



Discussion Guide



Beauty is a Verb

by Michael Northen, Sheila Black, and Jennifer Bartlett

About the Book

Genre: Poetry

Interest Level: Adult

Ordering Information

General Order Information:

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SYNOPSIS

Beauty is a Verb is a ground-breaking anthology of disability poetry, essays on disability, and writings on the poetics of both. Crip Poetry. Disability Poetry. Poems with Disabilities. This is where poetry and disability intersect, overlap, collide and make peace.

For the reader of good poetry interested in the diversity of American expression. The anthology provides an understanding of the history and contemporary vitality of the poetry and poetics of the non-normative body. Three sections--"Foremothers and Forefathers," "The Disability Poetics Movement," and "A Language of New Embodiment"--gather the poems and statements on poetics together in a meaningful whole.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Michael Northen edits *Wordgathering, A Journal of Disability and Poetry* and coordinates the annual Inglis House Poetry Contest for disability-related poetry. For over 40 years, he has taught adults with physical disabilities, women on public assistance, prisoners, and rural and inner city children.

Sheila Black is the author of over 40 books for children and young adults as well as the author of two poetry collections and two chapbooks. She was born with X-Linked Hypophosphotemia (XLH), a rare genetic bone condition, often called Vitamin D Resistant Rickets. Two of her three children also have XLH.

Jennifer Bartlett was a 2005 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow. Her publications include *Derivative of the Moving Image* (UNM Press 2005), *(a) lullaby without any music* (Chax 2011), and *Anti-Autobiography* (Saint Elizabeth Street / Youth-in-Asia Press 2010).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the book challenge normative perceptions of beauty in the context of disability studies?
2. Analyze the book cover. What does the imagery convey? How does it relate to the title of the collection, *Beauty is a Verb*?
3. What does non-normative mean in the context of this collection?
4. Jennifer Bartlett discusses the need to “consider the social model of disability” (15). How does the poetry in the collection consider society’s critique of non-normative bodies?
5. What are some of the overlapping themes between the poetry in “Early Voices” section and “The Disability Poetics Movement”? What differences do you notice between these two sections?
6. What are some key takeaways about self-image and self-acceptance from the book?
7. Can you relate any personal experiences or reflections to the themes discussed in the book?
8. How do literary and media texts influence the way we approach disability, and how have literary and media texts helped us understand disability in new ways?
9. Compare and contrast the poetic styles of two different poets in the collection. How do their unique approaches contribute to the overall message of the book?
10. How do the poems in the section entitled “Towards a New Language of Embodiment” help us reimagine the sociopolitical landscape of disability poetry?
11. Explore the role of sensory imagery in the poems. How do authors use sensory details to enhance the reader’s understanding of disability?
12. Choose a poem that helps you think about form. How does the length of each line impact how you experience the line? When you read the poem aloud, do you speed up, slow down, or pause at the end of the line? How does the form impact your overall experience of the poem.
13. In Cynthia Hogue’s piece, “The Creature Within: On Poetry and Dis/Ability” she starts with an epigraph by Adrienne Rich, which states: Well, nothing is predictable with pain. Did the old poets write of this? How does this epigraph inform your understanding of poetic narratives of pain? How would you describe the lineage of disability poetry?
14. How do the prose and poetics work together in the collection? Why do you think the editors chose to include both forms?
15. Discuss how intersectionality appears throughout the collection. How do poets navigate the complexities of race, gender, sexuality, and disability in their work?