

Makel Harris

Seed Shape Essay

African American Lit

What is a seed shape? Seed shape is the beginning of something or an event. We tend to lose sight of something's seed shape as time goes on and more and more is added (figuratively or literally). The seed shape that I feel most represents what we have discussed throughout the course thus far is the tension between maintaining one's cultural identity/roots while trying to fit into the dominant culture. I have gotten this idea from the readings, *Everyday Use*, from *Call and Response* and, *Nobody Knows the Trouble I See*, by Bernice Johnson Reagon. In " *Everyday Use*", the character Dee seems to have gone back and forth with accepting her culture and being embarrassed of her culture. And in Johnson's essay she discusses the idea of those who "straddle" between cultures.

In the text, " *Everyday Use*", the character Dee is seeming to have gone back and forth with wanting to be a part of and accepting her culture. This has seemed to cause strain on her relationship with her mother and her sister, Maggie. Dee goes away for a long time and when she finally comes home to visit it is like she is a different person. Her mother doesn't seem to accept Dee for who she is and that it took time for her to realize that her culture was/is something very special and important to her family. Throughout the text, the speaker talked negatively about Dee repeatedly and just did not seem to want her around. In the text the speaker states, "Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy dress to wear to her graduation from highschool; black pumps to match the green suit she'd made from an old suit somebody gave me... at sixteen she had a style of her own: and she knew what style was." This quote I feel provides an understanding about who Dee is and the types of things that she values compared

to her mother/the speaker and that is why she is being looked down upon by the speaker. As the text goes on, the speaker addresses that Dee seems to be more into their culture than she ever was before, she even changed her name. “‘Mama,’ Wangero said, sweet as a bird. ‘Can I have these old quilts?’ I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed. ‘Why don’t you take one or two of the others?’ I asked... ‘No I don’t want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine.’... ‘These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all the stitching by hand. Imagine!’ she held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them... ‘The truth is.’ I said, ‘I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas.’ She gasped like a bee had stung her. ‘Maggie can’t appreciate these quilts!’ she cried. ‘She’d probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use.” This quote sums up the idea that Dee has suddenly become interested in her culture even though she never was before. Dee feels that because she now wants to appreciate her culture that she should get what she wants no matter who she hurts. Her sister Maggie has always been devoted to their culture and to learning about their culture and for Dee to come in suddenly is unfair. I think this also shows how it can be a struggle when it comes to the understanding of culture and understanding how important one’s culture is to them and it is not something you can just suddenly want to be interested in. later in the text, Dee states, “you just don’t understand... ‘What don’t I understand?’ I wanted to know. ‘Your heritage’, she said.” Again, Dee is coming from out of nowhere and telling her family who have always been involved with their culture/heritage that they are not involved or educated enough. I can see where Dee is coming from. Because she never showed interest as a child her mother it seems did not try to make her aware and knowledgeable about her culture and now that she is older she may not think that her mother and sister are as in touch with their culture as she is when in reality they are and they always have been. Dee is clearly struggling to grasp the idea that her mother and sister are fully invested in their culture as well and I think it is because Dee herself had such a hard time for a long time accepting their culture.

In her essay, *Nobody Knows the Trouble I see*, Johnson talks about the idea of straddling between cultures. She defines this as, “we are born in and of one place and culture and are sent by our parents and the elders of our community to master and achieve access and mobility for ourselves, and thus our people, in the larger dominant society.” I feel that Dee can connect back to this idea but almost in the opposite way. It took her leaving her home and moving away to start to appreciate and learn the ways and ideas of her own culture. Johnson also states in her essay, “Parents and elders of the community turn their children over to schools with the idea that these children will be able to master the culture and the paths of the more dominant and opposing society. This process is only somewhat eased when the community of birth pulls these training institutions from the larger culture into its culture to prepare children.” Shortly after that she also states, “there are many children, however, who grow up and learn the lesson, as it is said in the African-American community too; they go into the land of the other and they stay- they never come back physically or in their professional contributions. Many do not survive the trauma of trying to master two systems at variance with each other.” Through these two quotes I feel that Johnson proves that there is indeed tension or difficulties when it comes to one trying to learn a whole new culture while not forgetting theirs or losing their own cultural identity. This is something that in some cultures is pressured a lot by the elders and it can cause serious problems when it comes to the mental health of their children and when it comes to their children trying to also find their identity during all of this.

After completing this assignment I have been made aware of different things I should be looking for during the class. This assignment was one that was difficult for me at first but when I sat down and really looked into the texts and began asking myself questions like, “how would you balance two different cultures at once?” or “Would I be able to handle pressure like that from elders or would I be like one of the children who didn’t come back?” I have learned a lot about how different cultures function and how people can learn and be involved with different cultures at the same time from re-reading these texts. For the remainder of this course

something I will be looking for is examples of different cultures. Examples of cultures who also send their children away to learn new things so that I can make that connection back to these readings from the beginning of the course. Being able to make connections between texts and different assignments throughout the course I feel is very important and this assignment has helped me do that and helped me to realize what I should be looking for during class and small group discussions.