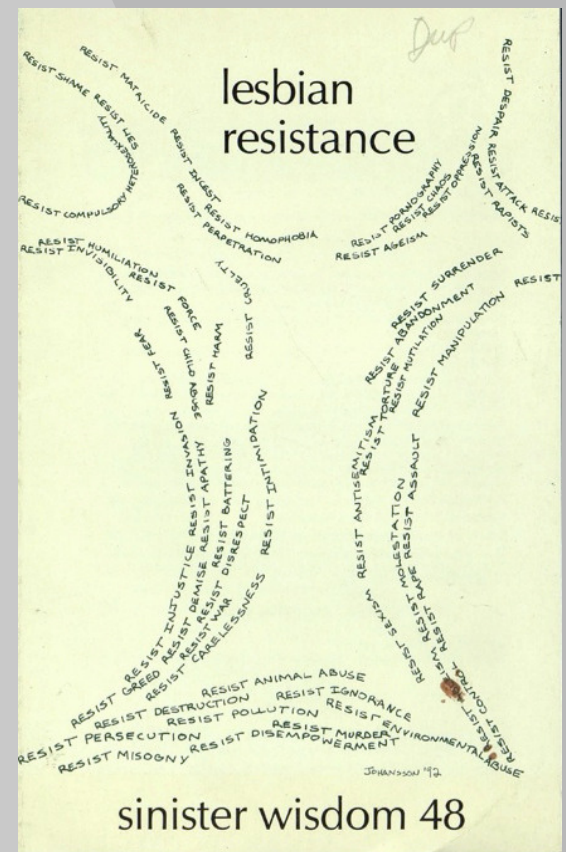


# SINISTER WISDOM TEACHING GUIDE:

## *Sinister Wisdom 48: Lesbian Resistance*

### SUMMARY

The lesbians in *Sinister Wisdom 48: Lesbian Resistance* (Winter 1992/93) imagine ways for lesbians to reclaim power. Modes of lesbian resistance include: armed struggle, challenging the system from within, speaking for coalition politics, separatism, and more. One of the most potent forms of resistance emphasized is lesbian visibility and writing. The stories, essays, and poems included in this issue all document lesbian resistance. In her “Notes for a Magazine,” Elana Dykewomon sums up this issue perfectly: “Resisting is a life-long series of examinations of power and privilege” (p. 4).



### HISTORY OF *Sinister Wisdom*

*Sinister Wisdom* is a multicultural lesbian literary and art journal that began in 1976 and publishes three to four issues per year. The journal started in Charlotte, North Carolina with Harriett Desmoines (Ellenberger) and Catherine Nicholson as its editors. *Sinister Wisdom* is still published today, and its contents have evolved alongside lesbian identities, politics, theory, and aesthetics. Some issues, such as *Sinister Wisdom 48: Lesbian Resistance*, are organized by a theme, while others are open issues that feature writing and art across themes.

## THEMES AND CORRESPONDING READINGS

### Definitions of Resistance

- “How We Decide” p. 6-12 by Terri Fredlund seeks to understand the concept of resistance and what it means to resist.
- “And Everything We Do?” p. 107-110 by Denise Nico Leto defines resistance and explores different forms of lesbian resistance.

### Lesbians in Prisons

- “Links” p. 13-15 by Susan Rosenberg is a personal account of imprisonment.
- “Redefining Moment” p. 57-59 by Susan Rosenberg is an account of being arrested for revolutionary acts.
- Two poems by Laura Whitehorn, p. 60, discuss imprisonment.
- “A Society of Captive Women” by JoAnn Starr p. 61-62 documents the two-thousand female prisoners that live at the Federal Medical Facility in Lexington, KY.

### Organizing Resistance

- “Speech on Hate Crimes” by Janice Gutman p. 31-35 is a speech from the 1990 Center for Democratic Renewal that discusses the organizations that lesbians have formed to stop hate.
- “Lesbian Politics and the National Lesbian Conference” by Amber L. Katherine p. 37-43 discusses the pros and cons associated with the National Lesbian Conference while also documenting the history of a few small groups.

### Discrimination Against Lesbians

- “If Only Resistance Counted on Forbearance on Student Loans” by L.A. Dyer p. 74-78 analyzes how to unravel the prejudicial, damaging systems against women in the field of psychology.
- “A Question of ‘Civil Rights’” by Toni L Cassista p. 97-101 discusses fatphobia and documents an account where Cassista was not hired due to her weight.

### Parables of Compassionate Resistance

- “On Killing Insects” by Lenore Baeli Wang p. 79-80 is a poem about removing bugs rather than killing them.
- “The Politics of Snails: A Parable” by Irena Klepfisz p. 92-94 tells a story about removing snails rather than killing them.

