

## ***Binti: Home* Lesson Plan**

by Erika Gotfredson

**Overview:** This lesson has been designed to facilitate thought and discussion about the various meanings of the word “home” within Nnedi Okorafor’s novella *Binti: Home*, specifically as those different, sometimes conflicting meanings correlate with the growth and challenges Binti experiences throughout her journey. While this activity is best suited for a day when students have completed the entire novella, it could be condensed to focus on particular sections of the text.

This lesson has been adapted from the “Keyword” exercise included in Diana Fuss and William A. Gleason’s *The Pocket Instructor, Literature: 101 exercises for the college classroom* (Fuss and Gleason 243-245). For a useful resource on Nnedi Okorafor’s interest in space and place within her trilogy, see Dustin Crowley’s “Cosmos and Polis: Space and Place in Nnedi Okorafor’s SF.”

**Lesson Topic:** Tracing a Keyword’s Contexts and Changing Meanings

### **Objectives:**

By the end of class, students will be able to:

- Identify different contexts and meanings of a word within the novella
- Contend with the various meanings of a word as it relates to the novella’s characterization and themes

### **Class Structure:**

*30 minutes:* Group work

- Break students into groups and assign each group a chapter or set of chapters. Use the list below of chapters and their corresponding mentions of the word “home” to determine how many groups you should use:
  - **Opening Chapter, pp. 99-108:** 100, 104, 106, 107, 108
  - **Humans. Always Performing, pp. 109-115:** 109, 111, 113, 114
  - **Launch, pp. 116-126:** 116, 117, 119, 124, 125, 126
  - **At Home, pp. 127-135:** 132, 133
  - **The Root, pp. 136-149:** 136, 137, 139, 141, 144, 146, 148
  - **Night Masquerade, pp. 150-159:** 151, 153, 158
  - **Blood, pp. 160-162**
  - **Hinterland, pp. 163-165**
  - **Destiny is a Delicate Dance, pp. 166-174:** 166, 167, 172, 173
  - **Lies, pp. 175-186:** 176, 185
  - **Gold People, pp. 187-88**
  - **The Ariya, pp. 189-197:** 190, 192, 196, 197
  - **Initiative, pp. 198-204:** 203, 204
- Give each group the following instructions:
  - Using your phone or computer, look up the word “home” in the Oxford English Dictionary. Take note of the different definitions and connotations of the word as a group.

- In your assigned sections, seek each moment that the word “home” appears in the text.
- For each time that the word appears, answer the following questions:
  - Which definition of “home” applies to this particular use of the word?
  - What does the use of the word “home” in this moment tell us about Binti’s characterization?

*20 minutes:* Share findings

- Have each group share their findings for 1-2 instances where “home” appears in the text.
- As each group shares, take notes on a whiteboard or PowerPoint, grouping the examples based on the definition they employ (for instance, a dwelling place, the location where one was raised, or one’s sense of belonging).
- Once students have listed a variety of meanings that the word “home” takes in the book, pose the following questions to students for discussion:
  - How does Binti’s use of the word “home” change over the course of the text?
  - How do Binti’s conflicting meanings assigned to “home” pertain to her identity and the changes she experiences?

*25 minutes:* Close readings

- Using the list you generated together as a guide, perform close readings on a few passages with the class. The primary questions to be addressed through the discussion include:
  - What does Binti learn about her home, and why are such changes to her mindset important for her growth?
  - Where does Binti feel that she belongs, and how does this change over the course of the novella? What causes this change?
  - How do Binti’s various conceptions of home conflict, and how does Binti’s conflicted feeling of home relate to the novel’s themes?
- Page 108:
 

*I’m unclean because I left home, I thought. If I go home and complete my pilgrimage, I will be cleansed. The Seven will forgive me and I’ll be free of this toxic anger.* (Okorafor 108)

  - Pose the following questions to students after you have read this passage together:
    - What causes Binti to feel that she is unclean per her home culture?
    - What does “home” mean for Binti as she studies at Oomza University?
- Page 146:
 

“What did that place do to you?” he asked, still covering his face.

I couldn’t stop the tears from falling. I didn’t *know* what it all had done to me. It was there sometimes, and then sometimes, it wasn’t. I was peaceful, then all I could see was war. My siblings had been attacking me. How was peace going to help? I wanted to say these things. I wanted to explain to them all. Instead, I fled the dining room. I left my family to continue talking about me in my absence as they had since I’d left. As I ascended the stairs, I heard them start in. Vera began, then my brothers.

I slammed my bedroom door behind me and just stood there. My entire body was shuddering. I'd traveled so far to come home and rest in the arms of my family and now I'd just cast myself out. (Okorafor 146)

- Pose the following questions to students after you have read this passage together:
  - What has changed about Binti's home in her absence?
  - Why does she no longer feel that she fits in at home?
- Page 182:

“You Himba are so inward-looking,” she said. “Cocooned around that pink lake, growing your technology from knowledge harvested from deep within your genius, you girls and women dig up your red clay and hide beneath it. You're an interesting people who have been on those lands for generations. But you're a young people. The Enyi Zinariya are old old Africans.

“And contrary to what you all believe, we have technology that puts yours to shame and we've had it for centuries.” She paused, letting this news sink in. It wasn't sinking in to me easily. All that she'd said was so contrary to all that I had been taught that I'd begun to feel a little dizzy. (Okorafor 182)
- Pose the following question to students after you have read this passage together:
  - How does Binti's perspective of her home culture change during the various journeys she takes?
- Page 196:

The voice came from deep in me, but it was familiar. I'd been hearing it since I left home, ignoring its steady matter-of-fact low voice: “You did not succeed your father. No man will marry you. Selfish girl. Failed girl.” I was supposed to be these things in order to be. I had not taken my place within the collective. This had left me feeling exposed and foundationless, even as I pursued my dreams. Now here I was about to make another choice that would further ensure I could never go back. (Okorafor 196)
- Pose the following questions to students after you have read this passage together:
  - What pressures does Binti experience from her home culture?
  - How does she negotiate these pressures, and how do they continue to influence her even when she leaves?
- Conclude the class with a brief discussion of the following question:
  - Why might Okorafor have chosen to end the novella with Binti's confusion about the word “home”? How does Binti's confusion about the word signify the changes she experienced over the course of the novella?
  - See page 204:

I was Himba, a master harmonizer. Then I was also Meduse, anger vibrating in my *okuoko*. Now I was also Enyi Zinariya, of the Desert People gifted with alien technology. I was worlds. What was home? Where was home? Was home on fire? (Okorafor 204).

## Works Cited

Crowley, Dustin. "Cosmos and Polis: Space and Place in Nnedi Okorafor's SF." *Science Fiction*

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