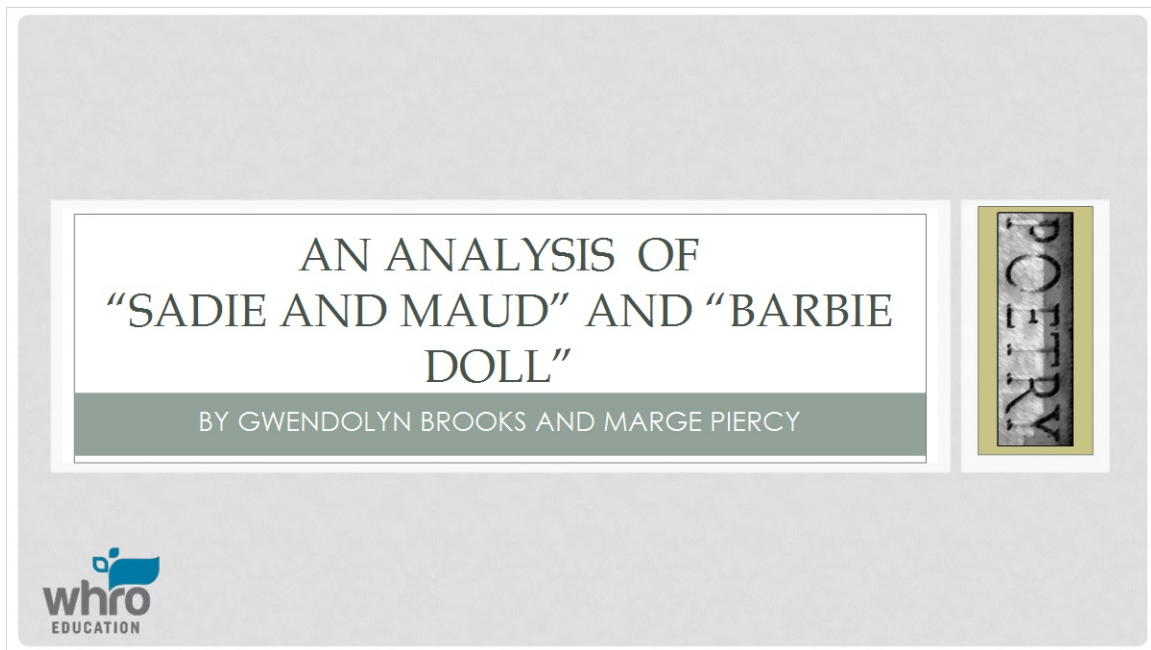


Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

Introduction



An analysis of “Sadie and Maud” and “Barbie Doll” by Gwendolyn Brooks and Marge Piercy

Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

Gwendolyn Brooks



The Pulitzer Prize is an award administered by Columbia University. Each year awards are handed out in twenty-one different categories. Gwendolyn Brooks was the first black author to win this prestigious award. Born in Topeka, Kansas, she moved to Chicago at an early age. Brooks was known for her love of reading and writing from a very early age. At the age of thirteen, she published her first poem. From there, her career as a poet exploded and she eventually became the poetry consultant to the Library of Congress. Read more about Gwendolyn Brooks and her amazing career at the Poetry Foundation website. What follows is a reading of Gwendolyn Brooks' poem, "Sadie and Maud."

Image Courtesy of Miami Dade College, Gwendolyn Brooks, Miami Book Fair International, 1985

Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

“Sadie and Maud”



∞ “SADIE AND MAUD” ∞

Maud went to college.
Sadie stayed at home.
Sadie scraped life
With a fine-tooth comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in.
Her comb found every strand.
Sadie was one of the livingest chits
In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies
Under her maiden name.
Maud and Ma and Papa
Nearly died of shame.

Maud went to college.
Sadie stayed at home.
Sadie scraped life
With a fine-tooth comb.

