

Sinister Wisdom

A Multicultural Lesbian Literary & Art Journal

Sinister Wisdom 58 Teaching Guide

Sinister Wisdom Teaching Guides ***Sinister Wisdom 58: Open Issue***

Summary: *Sinister Wisdom 58: Open Issue* features diverse works of narrative, poetry, and visual art concerning a wide range of lesbian themes. *Sinister Wisdom 58* is a transition collection between its departing editor, Akiba Onáda-Sikwoia, and its new editor, Margo Mercedes Rivera. Beginning with notes of goodbyes and introductions, this issue features prose, poetry, and art that both reflect on lesbian pasts and also help construct and imagine lesbian futures. Poetry editor Ekua Omosupe states that “Daily we sound the war cries against misogyny, genocide, poisoned water and food, racism, sexism, homophobia, AIDS, hunger, homelessness, and more, without enough relief in our suffering, yet we survive against the odds” (8). Facing financial hardship between the magazine’s moves across the United States and transitioning editors, this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* covers an array of these topics and through art and writing continues to “survive against the odds” by cultivating a space of lesbian expression and identity within its pages.

Themes:

- In Praise of Lesbians:
 - Barbara Lynne Brush “The Sky-Writers” p. 36.
 - M.C. Ball “Garden Britomart” p. 49.
 - anda d elle “ode to a woman wearing cleats” p. 80.
 - Raye Lynn “For the Strong Woman, Nien Cheng” p. 89-90.
- Activism and Criticism:
 - Elizabeth Clare “Bedrock” p. 19-22.
 - Elizabeth Ribet “grrl-story” p. 45-47.
 - Margo Mercedes Rivera “Four Directions” p. 83.
 - Maria Cecília Santos “Academic Convers(at)ion” p. 84-85.
 - Elizabeth Clare “The Terrorist God” p. 109.
- Illness and Death:
 - Ekua Omosupe “Audre Lorde” p. 64-65.
 - Patricia Fontaine “Entering My Days” p. 67.
 - Marcia Rose “From Rachel’s Mother” p. 94-95 & “Vigil” p. 96-97.
 - tova “lost and found” p. 98-99.
 - Raye Lynn “Shadowing” p. 100.
- Multicultural Lesbianism:
 - Odilia Galván Rodríguez “Tezcatlipoca” p. 10.
 - PHKimura “after a storm” p. 11-13.
 - Juanita Chavez “La Evil Woman” p. 37-44.
 - ananda esteva “this is what i’d tell her if we were friends not just lovers” p. 69-70.
 - Jacqueline Miranda “A Desperate Act” p. 82.
 - Margo Mercedes Rivera “Four Directions” p. 83.

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- Maria Cecília Santos “Academic Convers(at)ion” p. 84-85.
- Rodrigues “Ponies” p. 101-102.
- Disability:
 - Margaret Robison “One Small Step” p. 55.
 - Cathy Cade “Beijing Images” p. 57-63.
- Coming of Age and Coming Out:
 - Juanita Chavez “La Evil Woman” p. 37-44.
 - Margo Mercedes Rivera “Marlene” p. 42-43.
 - Liz Morrison “90 Miles an Hour” p. 50-53.
- Butch/Femme Identities:
 - Mandy Precious “No Weak Swimmers Beyond This Point” p. 54.
 - ananda esteva “this is what i’d tell her if we were friends not just lovers” p. 69-70.
 - Jean H. Thoresen “Butch Trade” p. 71-72.
 - sharon bridgforth “bull-jean & tha wo’mn” p. 73-75.
 - Niobé Ngozi “Gender Variant and Available” p. 111-113.

Discussion Questions:

1. Intersectional Identities: Discuss definitions and examples of “intersectionality.” What intersectional identities appear in this issue of *Sinister Wisdom*? How do these identities reveal challenges, opportunities, or oppressions? Choose one to two pieces that illustrate intersectionality and share them with your group. Explain where you see instances of intersectionality in these pieces, and their relevance to lesbian expression.
2. Art and Photography: Analyze Cathy Cade’s “Beijing Images” (56-63) or ananda esteva’s “El Otro Lado de la Jota Chola” (76-79). Describe the images and their connection to the themes of the journal. How do the images in each collection relate to one another? What narratives, experiences, opportunities, or challenges might these images express?
3. Butch/Femme Expressions and Identity: Many of the pieces in this issue depict variations of lesbian expression and identity, especially within the language of butch/femme dichotomies. How are butch and femme identities depicted in this issue? Is there a value attached to these expressions in regard to conceptions of beauty or desire? How to the writers and artists in this issue expand upon or challenge these categories?
4. Desire and Expression: Throughout this issue, how is lesbian desire understood in relation to growth and self-expression? How do works that depict coming-of-age narratives and coming out depict desire? How do pieces like sharon bridgforth’s “bull-jean & tha wo’mn” (73-75) or ananda esteva’s “this is what i’d tell her if we were friends not just lovers” (69-70) explore lesbian desire? What is the relationship between each speaker’s sense of self-expression and desire?

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5. Theory and Practice: Many of the works in this issue illustrate the often complicated relationship between theories of activism within academic communities and grassroots community activist work. How does Elizabeth Ribet's "grrl-story" (45-47) depict this complicated relationship? How does Maria Cecília Santos's "Academic Convers(at)ion" (84-85) depict it? What issues, oversights, or challenges are associated with approaches to lesbian-feminist thought and activism in academic environments? In these pieces or others in *Sinister Wisdom 58*, is there a positive side to mingling theory and praxis? What solutions would you pose to these problems?

Unit Teaching Activity Ideas:

Praise Poem: In the style of M.C. Ball's "Garden Britomart" (49) or andal elle's "ode to a woman wearing cleats" (80), write a praise poem for someone in your community.

Research and Context: Do some quick research on Audre Lorde and Nien Cheng. Who were they? What activism through writing did they achieve? Use this contextual information to inform your readings of Ekua Omosupe's "Audre Lorde" (64-65) and Raye Lynn's "For the Strong Woman, Nien Cheng" (89-90). After reflecting critically on these two pieces, write a letter to either Audre Lorde or Nien Cheng, explaining their influence on writing and activism through poetry.

Journal: Write about the coming-out experience in Liz Morrison's "90 Miles an Hour" (50-53). How does the narrator feel about being outed? How does the narrator balance her relationship with her mother and her relationship to sexuality?

Letter to the Editor: Write a "Letter to the Editor" describing either a piece that impressed you or a piece that frustrated you. Maintain a formal tone while stating your position, and provide quotes as textual evidence to support your opinion of the work.

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.

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