

Michael+ Josephine

Discussion Notes / Study Guide

Overview

This study guide offers a start for discussions for **Michael + Josephine**, a novel in verse by Jo Reyes-Boitel, published by FlowerSong Press (2019).

Michael + Josephine (M+J) is a novel in verse. A novel in verse is one long poem or several poems grouped together to tell a story. Novels in verse employ the characteristics of poetry with those of the novel. The novel emphasizes story and character. poetry emphasizes language and imagery. together in one space they are a double header of both, not a watered-down version of both.

Major characteristics include:

1. storyline
2. multiple characters
3. varying points of view
4. poetry verses, typically no more than 2 pages, each with their own title
5. some change/revelation/journey (hero's journey)

For more information visit:

[DIY MFA](#)

[Academy of American Poets](#)

The Rise of the Form

The novel in verse is a hybrid form. Genre blending is liberating for writers and the novel in verse allows for a mixture of prose and verse/poetry or entirely verse poetry.

The novel in verse has had a resurgence over the last decade, namely within people of color communities and within the Young Adult (YA) writers market. There are several reasons:

1. the accessibility and readability of the form better engages technology-focused youth in connecting to the story;
2. pockets of a story that are missing or incomplete speak to lost stories within migrating communities and families; and
3. the form is an extension of oral storytelling.

The hybridity also allows for opportunities of multiple voices, weaved together.

About Michael + Josephine

This short book is, at its core, a love story that reimagines St. Michael the Archangel as a queer woman who begins a love relationship with Josephine, a disaster relief worker.

To consider while reading M+J:

- Queer Love as a Form of Resistance
 - [“Telling Queer Love Stories with Happy Endings is a Form of Resistance”](#) by Camille Perri
 - [“Queer Sex is Not Resistance – Or at Least, Not Resistance Enough”](#) by Katie Heaney
 - [“\(Queer\) love and Resistance”](#) by Ali Bhagat
- The Rise of the Novel in Verse
 - [The Rise of the Verse Novel: Celebrating National Poetry Month](#)
- Utilizing “queer” within descriptors rather than other labels
 - [“How the word ‘queer’ was adopted by the LGBTQ community”](#) by Merrill Perlman
- America’s Role in Foreign Aid
 - [“The Origins of US Foreign Disaster Assistance”](#) by Julia F. Irwin
- Liberation and Support and America’s Role Worldwide
 - [The State of LGBT Rights Worldwide](#), Amnesty International
 - [The Consequences of Threatening Foreign Aid Cuts Over Immigration Enforcement](#)

Questions for Further Discussion

1. How does the novel in verse form help the story?
2. Does the pace of the book increase the intimacy and accessibility of the story?
3. What role does humor play within the text?
4. What role does destructive human emotion have in creating conflict throughout the world?
5. Both Michael and Josephine are – in a way – disaster relief workers. What commonalities do they have? What differences?
6. How would the two primary characters be described? Their queer identity isn’t center. What effect does this have in comparison to the work they do?
- 7.

Writing Exercises to Tap into the Novel in Verse Form or in Addressing the Book’s Themes

- Consider your own biography. Choose one primary story for each year (or decade) and write a short vignette. Link them employing poetry features like extended metaphor or repetition. What common themes might carry from one to another to link them, whether in obvious or surprising ways?
- M+J has some unique characters who interact with the primary characters. What interesting personalities are in your life? How do they help you in moments of transformation (either actively or by their very presence)?
- How do you express love in subversive, rebellious, and necessary ways?
- Our lives are marked by major events that, even if not personally affecting us, change us in small ways or set a paradigm shift in our thinking. What major events have occurred and how did you change in immediate ways? How did you change over time?

- The idea of self-care and personal growth are important in M+J. Write down practices you take toward these two things. What made you decide to incorporate these into your life?

Novels in Verse for Further Reading

Love/Iraq, Sheila Black
 Names Above Houses, Oliver de la Paz
 Leadbelly, Tyehimba Jess
 Autobiography of Red, Anne Carson
 Turn Me Loose, Frank X Walker
 The Poet X, Elizabeth Acevedo
 Watercolor Women, Opaque Men, Ana Castillo
 Memory of Forgetting, Mahmūd Darwish
 Your Own, Sylvia, A Verse Portrait, Sylvia Plath
 The Essential Hits of Shorty Bon Bon, Willie Perdomo
 Liliane, Ntozake Shange
 Macnolia, A Van Jordan
 Omeros, Derek Walcott
 Brown Girl Dreaming, Jacqueline Woodson

About the Author

jo reyes-boitel is a poet, essayist, and playwright. Somehow born in Minnesota, her family calls Texas, Florida, Mexico, and/or Cuba home. Recent and forthcoming publications include Scalawag Journal, Windward Review, La Voz de Esperanza, Chachalaca Review, Borderlands, The Americas Review, and Your Impossible Voice.

A recent working performance art piece called *this body* was presented as part of W-I-P (Work in Progress) at Jump-Start Performance Company and Palo Alto Theater. Prior, her directorial and writing debut of *Nahual*, a one-woman play, was presented at Palo Alto Community College in celebration of World Theater Day. jo was the recipient of the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation Award, granted by Sandra Cisneros.

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Areas of Study

queer studies, women's studies, world, immigration, saints, religion, queering, imagery, novel in verse