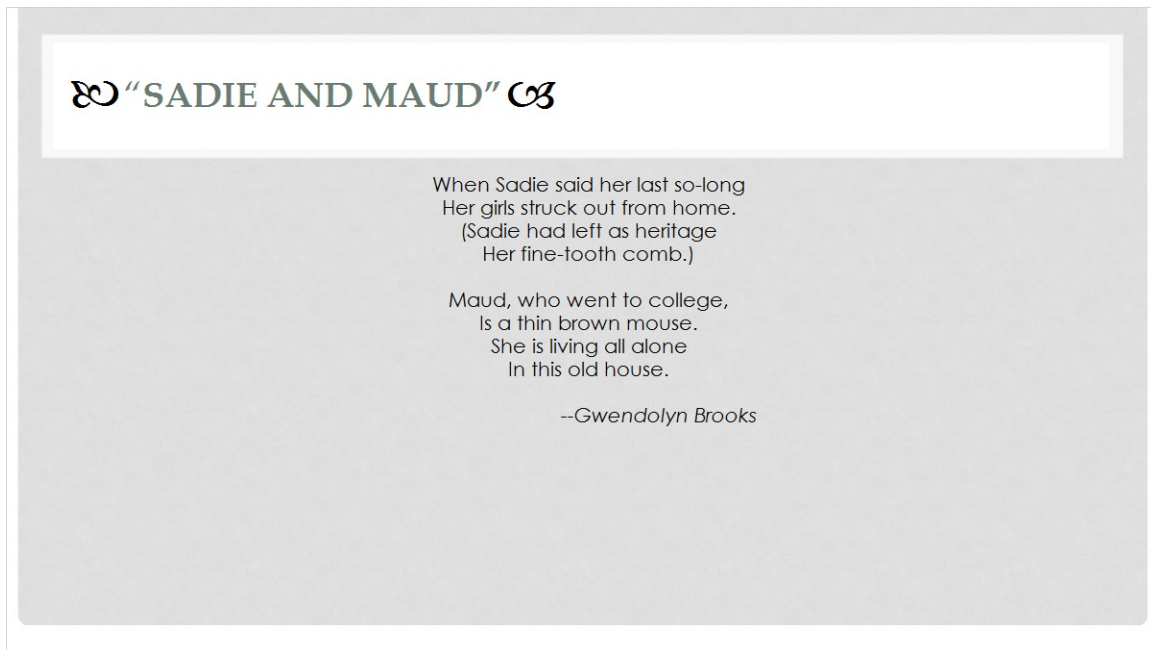
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Nearly died of shame.

Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

“Sadie and Maud”



When Sadie said her last so-long
Her girls struck out from home.
(Sadie had left as heritage
Her fine-tooth comb.)

Maud, who went to college,
Is a thin brown mouse.
She is living all alone
In this old house.

Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

Interpretation

∞ INTERPRETATION ∞

Maud went to college.
Sadie stayed at home.
Sadie scraped life
With a fine-tooth comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in.
Her comb found every strand.
Sadie was one of the livingest chits
In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies
Under her maiden name.
Maud and Ma and Papa
Nearly died of shame.

To analyze this poem, it may help to color code each stanza. Each stanza consists of four lines. Starting with the first stanza, you can see that Brooks is comparing the life of two sisters, Maud and Sadie. Maud went away to college and Sadie stayed at home. The third and fourth lines of this stanza represent an idiom. “Sadie scraped life with a fine-tooth comb.” An **idiom** is an expression that means something more than the literal meaning. Here, Brooks is saying that Sadie lived her life to the fullest. In stanza two, Brooks uses symbolism. “Her comb found every strand.” Again, this is a reference to Sadie and how she lives her life, not missing out on any fun. Brooks uses a hyperbole in stanza three. “Nearly died of shame,” is an exaggeration. A **hyperbole** is an exaggeration used for emphasis or effect. This is exactly what Brooks is trying to achieve with the audience.

