

Me (Moth) A Novel in Verse By Amber McBride

Developed by Amber McBride

This lesson serves as a brief introduction to looking critically at novels in verse. Many students have read individual poems, but have not seen a collection of poems woven together to create a narrative. Novels in verse have character development, plot, rising and falling action—just like many novels. These materials help guide readers through *Me (Moth)* and also includes discussion questions that will encourage students to look at theme, setting and literary devices that help the novel move forward.

Furthermore *Me (Moth)* focuses on diversity, identity and many difficulties that teens, specifically marginalized teens face. It is an excellent tool to open discussions about diversity and the importance of inclusivity in the classroom.

The following material will likely take four days to complete if students read the book(at home) in the span of a week. **Day 1:** What is a novel in verse and what is *Me (Moth)* about. **Day 2:** What is Hoodoo and information on the Navajo Nation **Day 3:** What is your identity? Why is it important? **Day 4:** Final discussion questions.

This lesson also includes a slide show with suggested discussion questions, links and information for students.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will read an entire novel in verse and think about how the form helps or hinders the story.
- Students will discuss identity, their own personal identities and why they are important. This can encourage discussions about inclusivity.
- Students will look at how foreshadowing is used throughout *Me (Moth)*.

- Students will learn about different cultures, belief systems and origin stories from the Navajo Nation and African American Hoodoo magic systems.
- Students will practice reading their poems to an audience.

**This lesson keeps in mind NCTE Standards and encourages students to read widely from a diverse group of poets, expand their vocabulary, look closely at figurative language and critically think about poetry and performance.

Slide 1 What is a novel in verse?:

A novel in verse is exactly what the title implies, it is a novel that is written using poetry instead of prose.

A novel in verse is different from a collection of poetry because there is still a clear plot for the reader to follow.

Some examples of novels in verse include; *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, *A Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds and *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson.

Task: Why do you think an author decides to write in verse instead of prose? Do you like verse novels?

Task 2: Can you find at least two other novels in verse online and share them with the class.

Slide 2 What Me (Moth) about?:

Me (Moth) is a novel in verse about a girl named Moth and a boy named Sani who both feel invisible in their primarily white suburban city.

They are both grieving in different ways. Sani has an abusive stepfather and deals with clinical depression. Moth is still carrying the physical and mental wounds from the car crash that killed her mother, father and brother.

They decide to take a road trip to Sani's home, The Navajo Nation, and share stories along the way.

More about the novel here: <https://us.macmillan.com/books/9781250780362>

Slide 3 Hoodoo/Rootwork In Me (Moth):

This is a photo slide but some good resources on Hoodoo/Rootwork/Conjure:

Tackling Misconceptions about Hoodoo: <https://medium.com/@theblackvanguards/tackling-the-prevalent-misconceptions-of-hoodoo-36922627e711>

Black Magic: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qkg93m/black-magic-talking-with-hoodoo-witches>

Why Some Young Black Christians are Practicing Hoodoo:

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/features/why-some-young-black-christians-are-practicing-hoodoo>

Slide 4 What is Hoodoo:

When enslaved Africans arrived in the United States, they were no longer permitted to practice their own spiritual traditions—Christianity was forced on them. Hoodoo is a magic system that grew out of that injustice. At its core, Hoodoo is a melding of West African spiritual traditions and Christianity. Often referred to as Rootwork, Hoodoo’s ultimate goal is to shift the odds in your favor through ancestral worship, offerings, and work with herbs and plants.

Though it is practiced differently from region to region, at the root, Hoodoo highlights the strength and power of the ancestors. Hoodoo is neither good nor bad; it is balance. With the Great Migration, Hoodoo took hold throughout the United States.

Slide 5 Navajo Stories and Traditions In Me (Moth):

This is a photo slide but some great resources to share with students about the Navajo Nation are below.

Navajo Creation Story: <http://navajopeople.org/blog/navajo-creation-story-the-first-world-nihodilhil-black-world/>

A Little About The Four Worlds: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4jy9RaWz0>

The Dine: <http://navajopeople.org>

Slide 6 Navajo Nation:

The Navajo Nation is a territory of just over 27,000 square miles that occupies land in Arizona, Utah and New Mexico. Although it is one of the largest reservations it is important to remember that Native Americans were forced from their homelands by the USA government. These forceful evacuations were often under horrendous conditions. Reservations only cover about 56 million acres which is only about the size of Idaho.

The Navajo also known as the Dine have many creation stories which Sani shares in *Me (Moth)*. Specifically, the creation of the 4 worlds. A great place to read more about these creation stories is (<http://navajopeople.org/blog/navajo-creation-story-the-first-world-nihodilhil-black-world/>).

Slide 7 Who are you? What does diversity mean to you? What do you want people to know about you?:

This is a great place to talk about identity, the intersections of identity, diversity and inclusivity in the classroom.

A great activity is to have students write down the most important three aspects of their identity and as how those aspects influence how they see the world.

For example: Amber McBride—Black, female, part of the LGBTQ+ community, writer, hoodoo.

Slide 8 Themes Addressed in Me (Moth):

Take a second to discuss some of the themes you think *Me (Moth)* addresses. Why do you think the author decided to highlight these themes in the novel?

Here are a few examples of possible themes found within *Me (Moth)*.

- The importance of identity.
- Dealing with loss.

Task: Try to pick two themes and find examples in the text that support your idea.

Slide 9 Discussion Questions:

- How is foreshadowing used in *Me (Moth)*?
- Have you ever felt guilty about something? Why do you think Moth has survivor's guilt?
- If someone asked you what your identity was how would you answer?
- What do you think *Me (Moth)* says about the importance of being seen? Do you feel seen in your community, school or friendships? Why or why not.
- Do you have a favorite line in the book? Why is it your favorite and what do you think it means.
- If you were going to add a song to Moth's playlist, what would it be?

Slide 10 Discussion Questions (From Text):

What do you think this excerpt from page 3 of *Me (Moth)* is saying about names and remembering?

“Names outgrow you, like a garden left untended;

they don’t disappear

with the science that keeps out bodies alive.”

In the poems “Old South: Practice Apocalypse” and “Creation According to Sani” on pages 110-121, Moth and Sani share stories with each other. What similarities do you see in Moth and Sani’s stories?

What literary device is used on page 146 when it says:

It’s raining tap dancers again

& the motel is dim...

Why do you think *Me (Moth)* is divided into four sections (egg, caterpillar, cocoon and moth)?

Slide 11 About Me (Amber McBride):

Amber McBride is an English professor at the University of Virginia and holds an MFA in poetry from Emerson College. Her poetry has been published in several literary magazines including *Ploughshares* and *The Rumpus*. She lives in Charlottesville, Virginia with her dog, Shiloh. *Me (Moth)* is her young adult debut.

You can find Amber on social media: @ambsmcbride. If you use the hashtag #memoth, to ask a question or add to the playlist, she might drop in and say hi!