
LUZ BONES READERS' GUIDE

SYNOPSIS

Luz Bones is a collection of forty-six formal poems, including sonnets, triolets, and other rhymed poems that run chronologically to tell the narratives of real people through time and history. Among them are the famous—such as Martin Luther, Hans Christian Andersen, John James Audubon, the original Siamese twins, Chang and Eng Bunker, and Mae West, as well as the more obscure such as Annie C., and H. L., who relate the joy, sadness, and terror of their “near-death” experiences and their aftermath.

AUTHOR BIO

Myrna Stone is the author of five books of poetry, including *In the Present Tense: Portraits of My Father*, a Finalist for the 2014 Ohioana Book Award in Poetry, and *The Casanova Chronicles*, a Finalist for the 2011 Ohioana Book Award in Poetry. Her poems have been published in over fifty journals, including *Poetry*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Southwest Review*, *Boulevard*, *New Orleans Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Nimrod*, and *River Styx*, as well as in nine anthologies.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

COMPREHENSIVE

- 1) *Luz Bones* takes its readers on a journey through time and space with the voices of multiple figures like Martin Luther, Hans Christian Andersen and Mae West, among others. What is the common element that connects these diverse narratives? What does that say about the universality of narratives?
- 2) *Luz Bones* begins with an epigraph from Thich Nhat Hanh. How does this epigraph contextualize the poems that follow it? How does it impact your experience as a reader?
- 3) The poems “Luz Bones” and “To My Parents in the Hereafter” frame the numbered sections of the book. Why do you think Stone chose these poems as the Prologue and Epilogue of the book? How do they relate to each other and the poems that connect them?
- 4) In the first and title poem of the collection, Stone invites her readers into an “earthen door.” Where does that door lead you? How has that journey impacted you?
- 5) Stone uses a variety of poetic forms in *Luz Bones*, such as sonnets and triolets. What other poetic techniques does she use? How does her use of form and technique contribute to your understanding of the poems?
- 6) How do the poems in *Luz Bones* view disfigured, diseased and broken bodies? What influence do those bodies have on their owners’ lives? Do these bodies also function as symbols and if so, what is their symbolic significance?
- 7) What is the importance of family, friends and significant others in this book? What role do these companions play in terms of pain, suffering and loss?

PART 1: CAST ABOUT AS VAPOR

- 1) In the poem “Lucy Bakewell Announces Her Imminent Marriage to John James Audubon in a Letter to Her Kinswoman, Miss Gifford,” Stone talks of the “conscious/life of the body.” In what other ways does *Luz Bones* deal with the life, or lack thereof, of the body?
- 2) Characterize John James Audubon based on the poems from pg. 16-25. How does the multiplicity of perspectives impact how you perceive the character? Does your opinion of him change as you make your way through the poems?
- 3) Compare and contrast the ideas of friendship and loyalty as represented in “Joseph Mason, Audubon’s Former Background Artist, Speaks to Their Mutual Friends on Loyalty” and “Upon Taking Delivery of Audubon’s First Published Bird Prints, Joseph Mason Sees, Then Shares with His Son, a Bitter Truth.” What does this change in opinion over time suggest?

PART 2: THE SIAMESE TWINS NARRATIVES

- 1) What is your vision of motherhood as represented in the first three poems of this section (pg. 29-34)? What kind of a mother is Nok Thai? Are her decisions justified?
- 2) How is the theme of profit motive and greed explored in “Captain Abel Coffin on How He and His Partner, Robert Hunter, Have Managed the Twins on Tour”?
- 3) In the poem “I, Chang-Eng” (pg. 37-38), the twins look forward to a time when they “shall accede/only to one another’s wishes.” Discuss how the twins’ understanding of agency and identity is impacted by the conjoined nature of their bodies.

PART 3: AS PRESENT NOW AS EVER

- 1) In the poem “In a Letter to His Cousin, Banker Moritz Melchior Speaks of His Wife, Dorothea, and Her Devotion to Hans Christian Andersen,” Stone reminds us, “Selfless love, Iris,/ is rare, and rarer still if it survives us.” What are the other forms of selfless love in *Luz Bones*? What is the significance of selfless love in the book as a whole?
- 2) The poem “Dorothea Melchior to Her Daughter on Andersen’s Impact a Dozen Years After His Death” deals with the lasting impact of an artist even after death. In what ways is mortality challenged in the narrative arcs of *Luz Bones*? What is the significance of the different forms of life after death? How do the poems in this section explore the themes of witness? What is the relationship between silence and credibility in these poems?

LEARNING STANDARDS

STANDARDS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (compiled by NCTE and IRA)

1. Students read a variety of topics that have many central themes that relate to one another. Non-fiction is used to show the importance of how people are affected in other parts of the world.
2. Students need to have multiple genres in order to grow in the classroom. Fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and many others help students reach their goals and potential.
3. Students need to be able to know and the key factors of the story.
4. Students should have the comprehension skills to explain the ideas and facts that are within the book.
5. Students need to be able to apply their analysis skills as they read the book and know how to compare and differentiate it from other stories they have already read.
6. Students need to know how to apply all of their skills in order to determine the final product. Students need to be able to plan and determine their course of action.
7. Students need to know how to use synthesis as they begin to recreate what they have read. Students should be able to hypothesize and create their own ideas.
8. Students need to know and remember the importance of evaluation as they recall their knowledge, analysis, and understanding of the book they have read. Students should know how to critique and assess the assignment while they grow in the classroom.