

## Notes on Practicing by Marie Howe:

When I first read this poem, it sounded like a discovering of sexuality under the guise of heterosexuality. That is to say, they would pretend one of the two girls was a boy when they paired off, because that's what they were told was normal, yet still managed to feel "the first pure thrill of reluctant desire". I love the idea of this poem because I do not believe that a person can ever know their sexuality in totality without, on some level, considering/exploring other options. On the most basic level, this poem is composed of ten open stanzas. Howe defines the poem early on as a love poem, though it be one written to multiple people instead of one solitary partner. Each of the lines is paired off into one stanza each just as the girls paired off to practice. There is a shift in imagery in the poem after the phrase "Now, you be the boy" that shows the gendered objects in the eyes of our culture. Boys had the concrete floor and video games, dirty laundry and trains. Girls on the other hand had stools that spun and plush carpeting.

I believe Howe wrote this poem to express the prepubescent, sexual curiosities many young women go through. The speaker says, "I want to write a love poem for the girls I kissed in seventh grade." And at this point in the poem, the reader doesn't necessarily know the speaker is female. It's made clear with a line in the third stanza, "one was the boy, and we paired off— maybe six or eight girls." The speaker references her time with other girls as "practicing", but I think it was more of an exploration of sexual curiosity. At the end of the poem, the speaker looks back on her experiences with, "the first pure thrill of unreluctant desire", showing that she felt real sexual euphoria. The tone of this piece came off as young and innocent. The diction was playful; I felt as if I were reading this poem out of the speaker's diary. i.e. "we kissed and kissed until we were stoned on kisses", "Now you be the boy" and, "That feels good or I like that." . The speaker compares Gloria's basement (where the "practicing" took place) to a boat, through use a simile. She uses a boat, because it has small windows and the occupants are very isolated from the outside, thus the basement is like a safe haven for the pre-teens. The free verse scheme also helps create that "diary" effect. Its as if the speaker is just recalling a memory from her childhood. The speaker also mentions "love poems" and "love songs", but I didn't feel this poem had a natural sound rhythm or quality. Perhaps there is a rhythm meter that I don't know how to decipher. (Maybe something to talk about in class?)