Using Sci-Fi Novel BARREN: TAKING OF NAME

to Examine Gender Roles through Science Fiction

PREVIEW

An Inter-Disciplinary Resource Unit Plan

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This abridged version includes introductory sections as well as the first two out of the six lesson plans that comprise the unit. The complete unit is available free of charge. Contact:

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Contents

Note: the abridged document includes only the sections shown above. Remaining sections (below) will appear in the complete resource unit plan for those who request it.

DESCRIPTION

The following unit is designed for exploration and analysis of traditional and evolving gender norms through the science fiction genre. It focuses on the novel *Barren: Taking of Name* to provide a springboard into conversations about gender while simultaneously appreciating the context of science fiction. The unit offers a template over which instructors from disciplines ranging from personal growth psychology to contemporary literature can superimpose their own course objectives. Within the Gender Studies field, it can provide a catalyst for investigating gender distinctions/pronouns and their respective associations.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

While the unit is designed for adaptation, it directs attention at topics in gender studies through science fiction. At the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. Recognize and describe the potential of science fiction to raise awareness and create empathy regarding issues of gender.
2. Summarize key components of science fiction particularly as they play out in sci-fi literature with gender-related themes.
3. Meaningfully engage in literary analysis of science fiction as a means of sociological inquiry concerning gender.

RATIONALE FOR USE OF SELECTED NOVEL

The science fiction novel *Taking of Name* is the first book of a trilogy set in an alien world populated by a humanoid race that procreates asexually and is genderless. It is a relatively short novel with an engaging story line and provides a worthwhile vehicle for exploring topics surrounding gender. It fits into a tradition of literary exploration of gender within the science fiction genre along with other books like Ursula Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* and Octavia Butler's *Dawn.*

Taking of Name, however, has a unique feature that becomes a foundation for this unit. The characters are genderless, but, for linguistic and literary purposes, the author has made an editorial decision to publish the novel in two versions, one using feminine pronouns to refer to its characters, and the other using masculine pronouns. This unit is built upon a plan in which students are randomly assigned to read either *Version F* or *Version M*. Consequently, they read the novel through the lens of their own associations given the pronoun differences and can then observe and analyze their own associations.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

While the alien *uedin* are genderless, the reader brings a point of view informed in varying degrees by societal norms. Depending on which version of the story students read, they are likely to encounter characteristics which concur or contrast with expectations associated with the gender of the pronouns. This reveals an array of biases which might typically go unnoticed. Students are then challenged with the question: *What traditional gender characteristics come to mind for the contemporary reader encountering the fictional behaviors and characteristics appearing in the novel? What do these expectations reveal about you, the individual reader, and the society which has informed your associations?*

Barren: Taking of Name is the first book of a three-volume series. At the time of the publication of the unit plan, it is available as a free download on Amazon.

Note: "uedin" is pronounced: wā´-dĭn

TIMING AND LOGISTICS

This unit plan can be adapted to program needs depending on whether it is taught on campus or online and how often the class meets. The tentative design is based on a reading schedule of two weeks with the final assessment due after six one-hour class meetings. Please note that the plan is not intended to constitute a course curriculum; rather it is proposed as a two-week unit to be integrated within a larger syllabus. It may be necessary to supplement or trim content depending on factors such as class length, instructional pacing, and the degree to which connections are made to the larger course into which the unit is integrated.

The novel is published in two versions, and it is critical that steps are taken so that both versions can be simultaneously read and compared by two groups in the class. The student roster should therefore be randomly divided into two groups; one group will be assigned to read Version F, and the other group will be assigned to read Version M. Students should be given advanced instruction for downloading the eBook (or purchasing the paper copy of the novel) in whichever version they have been assigned. They will need to have the book in their possession (either on tablets which they are carrying or else the physical paperbacks) at every class session starting from Day 1 of the unit.

Journaling requirements should also be communicated in advance of the first day of unit coverage, as journaling will begin immediately after the opening passages of the novel are read aloud.

