

5. Describe the setting of Yamauchi's story and its many references to time elements. To what extent does place and time relate to the characters' identity and expectations?

Cultural Contexts

1. Discuss with your group the nature of the conflicts that emerge in the story. To what extent would your group classify them as cultural, as Mrs. Oka's inability to fit in her Japanese community, or as generational—illustrated by Mrs. Oka's relationship with her husband's daughter? Can your group reach a consensus about the nature of the conflicts?
2. What significance is there in Masako's decision, as the only Nisei (children of immigrant Japanese parents, second generation) to break the silence and tell Mrs. Oka's story? What makes her story worth telling? How do you interpret the last paragraph of the narrative?

Aurora Levins Morales

Puertoricanness

It was Puerto Rico waking up inside her. Puerto Rico waking her up at 6:00 A.M., remembering the rooster that used to crow over on 59th Street and the neighbors all cursed "that damn rooster," but she loved him, waited to hear his harsh voice carving up the Oakland sky and eating it like chopped corn, so obliviously sure of himself, crowing all alone with miles of houses around him. She was like that rooster.

Often she could hear them in her dreams. Not the lone rooster of 59th Street (or some street nearby . . . she had never found the exact yard though she had tried), but the wild careening hysterical roosters of 3:00 A.M. in Bartolo, screaming at the night and screaming again at the day.

It was Puerto Rico waking up inside her, uncurling and shoving open the door she had kept neatly shut for years and years. Maybe since the first time she was an immigrant, when she refused to speak Spanish in nursery school. Certainly since the last time, when at thirteen she found herself between languages, between countries, with no land feeling at all solid under her feet. The mulberry trees of Chicago, that first summer, had looked so utterly pitiful beside her memory of flamboyant and banana and . . . No, not even the individual trees and bushes but the mass of them, the overwhelming profusion of green life that was the home of her comfort and nest of her dreams.

The door was opening. She could no longer keep her accent under lock and key. It seeped out, masquerading as dyslexia, stuttering, halting, unable to speak the word which will surely come out in the wrong language, wearing the wrong clothes. Doesn't that girl know how to dress? Doesn't she know how to date, what to say to a professor, how to behave at a dinner table laid with silver and crystal and too many forks?

Yesterday she answered her husband's request that she listen to the whole of his thoughts before commenting by screaming. "This is how we talk. I will not

wait sedately for you to finish. Interrupt me back!" She drank pineapple juice three or four times a day. Not Lotus, just Co-op brand, but it was *piña*,¹ and it was sweet and yellow. And she was letting the clock slip away from her into a world of morning and afternoon and night, instead of "five-forty-one-and-twenty seconds—beep."

There were things she noticed about herself, the Puertoricanness of which she had kept hidden all these years, but which had persisted as habits, as idiosyncrasies of her nature. The way she left a pot of food on the stove all day, eating out of it whenever hunger struck her, liking to have something ready. The way she had lacked food to offer Elena in the old days and had stamped on the desire to do so because it *was* Puerto Rican: Come, *mija* . . . ¿quieres café?² The way she was embarrassed and irritated by Ana's unannounced visits, just dropping by, keeping the country habits after a generation of city life. So unlike the cluttered datebooks of all her friends, making appointments to speak to each other on the phone days in advance. Now she yearned for that clocklessness, for the perpetual food pots of her childhood. Even in the poorest houses a plate of white rice and brown beans with calabaza³ or green bananas and oil.

She had told Sally that Puerto Ricans lived as if they were all in a small town still, a small town of six million spread out over tens of thousands of square miles, and that the small town that was her country needed to include Manila Avenue in Oakland now, because she was moving back into it. She would not fight the waking early anymore, or the eating all day, or the desire to let time slip between her fingers and allow her work to shape it. Work, eating, sleep, lovemaking, play—to let them shape the day instead of letting the day shape them. Since she could not right now, in the endless bartering of a woman with two countries, bring herself to trade in one-half of her heart for the other, exchange this loneliness for another perhaps harsher one, she would live as a Puerto Rican lives *en la isla*,⁴ right here in north Oakland, plant the *bananales*⁵ and *cafetales*⁶ of her heart around her bedroom door, sleep under the shadow of their bloom and the carving hoarseness of the roosters, wake to blue-rimmed white enamel cups of *jugo de piña*⁷ and plates of *guineo verde*,⁸ and heat pots of rice with bits of meat in them on the stove all day.

There was a woman in her who had never had the chance to move through this house the way she wanted to, a woman raised to be like those women of her childhood, hardworking and humorous and clear. That woman was yawning up out of sleep and into this cluttered daily routine of a Northern California writer living at the edges of Berkeley. She was taking over, putting doilies on the word processor,

¹ Pineapple.

² "Eat, darling, you want some coffee?"

³ Pumpkin.

⁴ On the island.

⁵ Banana plants.

⁶ Coffee trees.

⁷ Pineapple juice.

⁸ Green bananas, or plantains.

not bothering to make appointments, talking to the neighbors, riding miles on the bus to buy bacalao,⁹ making her presence felt . . . and she was all Puerto Rican, every bit of her.

[1986]

Journal Entry

Respond to the juxtaposition of chronological and psychological time in "Puertoricanness." How are they similar? Different?

Textual Considerations

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of Morales's use of the metaphor of a house to suggest multiple identities. What prompts her to open the doors of her Puerto Rican self? To what extent does identity encompass multiple selves? Explain.
2. Morales uses repetition to enhance theme. Cite examples you found particularly effective.
3. Describe the new self that the speaker constructs. How is it different from her former selves? With which self do you most empathize? Explain.

Cultural Contexts

1. Discuss with your group the speaker's desire to live again in a "clockless world." How does it differ from your world? Is it possible or even desirable to live without an awareness of time? What might be gained? Lost?
2. Review the last paragraph of the story. What does it imply about the costs of cultural displacement? Are ethnic identification and cultural assimilation mutually exclusive? Record your group's responses.

⁹ Codfish.

Toni Cade Bambara

The Lesson

Back in the days when everyone was old and stupid or young and foolish and me and Sugar were the only ones just right, this lady moved on our block with nappy hair and proper speech and no makeup. And quite naturally we laughed at her, laughed the way we did at the junk man who went about his business like he was some big-time president and his sorry-ass horse his secretary. And we kinda hated her too, hated the way we did the winos who cluttered up our parks and pissed on our handball walls and stank up our hallways and stairs so you couldn't halfway play hide-and-seek without a goddamn gas mask. Miss Moore was her name. The only woman