Student Sample

Adolescent Literature

Project #3

**Poetry Portfolio Analysis**

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1wgAh0glc1kNbNvUu5K292cqNsGdkXZnvWlrzheTLegA/edit#slide=id.g5700686095_0_2>

For the final project, I chose the poetry portfolio. When writing the poems for each book, I tried to capture one specific idea or theme or relationship that resonated with me the most. The poem formats I chose are meant to reflect the story and I incorporate lines from the book into each one.

For *Monster* by Walter Dean Myer, I chose to do a dialogue poem. I wanted the format of the poem to mimic the screenplay style the book is written, including using the stage directions to add to the imagery of the poem. One of the ain conflicts in the book is Stee struggling with the reality of how public perception-especially public racism-effects the American penal system and the justice it dispenses. I wanted the poem to be Steve confronting that directly. I used quotes taken right out of the book as the cut scenes and flashbacks that lead Steve to his understanding. The ending of the poem mirrors the ending of the book-where O'Brien turns away from Steve after the not guilty verdict-to show how perception effected even those people closest to him.

*The Boy On the Wooden Box* by Leon Leyson is a memoir, so I chose to reflect that style by doing a bio poem. The bio poem has a very specific 10 line form that tells about one person, in this case Leon Leyson, the main character and author of the book. The overall poem tells about Leon but also recaps the events of the book. In the prolouge, Leyson emphasizes that he will always believe that Oskar Schindler was a hero and that the book is his "turn to do what I can for him, to tell about the Oskar Schindler that I knew." He ends the prologue by saying "This is the story of my life and how it intersected with his." He makes it clear that the his life's story-especially his years under Schindler's protection-are the main point of the book so I wanted to make sure his story was the central part of my poem. I added the picture of Leon as a child and a grown man, Leon's family, Oskar Schindler, Amon Goeth, and Plaszow Concentration camp to illustrate what impacted him the most in the story. In the bio poem format, line 2 is 3-4 adjectives that describe the person. The 4 I chose were ones people had used to describe Leon in the book. I also chose to use both the original and "Americanized" versions of his name for the first and last lines to illustrate how much he changed and grew during his suffering and subsequent escape to America.

For *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi, I chose to do a blackout poem, even though defacing a book was physically painful. Blackout poems have always reminded me of redacted documents, which invoke thoughts of secrets and opacity. There are a lot of times that secrets come out in *American Street* and effect people's lives, as well as the arc of the story-some examples being Manant Jo telling Fabiola that she was "handling" her mother's case but not telling her how or what whas going on, Fabiola finding out that her cousin's were drug dealers, and Fabiola finding out the Q was Dray's uncle. These particular secrets all drove the choices that Fabiola made in the story. Not knowing about her mom's whereabouts led her to help the Detective. Finding out Q was Dray's uncle led her to the club and gave her the idea on how to set up Dray at the house party. Learning about her cousin's drug dealing drew her closer to them at the same it it isolated her from them and led her to create a plan where she lied and kissed Dray to try and set him up instead of just being able to connect him to the drugs that killed the girl in Grosse Pointe. The secrets and Fabiola's choices are used to highlihgt one of the main themes of the book-the importance of family bonds. Fabiola's bond with her mother, her aunt, and her cousins act as seperate but equally powerful sources of love, strength, and fire. The pages I chose to create the poem from are pulled from the Thanksgiving scene, where Fabiola is making a Hatian feast for her family. The poem is entitled "Une Belle Vie", pulled from a line in the very beginning of the book-"We will build a good, brand new life. Une belle vie, as Manman always promises." The phrase acts as the title as well as the first line of the poem. In the slideshow presentation, the pictures are hard to see so I put them in the speaker notes part.

One of the things that stuck with me after reading *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green was what Hazel might have said at Gus's funeral if she was real instead of saying the things she thought everyone needed and wanted to hear. I chose to do an elegy (with accomanying epitaphs on their headstones) because it is a traditional mourning poem whose format highlights the 3 stages of grief-sorrow, admiration, and acceptance. I used an modern elegy format that is freestyle and broken up into 3 stanzas-expressing sorrow, singing praises, and offering solace. Each stanza is a slightly different font, but all the fonts I chose were meant to look like the flowery script in a funeral program. The main thing I wanted to capture from the book was how much Hazel and Gus loved each other. They were both suffering with serious physical illnesses and yet managed to find peace and happiness with each other, a feat most people can't boast even in the best of times. To capture the love between them, I referenced things they did together in the second stanza-referencing "the stars" that was their name for the champagne at Oranjee, their visit to the Anne Frank House, and their time in the Literal Heart of Jesus, both in group and at Gus's prefuneral. Also, in the third stanza, I reference the letter that Gus sent to Peter Van Houten about Hazel and Hazel's response to it-that she was okay with her choice to love Gus.