### Speaking Out

- “Some Notes on Resistance” by L.M. Kenney p. 52-56 argues that writing is an important form of resistance.
- “Speak” by Tracy Becker p.111 is a poem about the importance of lesbian visibility.
- “Sonnets for God” by Kelly Jean Cogswell p.119-122 is a series of poems about reclaiming one’s voice and speaking out.



Resisting Patriarchy

- "For Thelma and Louise" by Kathleen O'Donnell p. 29-30 demonstrates women's desire to stand up against men while being unsure how to do so.
- "Lesbians Who Have Never Voluntarily Had Sex With Men" by Monifa Ajanaku p. 112-116 surveys women and finds out how many lesbians have never slept with men.
- "Rape and Empowerment: Three Pictures" by Janet/Giovanna Capone p. 117-118 is a poem that reflects the fear that men can cause in women.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

What forms of resistance do the writers in this issue document? What are the lesbians in this issue resisting? How is resistance constructed in this issue? What does lesbian resistance mean today?

2

There are two parables in this issue. How would you define the term *parable*? What do the parables in this issue mean? How effective are parables in portraying a social issue? Are parables as effective as documented narratives and essays to advocate for resistance?

3

Some of the pieces in this issue argue that writing is a form of resistance. Is that true? Is *Sinister Wisdom 48* a form of resistance? Do other issues of *Sinister Wisdom* offer forms of resistance?

4

Do the forms of resistance in this issue reflect contemporary forms of lesbian resistance? What examples of lesbian resistance have been in the news lately? What are contemporary lesbians resisting? Why does it matter?

5

What pieces speak to you the most? What forms of resistance speak to you the most, whether in this issue or in contemporary life? Why?

## TEACHING ACTIVITIES

### ORGANIZATION RESEARCH

Read the pieces by Amber L. Katherine p. 37 and Janice Gutman p. 31. Then, research and present on the history of one of the organizations mentioned in the piece or another organization that pertains to lesbians and social change.

### CONTEMPORARY RESISTANCE

Research contemporary instances of resistance in the news. Compare contemporary resistance to the forms of resistance documented in *Sinister Wisdom 48: Lesbian Resistance*.

### ENGAGE RESISTANCE

Think about school or community issues that present a problem. Select an issue that you feel strongly about. Think of different ways you can combat the issue or how you can confront the school board or city council about the issue. Write a proposal about what change you would like and why.

### RESISTANCE ANTHOLOGY

Write poems and/or stories about how the issue affects you personally. Compile your work with others who have completed this activity into a resistance anthology.



## ABOUT A CONTRIBUTOR:

Irena Klepfisz



<http://awiderbridge.org/hidden-gems-of-queer-lit-irena-klepfisz-dreams-of-an-insomniac/>

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

*Periods of Stress: Poems.* Out & Out Books, 1977.

*Keeper of Accounts.* Persephone Press, 1982.

*Different Enclosures.* Onlywomen Press, 1985.

*A Few Words in the Mother Tongue: Poems Selected and New (1971-1990).* Eighth Mountain Press, 1990.

*Dreams of an Insomniac: Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches, and Diatribes.* Eighth Mountain Press, 1990.

Irena Klepfisz is a Jewish, lesbian poet, Yiddish translator, and a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts grant in poetry. She teaches English literature, Yiddish language, Yiddish literature, and Women's Studies at Barnard College.

Klepfisz is best known for her poetry, published in *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue: Poems Selected and New (1971-1990)*, as well as in various journals. She has also published an essay collection called *Dreams of an Insomniac: Jewish Feminist Essays*. Klepfisz is also the co-editor of *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology* and *Jewish Women's Call for Peace: A Handbook for Jewish Women on the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict*, which was first published as *Sinister Wisdom 29/30*.

Klepfisz was born in 1941 in the Warsaw ghetto in Poland during the midst of World War II. Her father and other family members died during the war, but she and her mother survived by passing as Christian Poles. They immigrated to Sweden and then to the United States.

Bio adapted from: <http://www.iijs.columbia.edu/irena-klepfisz/>, <https://www.solidarity-us.org/node/527>, and <https://jwa.org/blog/adding-irena-klepfisz-to-the-canon>



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about *Sinister Wisdom*, go to: [sinisterwisdom.org](http://sinisterwisdom.org)

To see other *Sinister Wisdom* Teaching Guides, go to: [sinisterwisdom.org/teachingguides](http://sinisterwisdom.org/teachingguides)

To request a free classroom set of *Sinister Wisdom* 48, email Julie at [sinisterwisdom@gmail.com](mailto:sinisterwisdom@gmail.com) with the class title, number of students, and mailing address.



*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 48 Teaching Guide created by Zane DeZeeuw, July 2017 and edited by LB Johnston, July 2017**