Suggestions are provided for outside reading and secondary sources which students may use in their final projects. Instructors are encouraged to personalize the list.

The incorporated reading schedule is based on a plan in which the novel is discussed in segments along with related topics. An alternative approach would be to assign the entire novel with note-taking requirements before commencing with in-class coverage. Similarly, modification of unit content and coverage of related gender studies material is encouraged.

A final project for students is described in a handout included at the end of this unit. Students are guided to complete it over the course of the six class meeting days of the unit, and it is meant to be collected on the first day after coverage of the novel has concluded. Reflection and review of final project must therefore take place at a later date. While a limit of 1000 words might be suitable for the final project, it is not specified on the hand-out, so instructors will need to determine and announce their own limits as well as devise grading rubrics according to their program standards.

AUDIENCE CONCERNS

This unit can be used in a variety of academic settings, but it is written to accommodate a diverse population of post-secondary students. It potentially serves as a great starting point for an audience of students who may be new to conversations about gender. The degree to which the students engage with the subject of gender can dictate whether the instructor chooses to go further with explorations of contemporary literature or modern gender theory.

Assuming that the unit will be used in an open-enrollment class, is it likely the class will have a diversity of opinions regarding gender issues and gender identity. For example, students from more conservative cultures and others who are accustomed to more traditional views on gender norms may find some of the conversations to be challenging. To address these concerns, it will be important to set the stage for all discussion by reiterating that the novel is science fiction and describes a purely hypothetical world. At the same time, it relates to social change occurring in our world in differing degrees depending on culture and geography.

Alternatively, a certain sector of students informed by trends in gender activism may take exception the fact that the selected novel is published in masculine and feminine versions with no "they/them" version for the reader. To address these concerns, the instructor should explain that the author made an editorial choice to publish in versions M and F when it was published in 2015, and that the singular "they/them" has only come into popular usage in the past few years. You can add that the author's recent short stories set in the same alien world have been published with the gender-neutral "zie/zim." Please emphasize that input from any genderfluid or non-binary individual will provide a valuable perspective and will be highly appreciated in course discussion.

Post-secondary education is increasingly influenced by an awareness of the need for receptivity and planning for multiple forms of learning taking place simultaneously within the same course structure and schedule. Given that the benefits of learning differentiation are not limited to K-12 education, college students will have a more rewarding and fruitful learning experience as instructional outcomes are pursued with differentiation. See the appendix at the end of this document for a review of learning-based differentiation needs and suggestions.

JOURNALING

Students will be asked to keep reading journals. The notes they take will factor significantly in gathering content for their final projects. Students may use small notebooks to record their thoughts, impressions, questions, and ideas over the course of the unit's six lessons, or they can journal electronically, but they should be prepared to start journaling from Day 1 of the unit during which a reading of the novel's opening passages is completed in class.

A hand-out, detailing guidelines for journaling, is included as an appendix at the end of this document. It mentions the option of Sketchnotes and provides a web address. You may wish to mention that ideas can be shared via Sketchnotes in class.

CLASS/SESSION 1 – FIRST DAY OF UNIT COVERAGE IN CLASS
Discussing the dynamism of science fiction; Introducing the novel; First look at gender.

By the time the class meets, the following should be in place:

- Students have received preliminary instruction to obtain either Version F or Version M of the novel. They have acquired a copy of their version either in paperback or as a downloaded eBook, they have it with them, and they are prepared to start reading the opening passages of the novel in class.
- Students have journals and are ready for directed notetaking (which will be later described in a hand-out).

Detailed activity breakdown:

1. Statement for discussion: *"Science Fiction simultaneously makes us contemplate the future, while evaluating the present."*
   Note: conversation can be based on sci-fi classics that students are familiar with. Cinema may be more recognizable than literature, and that's ok. Consider *Star Trek, Jurassic Park, Planet of the Apes, Hunger Games*, *Avatar, Dune, Snowpiercer, Blade Runner, Gravity, Mad Max,* etc. Make a list of favorites, and then talk about how they make us contemplate the future and evaluate the present.

