

MAD Social Studies 10
B2: Poetic Connections

Name: _____

Assignment Synopsis:

Analyze the poem below, by this Canadian poet and answer the following key questions, giving full answers about the poem (four to six lines each).

*Keep in mind that calling a First Nations woman of mixed heritage a 'half-breed' was the correct term for the time.

Questions:

1. What does the poet mean that she is free of the trap and the paddle?
2. What are the shadows in her soul?
3. Why does he speak of the reek of rock-built cities? Does he dislike cities? Should she?
4. What is the perspective of the author, here? What is that of the woman in the piece?
5. What does the last stanza of the poem mean to you?
6. Is the poet envious, nasty, pitying, or what when he wrote this poem?
7. Does the poet seem like he likes First Nations?

The Half-Breed Girl

(1893)

She is free of the trap and the paddle,
The portage and the trail,
But something behind her savage life
Shines like a fragile veil.
Her dreams are undiscovered,
Shadows trouble her breast,
When the time for resting cometh
Then least is she at rest.
Oft in the morns of winter,
When she visits the rabbit snares,
An appearance floats in the crystal air
Beyond the balsam firs.

Oft in the summer mornings
When she strips the nets of fish,
The smell of the dripping net-twine
Gives to her heart a wish.

But she cannot learn the meaning
Of the shadows in her soul,
The lights that break and gather,
The clouds that part and roll,

The reek of rock-built cities,
Where her fathers dwelt of yore,
The gleam of loch and shealing,

The mist on the moor,

Frail traces of kindred kindness,
Of feud by hill and strand,
The heritage of an age-long life
In a legendary land.

She wakes in the stifling wigwam,
Where the air is heavy and wild,
She fears for something or nothing
With the heart of a frightened child.

She sees the stars turn slowly
Past the tangle of the poles,
Through the smoke of the dying embers,
Like the eyes of dead souls.

Her heart is shaken with longing
For the strange, still years,
For what she knows and knows not,
For the wells of ancient tears.

A voice calls from the rapids,
Deep, careless and free,
A voice that is larger than her life
Or than her death shall be.

She covers her face with her blanket,
Her fierce soul hates her breath,
As it cries with a sudden passion
For life or death.

Curriculum	4
Assess how underlying conditions and the actions of individuals or groups influence events, decisions, or developments, and analyze multiple consequences	Describe how the time in history for this poem determines the way the writer speaks about this First Nations woman
Explain and infer different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events by considering prevailing norms, values, worldviews, and beliefs	What do you think is the author's perspective, in comparison to that of his subject
Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their significance at particular times and places, and from group to group	Why is this poem a significant example of evidence for culture and standpoint in early Canada