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Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

Interpretation

∞ INTERPRETATION ∞

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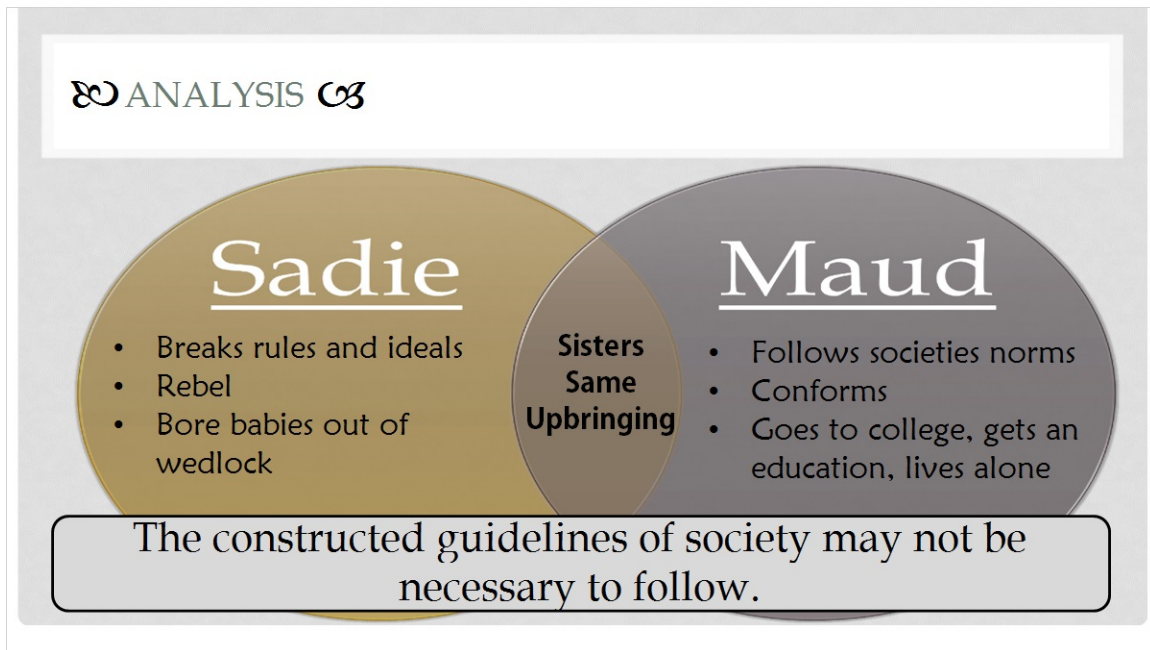
--Gwendolyn Brooks

In stanza four, the “fine-tooth comb” is mentioned again. Here, Sadie wants her children to live freely. Stanza five discusses Maud. Maud went to college and is now living alone. A metaphor is present in this stanza, as Maud is compared to a brown mouse. A **metaphor** is an implied comparison in which two very different things are compared by redefining one of them. Maud is redefined as a mouse.

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Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

Analysis



This poem compares two sisters that had the same upbringing by emphasizing their very different life choices. Sadie breaks all of society's rules and ideals. She bore two babies out of wedlock. When this poem was written in the 1940s, having children out of wedlock was looked down upon. This put her family to shame. But Sadie was not altered by any sort of ridicule. Society could not break her. She lived life "without a tangle in." Sadie proves that it was worth going up against society to find happiness.

