

We wear the mask essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

1. Can you paraphrase the poem if necessary? Yes. The poem is about a person describing all the jobs she has had over the years, concluding that the one job she would not do again would be a phone telemarketer because she did not like to hear the disappointment in the voices on the other end of the phone when they realized it was just a salesperson calling. 2. Who is the speaker in the poem? How would you describe this persona? Ms. Laux has worked as a sanatorium cook, a gas station manager, a maid, and a donut holer before receiving a B. A. in English from Mills College in 1988; therefore, I think she used her own life experience to write this poem (Dorianne). In an online posting, Dorianne Laux explains, “Every poem I write, I write for myself, to relieve some pressure, to try to get something right. I want the viewer, or reader, to see what I’ve seen, to know it the way I’ve known it...” (Guest).

3. What is the speaker’s tone? Which words reveal this tone? Is the poem perhaps ironic? The speaker describes the different dead-end jobs she has had in a positive way, happily noting, “all / the onion rings I could eat / cleaning houses was fine / liked the donut shop best...” (Laux, 4-5, 12, 29). At the end of the poem, the tone saddens with the description of her telemarketer job. “It wasn’t that I hated calling them... / It was that moment / of expectation, before I answered back / the sound of their held breath / their disappointment when they realized / I wasn’t who they thought I was...” (35, 39-43). I feel sorry for her, as she expresses the sadness she felt.

4. What heavily connotative words are used? What words have unusual or special meanings? Are any words or phrases repeated? If so, why? Which

words do you need to look up? This poem is very straightforward. There is no hidden meaning between the lines, just a wonderful poet pouring out her emotions on paper. 5. What images does the poet use? How do the images relate to one another? Do these images form a unified pattern (a motif) throughout the poem? Is there a central, controlling image? Ms. Laux brilliantly uses descriptive words to instantly transform you into each job she describes, such as “ handing / sacks of deep fried burritos through / the sliding window, the hungry hands / grabbing back...” (5-8). I can envision it perfectly, even hearing the sound of the paper bag crinkling. 6. What figures of speech are used? How do they contribute to the tone and meaning of the poem? A simile is used to describe the vegetable puree. “ I pureed peas and carrots / and stringy beets, scooped them, / like pudding, onto flesh-colored / plastic plates...” (20-23). I like her descriptive, no-fuss style of writing. 7

. Are there any symbols? What do they mean? Are they universal symbols, or do they arise from the particular context of this poem? There are not any symbols. 8. Is the occasion for or the setting of the poem important in understanding its meaning? Yes. If so, why? The speaker described working at different jobs: fast food, a maid, sanatorium worker, gas station attendant, donut shop worker, and lastly, a telemarketer. Out of all of those jobs, most people would think that she would like the telemarketer job the best because it is in an office. However, at the end of the poem, the speaker reveals the sadness she felt after the voice on the other end of the phone realized that she was just another salesperson calling. She would rather clean toilets, than to feel unwanted. To get the reader to feel the way she did, she needed to describe her past.

9. What is the theme (the central idea) of this poem? Can you state it in a single sentence? One should find a job that makes him or her happy. 10. How important is the role of metrics (sound effects), such as rhyme and rhythm? How do they affect tone and meaning? It is written in open form (free verse). The poem does not rhyme; however, rhythm does play a part. Laux places commas before some words at the end of a line to emphasize them. “ The only job I didn’t like, quit...” (1). “ Before that it was fast food, all...” (4).

11. How important is the contribution of form, such as rhyme scheme and line arrangement? How does the form influence the overall effect of the poem? There is not a certain form followed in this poem. In an online posting, Dorianne Laux comments, “I am compelled by poets who tell stories and find ways to make the telling sing. When I begin to write, the music seeped into the words and I found myself playing language like an instrument” (Guest).