2. Introduce novel. Book description on Amazon reads as follows:

   > *Childhood is over, and she has received a name: Elenn. But with the new name comes a new awareness of self, and for her it is deeply troubling. As other uedin youths face their futures with hope and excitement, Elenn must try to understand what it means that she is barren. It is a syndrome that not only deprives a uedin of her passing-of-life; it means that she is destined to deteriorate into depravity and die in misery. This knowledge poisons every aspect of life for Elenn, but can she find a way to cope, to bide her time, perhaps even to summon the strength to bear her burden with uedin dignity?*
   > *In version F, the androgynous uedin are referred to with feminine pronouns. Consider the option of Version M which uses masculine pronouns. Which version to read, Version F or Version M? That is the challenge that I present to my readers before they even buy the book. At one time I was suggesting that readers who identify as male should read M, and those who identify as female should read F. But who knows? Perhaps male gender identification people should read F, and vice-versa. As you wrestle with your own point of view, the story, I hope, will take you to a different one altogether.*

   Explain to students that they have been randomly assigned versions of the novel so that the versions which differ only by the use of gender pronouns can be compared.

3. Distribute and review Journaling hand-out, discuss "sketchnotes" option. [see hand-out]

4. Start the novel together, asking volunteers to read aloud. The prologue and author's note have few pronouns, and students can read along. Before starting the first chapter, direct students to

close their books and just listen to both versions back-to-back. Ask volunteers to read slowly, pausing between paragraphs, keeping in mind that students are listening to one version at a time without reading along.

    a. First reader – prologue and author's note, students reading along. (Either version.)
    b. Second reader – (Version F) first chapter, pages 3-8.
    c. Third reader – (Version M) second chapter, pages 9-16.

5. Statement for discussion: *"The use of gender pronouns influences how we visualize and imagine characters, how we apply expectations, and how we interpret behavior."* Invite students to write their thoughts and impressions in their journals before opening discussion. Tell them they are welcome to comment on any aspect of the first two chapters, but they should include at least one thing about gender. If there are no references to the specific content of the first two chapters, discuss some of the following to direct attention to gender pronouns in the text:

- "She knew where the rocks were and skipped around them." *(Because of the pronoun "she," does one think of a little girl, skipping around rocks?)*
- "Her head jiggled unsteadily." *(Because of the pronoun "her," does one think of an old lady figure with shaky movement?)*
- "He was flattered by this attention, and since it appeared that his aloofness was winning him esteem, he behaved as though he were too tired from his hike back to the capital and didn't want to bother with any of this." *(Because of the pronoun "he," does one imagine a boy with this selfish attitude?)*
- "Here he was, still a child-uedin himself, yet to be named, and even so, there was already the beginnings of a tiny life there within, resting dormant beneath the protection of the bony case. It filled him with awe." *(Does one find it momentarily odd for a character referred to as "he" to be thinking about what is essentially his womb?)*

6. Discuss the author's request that the reader try to imagine *uedin* society as one with neither male nor female identification. For the purposes of the unit, we are turning that challenge around. We are looking for gender-associations because, in addition to trying to understand the androgynous *uedin*, we are examining the mentality of the readers—that is, us humans.

Assessment: Student engagement can be assessed informally based on discussion. If the class is large enough, breaking into small groups for discussion topics can provide opportunities to encourage greater participation and accountability as the groups report back to the larger class. Optionally, journals can be visually checked to verify that students are participating as directed.

Assignment:

1. Read to page 72 (end of *Part 1*).
2. Write notes/commentary in your reading journals.
3. (optional) Log into *[instructor determined online discussion forum]* at *[designated time]* to discuss preliminary ideas about how gender is represented in popular science fiction.

CLASS/SESSION 2
Discussing categories of genre; Gender associations.

Assumptions:
- Students have read the novel up to page 69.
- Students have written some notes/commentary in their reading journals.
- (if online discussion forums are being conducted) Students have had a preliminary discussion about how gender is represented in popular science fiction.