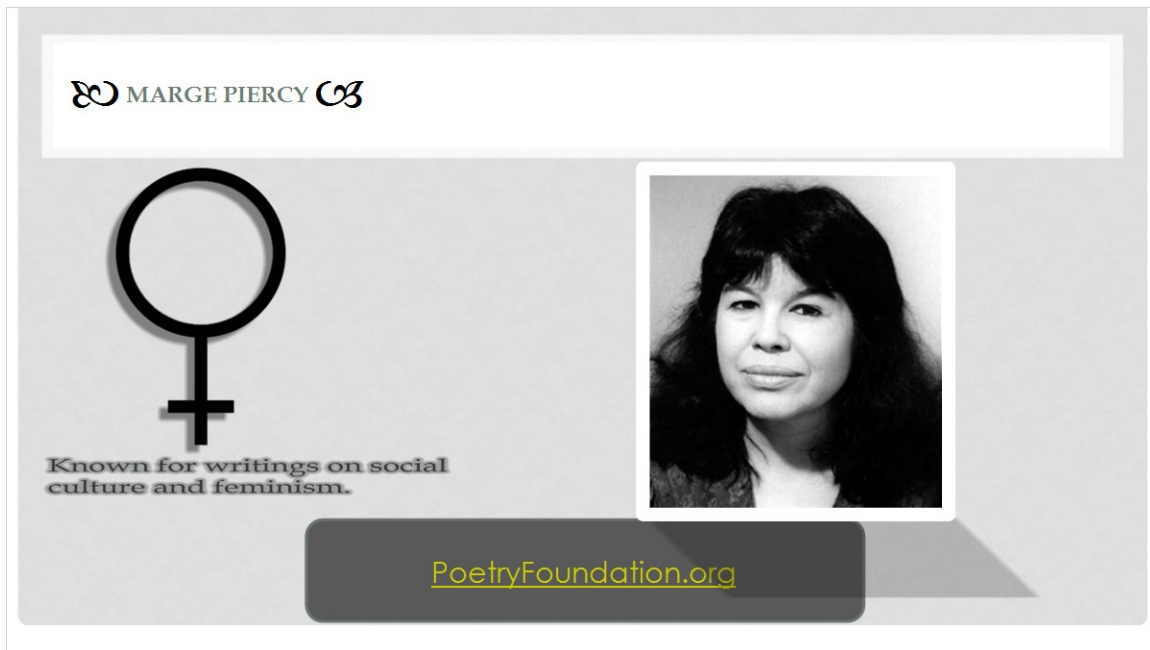
Maud is the exact opposite. Maud goes off to college and embraces the norms of society. The idea in society is that if you listen to your parents, go to college, and get an education, then you will be happy. Maud conformed and found herself living alone like a "brown mouse."

The author's intention is not to say rebel against society and you will be happy. Rather, Brooks is providing examples in her poetry that the constructed guidelines of society may not be necessary to follow. She is encouraging women to rise above stereotypes and find their own happiness.

Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

Marge Piercy



Born in Detroit, Michigan, Marge Piercy was raised in a working class family. Marge Piercy spent her early years reading. Her interest in reading came as a result of illness. She was diagnosed with rheumatic fever, an illness that can restrict the activity of young children. Without the ability to be physically active, she spent her time reading. Piercy's family was greatly affected by the Great Depression and she would be the first member to ever go to college, eventually graduating with both undergraduate and graduate degrees. During her time in college, Piercy organized movements against the Vietnam War, along with other politically influenced movements. These influences can still be seen in her writings. Piercy is known for her writings on social culture and feminism. Piercy is the author of seventeen novels. Read more about Marge Piercy and her career at the Poetry Foundation website. What follows is a reading of Marge Piercy's poem "Barbie Doll."

Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

"Barbie Doll"

∞ "BARBIE DOLL" ∞

This girlchild was born as usual
and presented dolls that did pee-pee
and miniature GE stoves and irons
and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.
Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:
You have a great big nose and fat legs.

She was healthy, tested intelligent,
possessed strong arms and back,
abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.
She went to and fro apologizing.
Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.

This girlchild was born as usual
and presented dolls that did pee-pee
and miniature GE stoves and irons
and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.
Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:
You have a great big nose and fat legs.

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Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

“Barbie Doll”

∞ “BARBIE DOLL” ∞

She was advised to play coy,
exhorted to come on hearty,
exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.
Her good nature wore out
like a fan belt.
So she cut off her nose and her legs
and offered them up.

In the casket displayed on satin she lay
with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,
a turned-up putty nose,
dressed in a pink and white nightie.
Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said.
Consummation at last.
To every woman a happy ending.

--Marge Piercy

She was advised to play coy,
exhorted to come on hearty,
exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.
Her good nature wore out
like a fan belt.
So she cut off her nose and her legs
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Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

Interpretation

∞ INTERPRETATION ∞

This girlchild was born as usual
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Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:
You have a great big nose and fat legs.

She was healthy, tested intelligent,
possessed strong arms and back,
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She went to and fro apologizing.
Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.

When you read the title, “Barbie Doll” what comes to mind? Do you think on imperfection? Probably not. A Barbie doll is known for an unrealistic portrayal of hair, body, belongings, and lifestyle. By giving girls a perfect specimen of a toy, society is suggesting that girls should grow up to be perfect as well.

