

Discussion Questions for the book Call Us What We Carry and the poem “The Hill We Climb”

“A good poem surprises your senses, shakes you awake, stirs your emotions and startles your imagination.”

Quote from Marilyn Singer

Call Us What We Carry: Discussion Questions

1. Amanda Gorman has said, “Poetry is the lens we use to interrogate the history that we stand on and the future we stand for.” In what ways does Call Us What We Carry support this statement?
2. In Section One “Requiem” Gorman describes her feelings and experiences during the pandemic. The poems invite us to think about the many ways we survived, grieved, and hoped for the pandemic to end. Which of these poems, lines and words resonate with your own experiences during this time?
3. Key elements that distinguish poetry from other kinds of literature include sound, rhyme and rhythm and format. The first 3 are apparent when you read the poem aloud and the last is most obvious when you read it silently. (poem analysis.com). Which poems in the book appealed to you most?

The Hill We Climb

Introduction

There have been six poems written and read at Inaugurations.

- 1961 John Kennedy asked Robert Frost to read his “The Gift Outright” at his Inauguration. Frost wrote an additional poem “Dedication”. However, at the proceedings he discovered that it was too bright and he was unable to see it. So, he recited “The Gift Outright” from memory.
- 1993 Bill Clinton asked May Angelou to write and read a poem. She read “On the Pulse of Morning” at his first Inauguration.
- 1997 At his second Inauguration, Bill Clinton asked Miller Williams to write and read a poem. He read “Of History and Hope.”
- 2009 Barack Obama asked Elizabeth Alexander to write and read a poem of hers. She read “Praise Song for the Day.”
- 2013 Richard Blanco was asked to write and read a poem for Barack Obama’s second Inauguration. He read “One Day”.
- 2021 Joe Biden asked Amanda Gorman to write and read a poem for his Inauguration. She read “The Hill We Climb.”

NOTE: You can watch all of the poets reading their poems on YouTube.

Did you know who Amanda Gorman was before Jan. 20? Many more people now know her as the [youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history](#). Committed to connecting literacy to the project of democracy, she considers reading and writing to be instruments of social change. Encouraged by her mother, an English teacher, Ms. Gorman began writing poems as a child, finding her voice as she assembled words on the page. Where other young poets turn inward, she draws inspiration from events in the news. Amanda's poetry has been described as both spoken-word poetry, which emphasizes rhymes and rhythms and occasional poetry which documents and reflects upon particular events and occasions both public and private.

Ms. Gorman was contacted by the Biden inaugural committee in late December. She was given no specific instructions on what to write but was urged to focus on unity and hope.

Discussion Questions for *The Hill We Climb*

1. Watch the video of Ms. Gorman reading "*The Hill We Climb.*" Then read the poem. What do you think were some of the most important words and phrases she used? Why do you think they are essential to the poem's meaning?
2. What do you think the theme, the overarching message of the poem is?
3. Throughout the poem we find references to events from the news. Which lines stood out for you? How do those lines reflect on American and Americans.
4. Which lines in the poem do you think reflect the occasion for which "*The Hill We Climb*" was written? How do those lines you have chosen suggest issues surrounding the inauguration of a president in 2021.
5. In the title of the poem Gorman employs the metaphor of a hill. Beyond a feature on a landscape, what does the image suggest to you? What else might a hill represent?
6. Extra Credit: How did her voice during the reading of the poem affect the way you understood her words? What did you notice about her body language while she recited the poem? Tre

Sources: Trevor Mur.com, mathumchat.com, NYTimes: Learning Network: Lesson of the Day, poem analysis.com, nea.org, pbs.org, learningforjustice.org, womenforwomen.org, penguinclassroom.com