



Lesson Plan:

Anaphora, Ritual &

"The Tao of the Black Plastic Comb"

Poem by Glenis Redmond / motionpoem by Irving Hillman

Lesson plan by Saara Myrene Raappana

Time: at least 50 minutes

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

1. learn about how anaphora and ritual work similarly a poem and film
2. analyze the ways that anaphora and ritual work in those pieces to create new, layered meanings
3. apply the lessons learned to writing a draft of a poem

MATERIALS

- "The Tao of the Black Plastic Comb" the poem & the motionpoem: motionpoems.org/episode/the-tao-of-the-black-plastic-comb/
- Interview with poet Glenis Redmond and filmmaker Irving Hillman: vimeo.com/235981040
- Pen/paper or other writing implements

One of the poetic devices that Glenis Redmond uses in "The Tao of the Black Plastic Comb" is anaphora (the repetition of a word or words at the beginning of successive lines). According to Edward Hirsch's *A Poet's Glossary*, in anaphora, "words accumulate mysterious power and resonance through repetition. . . . The key to anaphora is that each line is a repetition with a difference. . . . Something is reiterated, something else added or subtracted. Our attention keeps shifting from the phrasing that is repeated to the phrasing that is freshly introduced. What recurs is also changed. Anaphora is a self-conscious and repeated turn back to beginnings, back to the origin of the line."

In our interview, filmmaker Irving Hillman says, "When I read that poem, it literally took me back to when I was a little kid. Like, 'this Saturday morning ritual' was the line I read on the poem, and I was like, 'I want to capture that again.'" The film, then, too, is a "a self-conscious and repeated turn back to beginnings." (Hillman even returned to his hometown and filmed his mother and her friends from church in the film.) Redmond says, "There's an energy, there's rage and anger, but there's also me trying to do this, kind of, turn it on its head and do some alchemy work, really bless it to the deepest extent. Go into the shadow side, and turn it around, because God knows we all need to be loved, and I can't love anyone unless I love myself."

ACTIVITIES

1. **The Poem** (20-25 mins): Have students read the "The Tao of the Black Plastic Comb" (don't watch the film yet) and answer, either in small groups or in class discussion, the following questions:
 - a. Look at the different instances of "Bless" in this poem. What's your reaction to the first two instances? What do you think it means? What surprises you?
 - b. What about the last few instances of "Bless"? How has the meaning changed or been added to from the beginning of the poem to the end?
 - c. What happens between the beginning and the end to create those different meanings?

Anaphora, Ritual, & "Tao of the Black Plastic Comb" cont'd

2. The Film (20-25 mins): Watch the film adaptation of “The Tao of the Black Plastic Comb” once. Then let the students read the following questions and ask them to watch the film again, and then the interview with Redmon and Hillman, with these questions in mind.

- a. Find instances of ritual (repetition) in the film.
- b. How does repetition work the film the same way it works in the poem? How does it work differently?
- c. Choose one instance of repeated imagery (the hot comb, for instance) and look at how it gains additional meanings as the film progresses. What does it mean at the beginning? What does it mean at the end?

3. Depending on class time, have students complete this exercise in class or at home:

WRITING PROMPT

Choose something that isn't a blessing—something that makes you sad or afraid or angry—and make a list of the sensory details and events that you associate with that thing. Then bless them. Start each line with “bless,” and in revision, revise toward what Robert Alter describes as the key to anaphora: “a productive tension between sameness and difference, reiteration and development.”