*Godless* by Pete Hautman was a book that I can best describe as "irreverant". It was my favorite of the assigned books because it was written in Jason's voice and Jason's voice is very snarky, just like mine. The poetry format I chose is a limerick because snarkiness is part of the description for a limerick. There is an irreverence to the setup-punchline style, the mockery of norms to make a point, and the typically crude or lewd content of a limerick that I thought would accurately reflect the book. However, there is a serious overtone that builds in *Godless* as Chutengodianism grows out of Jason's control. They get in trouble with the law, multiple people get hurt, Shin has a mental breakdown, and the group of friends fractures-Jason is isolated by his parent's punishment, Magda and Henry co-create the upstart "Choots", Dan reattaches himself to the Church of his father, and Shin's parents keep everyone away from him, especially Jason. These unforseen consequences cause Jason to get serious about things and I refleted that in the poem by ending with snark, but no joke. I chose the word "upshot" specifically because it means "the eventual outcome of an action" but it sounds optimistic, like Shin and Jason were when they first started the process of creating Chutengodiasnism. They both embrace their new interest in a different way-Shin taking it very literally and Jason using it more as social outlet/power play-but they're equally engrossed in and excited by their religion. My visual idea-the poem being graffiti'd on the water tower-didn't turn out excatly as I had hoped (turns out I have almost no photoshp ability) but it was meant to reflect Henry and his Choots tagging the tower in the book.

*Shizuko's Daughter* by Kyoko Mori is sad story made beautiful by the imagery of the author. Mori used natural and sensory based descriptions to help the reader understand complex emotions and specific thoughts that Yuki was experiencing. I wanted to capture that same idea of portraying big feelings with simple, but descriptive lines and Japanese haiku and tanka were the most appropriate way to do that. I chose to do 5 poems overall-3 haikus, 2 tankas-so that I could highlight a different sense in each one. Each poem, besides describing the physical imagery of a specific item, also tried to capture Yuki's feelings from the scene that item was pulled from. The persimmon tea set evokes the sound memories of Hanae shattering and destroying them. The maple leaves remind Yuki of the time her and SHizuko ate fried leaves in the mountains. The smell of the formeldahyde reminds Yuki of the funeral home her mother's body was prepared in. The beauty of the irises and crysanthemums reminds Yuki of helping her mother in the garden and the connection between her grandma's flowers and the ones in Shizuko's garden that the grandma had given her. The feel of the paintbrush and the watercolors evokes the drawings that Yuki made of her mother's things that helped her start to move on from her mother's death.

For *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*  by Sherman Alexie, I did a contrapuntal poem. These poems are inspired by contrapuntal music compositions, which is two or more individual, melodic lines that are imposed upon one another simultaneously, creating an entirely new harmonic relationship. The poetry form is 2 seperate poems that combine to make one. I chose this poetry form because Junior wrestles with his "half Indian, half white" existence after he decides to transfer from the reservation school to the very white Rearden High School and the duality of the contrapuntal poem represents that well. The 2 poems I wrote are "Arnold", talking about his experience in the white school, and "Junior", talking about the feelings he has about the reservation that led him to leave. When they come together, the poem becomes about the overal story arc of the book-his realization that he had to leave and his acceptance of both sides of his life. The visual element I used is the color coding of the poems to show which lines came from which poems and the background image of the cover of the book. The image has a toy Indian on one side and a toy cowboy on the other and it both sets up the story and fits the poem perfectly.

The last book we read, *Where the Streets Had a Name* by Randa Abdel-Fattah hit me a lot harder than the other books and was very dificult for me to read. I actually ended up reading it 3 times in order to fully comprehend the themes and imagery because the horrors in that book are not ones I'm familiar with. The other books in the class all had some sort of horrible thing in them-sickness and death, racism, legal double standards, domestic abuse, suicide and mental illness-but those are things I've experienced in my own life. I know how to digest those type of stories. But the dehumanization, the military control, the death of a child from a suicide bomber, the survivor's guilt of Hayaat, the crumbling soul death of her father...some of things from this book I have no experience with outside of the news so the heavy emotions that Abdel-Fattah evoked with her writing hit me in a new spot. Because i was so effected, I tried to explore Hayaat's possible thoughts about what she faces with the Israelis in my poem instead of writing about one of the themes or imagery, etc from the book. Or at least, what I would be thinking in Hayaat's place. I chose to do a sonnet, a poetry form I'm very comortable with, with Goethe stanzas for the individual quatrains because they are not bound by iambic pentameter and, as the story is told from the perspective of a 13 year old girl, I wanted to keep it as simple and fluid as possible. Using the sonnet put familiar parameters on an unfamiliar thought process and helped me dig deeper into Hayaat's mindset. The couplet that finishes the sonnet is a paraphrase of a line that I ruminated on for days after reading the book-"Nobody has realized that laughter sounds the same, whether it shakes its way out of a Jew or a Palestinian." The phrasing of the sentence is what originally hooked me, but then I realized 2 things: 1) the seperation that this sentence implies-that Jews and Palestinians each consider the other group SO seperate, so far beneath them, that they wouldn't do something as universally human as laughing the same-explains how they can hate and kill each other the way they do. It explains how Isrealis can happily eject Palastineans from homes their families have had for generation and just *move in* to replace them. It explains the many, many murders on both sides. It explains so much because when you don't view someone as your equal, or at least your species, it's easy to not care about what happens to them. 2) You can replace "a Jew or a Palestinian" with so many sets of groups and have the exact same point-"a white guy or a black guy", "a Muslim or a Christian", "an illegal or a citizen". There's a lot of hatred in this world. But, as Sitti Zeynab says, "the wound that bleeds inwardly is the most dangerous." And that's the most thought provoking thing about this book-Hayaat should be furious. She should be full of hate. But mostly she just seems confused and sad. The visual element is the picture in the background of Palastinian olive trees to represent the ones Sitti lost and the colors of the interchangable words in the couplet of the poem.

I have truly enjoyed all of the books we read in class. They aren't books I would normally pick for myself but reading them and diving deeper, especially with this assignment, has been both a pain in the neck and an absolute joy.