretón is a story about a Latina whose cousin hid his AIDS from the majority of the family.
- Multi-Racial Identities
 - An untitled poem by Dajenya p. 56 conveys what it is like to have both black and white parents.
 - “Mestiza” p. 71 by Josefa Molina is a poem from the perspective of the multi-racial child of a white father.
- Lesbian Issues
 - “The Enemy” p. 57-58 by Dawn Rudd conveys a mother’s preparation before marching in a 1969 Civil Rights march.

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- “Just Give it to Me Baby... I Love You” p. 72-75 by Akiba Tiamaya talks about the need to discuss, teach, and practice safe sex and brings up issues of sexual abuse.
- “Workers are Falling Through the Gap – The Free Trade Agreement” p. 43 by Maya C. Valverde discusses the potential detrimental effects of the Free Trade Act between Mexico and the United States that the Bush Administration promoted.
- “Why I’m Leaving the New College: A Women of Color Confronts Feminist Psychology on its Racism” p. 93-99 by Jamie Lee Evans testifies against the racism found in graduate school programs.
- “poem for jennifer, marla, tawana, and me” p. 100-105 by Sapphire documents violent crimes against women and the unjust verdicts that often result from such crimes.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the cultures, races, ethnicities, and nationalities found in this issue? What visions of being a lesbian of color are offered in this collection?
2. What issues surrounding lesbians of color are raised in this collection? Are these issues only specific to lesbians of color? Are these issues that lesbians of color still face today?
3. How do writers convey the intersectionality of their identities in this issue? How are the interplays of multiple identities portrayed? What challenges are present in writing intersectionally?
4. What history does this issue of lesbians of color document? Does the history offered in this issue still resonate today?
5. What pieces sparked your interest? Did any of the pieces reflect aspects of your own identity?
6. Why would a journal publish an issue specific to lesbians of color? What does an issue specific to work by lesbians of color offer to other communities? Why is an issue on lesbians of color important?

Unit Teaching Activity Ideas:

1. Research a Contributor: Choose one of the contributors to research. Find and read work by the contributor and then reflect, write, or present about who the writer is, what sort of things they wrote, and why their writing is important and relevant today.
2. Building Self-Reflexivity About Personal Identities: Reflect about your own identities. Then, write about how the different aspects of your identity have shaped who you are.
3. Contemporary Issues of Race: Analyze how race is portrayed in this journal. Next, research contemporary issues of race. Finally, draw comparisons between new and old portrayals of race.

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History of Sinister Wisdom: *Sinister Wisdom* is a multicultural lesbian literary and art journal founded by Catherine Nicholson and Harriett Desmoines in 1976. Since then, *Sinister Wisdom* publishes three to four times a year and documents lesbian experience through poems, prose, politics, theory, and art.

About a Contributor: Sapphire

Sapphire, aka Ramona Lofton, is a bisexual, African-American novelist and poet from California. She is best known for her debut novel, *Push*, which was published in 1996 and made into an Academy Award winning film, *Precious*, in 2009. Her other novel, *The Kid*, was published in 2011, and is the sequel to *Push*. She has also written three books of poetry.

Sapphire was born in Fort Ord, California in 1950 to a military family. Her mother was a soldier in the Women's Army Corps, and her father was an army sergeant. She grew up in a household impacted by incest and alcoholism. In order to escape, she dropped out of high school and moved away. She immersed herself in the Slam Poetry movement in New York City and became a member of the United Lesbians of Color for Change, Inc. Sapphire has a bachelor's degree in modern dance from the City College of New York and a master's degree in fine arts from Brooklyn College. She currently lives in New York City.

Before Sapphire became a best-selling author with *Push*, Sapphire's poems and stories were first published in journals such as *Sinister Wisdom*. In *Sinister Wisdom 47*, *Sinister Wisdom* published Sapphire's poem, "poem for jennifer, marla, tawana, and me," which chronicles violent crimes that have happened to women and the lack of justice that came from those crimes.

Bio adapted from:

http://www.glbtcarchive.com/literature/sapphire_L.pdf

https://aalbc.com/authors/author.php?author_name=Sapphire

<http://www.blackpast.org/aah/lofton-ramona-sapphire-1950>

Bibliography:

Meditations on the Rainbow: Poetry. Crystal Bananas Press, 1987.

American Dreams. High Risk Books/Serpent's Tail, 1994.

Push. Alfred A. Knopf, 1996

Black Wings & Blind Angels: Poems. Knopf, 1999.

The Kid. Penguin Press, 2011.

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About a Contributor: Terri de la Peña

Terri de la Peña is a Chicana lesbian feminist fiction writer. Her novels explore the lives and struggles of Chicanas, specifically Chicana lesbians. She published her first novel, *Margins*, at the age of forty-five. Since then, she has published two more novels and has co-written a book, *A is for the Americas*, with Cynthia Chin-Lee and Enrique O. Sanchez.

Terri de la Peña was born on February 20, 1947 in Santa Monica, California. She is the daughter of a Mexican immigrant mother and a fourth-generation Californian father. Her mother owned a beauty shop, and her father was a tire repair foreman. Terri de la Peña received her education from the Santa Monica parochial schools and at Santa Monica Community College.

Terri de la Peña starting publishing stories in literary journals in her early forties. In *Sinister Wisdom 47: Tellin' It Like It Tis'*, Terri de la Peña interviews Eva Ayala in "Finding Out the Secrets: An Interview with Eva Ayala – Mexicana Lesbians in the U.S.A."

Bio adapted from:

http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8sx6f0m/entire_text/

http://queerbio.com/wiki/index.php?title=Terri_de_la_Pena

http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/460152.Terri_de_la_Pe_a

Bibliography:

Margins. Seal Press, 1992.

Latin Satins. Seal Press, 1994.

Faults. Alyson Books, 1999.

A is for the Americas (co-written with Cynthia Chin-Lee and Enrique O. Sanchez). Orchard Books, 1999.

Sinister Wisdom is happy to provide, free of charge, classroom sets and reading group sets of journal issues. For people who are able to make a contribution to cover the cost of postage, we will provide an invoice; postage reimbursement is voluntary though greatly appreciated.

Sinister Wisdom 47 Teaching Guide Created by Zane DeZeeuw July 2017
and Edited by LB Johnston July 2017