Detailed Activity Breakdown:

1. Journal check & sharing. Here is the opportunity to have a conversation with students about how they are settling into their versions of the novel. Are they visualizing the *uedin* as non-binary individuals, or are the gender pronouns influencing how they imagine the characters?

2. Survey of genre vis-à-vis *Taking of Name*. As with music, some literature falls into clear genre classification while other defies categorization. Interact with the class to discuss the genre of *Taking of Name*.
    a. <u>Are we dealing with fiction or nonfiction?</u> (The distinction between fiction and nonfiction may not need review, but it is mentioned only to show how genre is divided into groupings from larger to smaller categories starting with the largest and most basic. Students will all understand that *Taking of Name* is fiction.)
    b. <u>Realistic or speculative fiction?</u> (Speculative fiction ventures into worlds which do not exist in our known reality, history, nature, or present universe; it is conceived via the employment of active imagination. *Taking of Name* is speculative fiction.)
    c. <u>Which branch of speculative fiction?</u> Speculative fiction includes the following genres:
        i. Fantasy genre – often features traditional elements such as mythical creatures (elves, etc.), and magic or witchcraft.
        ii. Supernatural fiction/horror genre – often contradicts materialistic assumptions about the world, employing ghosts, demons, or monsters, and often featuring violence and death.
        iii. Science Fiction genre – often features hypothetical future technologies, interstellar travel or time travel, and aliens/cyborgs/mutants.
        iv. Superhero genre – often centers on heroes with extraordinary powers who fight against supervillains.
        v. Alternative History genre – reimagines historical events as if they happened in a different way.
    (*Taking of Name*, while foregoing many of the features of classic science fiction such as hypothetical future technologies or space travel, does focus on a world populated by an alien race, and therefore best fits into the category of science fiction.)
    d. <u>Hard or Soft Science Fiction?</u> Hard science fiction puts emphasis on physics, astronomy, biology, and engineering, with a concern for accuracy and plausibility. Soft science fiction puts emphasis on psychology, political science, and anthropology, with a concern for human emotions and relationships. (Most sci-fi includes elements of both and falls somewhere on a continuum. *Taking of Name* leans toward Soft science fiction.)

e. <u>Utopian or Dystopian?</u> Utopian science fiction is set in imaginary societies which manifest our hopes and ideals; dystopian science fiction is set in imaginary societies which manifest our fears and anxieties. (As *uedin* society is portrayed as peace-loving and harmonious, it falls more into the category of utopian science fiction. Note: this will be discussed in more detail in another class session.)

f. Is there a subgenre of science fiction which concerns itself with gender in a fundamental way? (Many writers have used science fiction to explore gender roles, but rather than seeing gender-centered sci-fi as a subgenre itself, it is probably better to see it as an occasional theme that occurs randomly across multiple subgenres.)

3. Discuss examples of the various genres occurring under the umbrella of speculative fiction and how gender is commonly treated within those genres. Talk about the examples in the table below, and invite students to share additional examples, exceptions, etc.

Genre	Example / How gender is treated within that example.
Fantasy	Example: *Game of Thrones*. It belongs in the fantasy genre because magical powers play an important role in the story. Due to cultural borrowings from conceptions of medieval Europe, fantasy usually features dominant male figures. *BBC Arts & Entertainment News* reported that female characters speak about three times less than male characters in the miniseries.
Supernatural/Horror	Example: Stephen King's *The Shining*. It belongs to the horror genre because it involves ghosts, and it incorporates violence and death. As is often the case with horror, the mad killer is male and the terrified victim is female.
Science Fiction	Example: *Star Wars*. Set in the distant future and featuring interstellar travel, aliens, and cyborgs, it has all the features of quintessential science fiction. The majority of prominent characters are male, but Princess Leia and Rey Skywalker represent significant strong female characters.
Superhero	Example: *Batman*. Follows a classic pattern with a hero who wields extraordinary powers and fights against supervillains with evil motivations. Batman is hyper-masculine; Catwoman presents an interesting female stereotype of the flirtatious femme fatale.
Alternative History	Example: Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*. It reimagines World War II history with whimsically fabricated assassination plots against Germany's Nazi leadership. The historical period spotlighted was very male-dominated; so is the speculative alternative history.