The first stanza presents the rolls of society to the reader. The girl is presented with dolls, appliances, and make-up. Piercy suggests that girls should play the role of mother, housewife, and beauty. Lines five and six state, “Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said/You have a great big nose and fat legs.” These lines suggest that not all girls fit this “perfect” mold.

The second stanza suggests that even healthy, intelligent girls will still possess insecurity if they are not beautiful. Line eleven states, “Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.” The girl is unable to recognize all of her talents because she is insecure due to her flaws.

Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

Interpretation

∞ INTERPRETATION ∞

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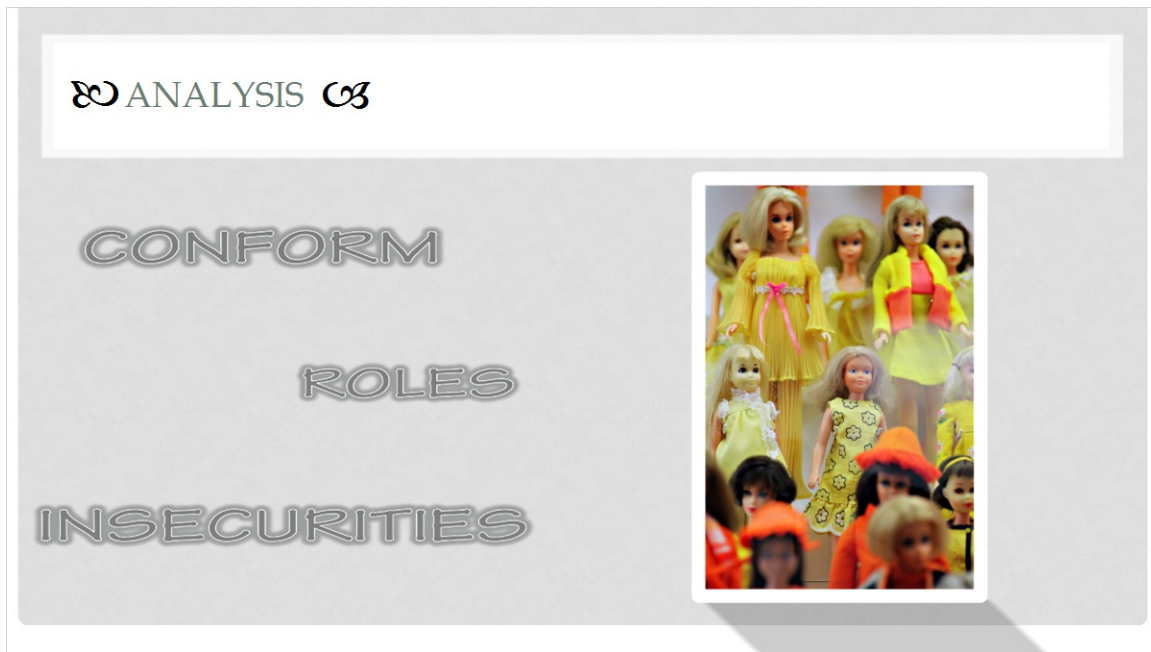
In the third stanza, Piercy writes about how the girl should conform to the norms of society. She should diet and change her appearance. Piercy uses a simile in lines fifteen and sixteen to show how frustrated the girl is, "Her good nature wore out like a fan belt." A **simile** is a direct comparison of dissimilar things. Here the young girl's good nature is being compared to a fan belt wearing out. In the last lines of the stanza, Piercy writes, "So she cut off her nose and her legs/and offered them up." What does this mean? Did she commit suicide?

The final stanza discusses the girl's funeral. She is being viewed by others with a "putty" nose and make-up. Others now view her as pretty. In death she is made to appear as pretty and perfect like a Barbie doll.

Module 4: Self-Discovery Through Facing Life's Obstacles

Topic 1 Content: Presentation Notes

Analysis



“Barbie Doll” by Marge Piercy discusses how girls are raised to conform to specific roles set by society. Piercy suggests little girls are expected to become perfect like the Barbie dolls created from molds. Even talented, intelligent girls that lack physical beauty will develop insecurities due to what the girls see as flaws in their physical appearance.