

***Binti: The Night Masquerade* Lesson Plan**

by Erika Gotfredson

Overview: This lesson has been designed to facilitate thought and discussion about the intergroup relations presented in Nnedi Okorafor's novella *Binti: The Night Masquerade*, specifically through mapping the places and groups that appear throughout the protagonist's journeys. While the lesson plan uses the map and corresponding discussion primarily to analyze the major conflicts within the final novella of the trilogy (both the conflict between the Meduse and the Khoush and Binti's internal conflict concerning her identity), it also requires that students have read the other two novellas for context.

This lesson has been adapted from the "Mapmaker" exercise included in Diana Fuss and William A. Gleason's *The Pocket Instructor, Literature: 101 exercises for the college classroom* (Fuss and Gleason 58-61). 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: Mapping Intergroup Relations and Character Identity

Objectives:

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

- Visually represent the intergroup relations in the trilogy
- Identify the sources of conflict within the novella
- Discuss the trilogy's vision for intergroup relations

Class Structure:

20 minutes: Map the places in the series

- Ask students to share places that have played a significant role within the novellas. As the students list the places, draw a rough sketch of a map on a whiteboard.
 - The map could include two "planes": locations on Earth including Khoushland, Osemba (Himbaland), and the desert; and places beyond Earth, namely Oomza University. You may also include Third Fish and/or New Fish.
 - The primary purpose of the map is to prompt students to visualize the different locations to which Binti travels and the different cultures and groups with which she interacts; for this, a rough sketch that captures the locations of various groups of people in relation to each other suffices. However, you may also consider adding imagery that captures the geographic features of a particular place, such as the cityscape of Oomza University or the "Root" in Osemba.
- After you and your students have completed a rough sketch of the places within the trilogy, place each group with which Binti interacts on the map. The map should include the following groups: Himba, Khoush, Enyi Zinariya, Oomza University students, and Meduse.

15 minutes: Small group discussions

- Break students into groups of 2-4 and assign each group of students a group from the map.
- Have each group complete the following tasks:

- List as many characteristics as you can concerning your assigned group and their home.
- Answer the following questions about your group:
 - How does Binti relate to the group? Does she fit in? Why or why not?
 - How does the group get along with other groups on Earth and beyond? What factors influence their intergroup relationships?

15 minutes: Class discussion

- Have each group briefly report on their findings.
- As the students discuss how the different groups relate to each other, visually represent the affiliations and tensions on the map.
- You might also track Binti's journeys across the map to visually represent the different places she has been and groups with whom she has interacted.

25 minutes: Close readings

- Using the map you have 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:
 - How does conflict arise between the different groups within the series?
 - How does Binti play a role in addressing these conflicts, and why is this role she plays significant?
- Page 228:

Mwinyi groaned. "Haven't you learned *anything* from all this? What'd you think I was a few days ago? What did you think of all Enyi Zinariya?" I didn't respond, so he did. "You thought we were savages. You were raised to believe that, even though your own father was one of us. You know why. And now I'm sitting here telling you how I learned I was a harmonizer and you're so stuck on lies that you'd rather sit here wondering if I'm a *spirit* than question what you've been taught." (Okorafor 228)

 - Pose the following questions to students after you have read this passage together:
 - How has Binti's upbringing conditioned her to interact with other groups of people? What might this say about the Himba culture?
 - Does the book suggest that Binti grows beyond her initial prejudices?
- Page 290:

"I incite the deep culture of the Himba." I looked intensely at both King Goldie and the Meduse chief. "Neither of you know of it and that is okay. The Himba council members were to do this, but I think they're afraid. I think they're hiding. I'm not. And I'm a collective within myself, so I can.

"Meduse tradition is one of honor. Khoush tradition is one of respect. I am master harmonizer of the Osemba Himba." I raised my hands, the currents swirling into balls in both hands like blue suns. I held one toward Goldie. "The one who represents the Khoush." I held a hand toward the Meduse chief. "The one who represents the Meduse." I steadied myself. I pulled from deep within me, from the earth beneath my feet, from what I could reach beyond the Earth above. Because I was a master harmonizer and my path was through mathematics, I took what came and felt it as numbers, absorbed it as math, and when I spoke, I

breathed it out. “Please,” I said, the words coming from my mouth cool in my throat, pouring over my tongue and lips. I was doing it; I was speaking the words to power. I was uttering deep culture. “End this,” I said, my voice full and steady. “End this now.” (Okorafor 290)

- Pose the following questions to students after you have read this passage together:
 - What has caused the conflict between the Khoush and the Meduse, and what is at stake within the conflict?
 - What does Binti mean when she calls herself a “collective,” and how does this role as a “collective” aid her in attempting to facilitate peace?
- Page 348:

I giggled wildly and screamed, “What *am* I? I’m so much,” with tears welling in my eyes. “I . . . I didn’t go on my pilgrimage when I went home. That was supposed to complete me as a woman in my village. Instead, my mere *presence* started a *war*! In my home! *They burned my home!* And they killed me! I died! And then I came back as . . . am I really even me?” I was on my feet now. Pacing the small room. Smacking my forehead. (Okorafor 348)
- Pose the following questions to students after you have read this passage together:
 - What prompts Binti’s anxiety about her changing identity?
 - Why is Binti’s collective identity significant within the book’s plot?
- Conclude the class with a brief discussion of the following question:
 - What vision does the book have for healthy intergroup relations, specifically as they relate to concepts of home and belonging?

Works Cited

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

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for the College Classroom. Princeton UP, 2016.

Okorafor, Nnedi. *Binti: The Complete Trilogy*. DAW, 2020.