4. Summarize as a class what students believe to be the proper genre categorization of *Taking of Name*. (Note: as students advance through the novel, they may get a better sense of it as being a work of Soft Science Fiction with utopian aspects and a theme concerned with gender and identity issues. However, for the purposes of this lesson, it is sufficient if they can engage in discussion about the varying genres of speculative fiction so that conversations can continue about how societal gender roles are revealed within them.)

5. Distribute and discuss hand-out for final projects. [See hand-out]. Note: the unit is designed to be taught over the course of six class meetings; due date for final projects is proposed for the first class date after the unit is completed. (Appendices of this unit plan, "WORKS CITED" and "ADDITIONAL SOURCES / RECOMMENDED READINGS" can provide possible outside sources for student consideration. Instructors are encouraged to seek out additional recommendations to create their own list and distribute it when introducing the final project.)

Assessment: Student engagement can be assessed informally based on discussion. If the class is large enough, breaking into small groups for discussion topics can provide opportunities to encourage greater participation and accountability as the groups report back to the larger class. Optionally, journals can be visually checked to verify that students are participating as directed.

Assignment:

1. Read to page 122 (up to *The Arrival of Rains*).
2. Write notes/commentary in your reading journals.
3. Choose concept for projects based on directions on the hand-out.
4. (optional) Log into *[instructor determined online discussion forum]* at *[designated time]* to discuss preliminary ideas about your understanding of utopian and dystopian science fiction.

CLASS /SESSION 3
Utopian/dystopian themes; Internal conflict

Assumptions:
- Students have read the novel to page 122 (up to *The Arrival of Rains*).
- Students have written some notes/commentary in their reading journals.
- Students have read the final project hand-out and are in the process of conceptualizing their projects.
- (if online discussion forums are being conducted) Students have had a preliminary discussion about their understanding of utopian and dystopian science fiction.

Detailed Activity Breakdown:

1. Journal check & discussion about assigned reading. Having read to page 122, students are now in *Part 3* of the novel. The protagonist, Elenn, has had a realization of his/her barren status. Invite students to share any commentary from their journals or sketchnotes. Remind them that a primary focus of the journals should be reflection on the pronoun for their version of the book in addition to other observations about gender, *uedin* society, or the story in general. Ask if any student has any comment specific to pronoun usage. In addition to whatever they bring up, discuss the last paragraph of *Part 2* on page 112. Ask volunteers to read the paragraph in both versions while the class listens with particular attention to the gender pronouns.

   Version F:
   "Tilke!" Elenn protested. Tilke stopped momentarily to allow her whatever lame apology she wanted to make. "Tilke… you'll be a great server! Tilke, I'm so proud of you!" The words rang empty in Tilke's ears. She walked briskly from the pavilion and up the hill without looking back.

   Version M:
   "Tilke!" Elenn protested. Tilke stopped momentarily to allow him whatever lame apology he wanted to make. "Tilke… you'll be a great server! Tilke, I'm so proud of you!" The words rang empty in Tilke's ears. He walked briskly from the pavilion and up the hill without looking back.

   How does this scene resonate differently by version? The scene depicts an emotionally complicated situation between two friends involving hurt feelings and resentment. Is it reminiscent of feminine or masculine psychology? Why do we make that conclusion? (Girls are more emotionally complex than boys—is it true? Is an emotionally complex boy subtly prompted by such expectations to question his gender identity?)

2. Statement for discussion: *"Utopian science fiction is set in imaginary societies which manifest hopes and ideals; dystopian science fiction is set in imaginary societies which manifest fears and anxieties." Note: You may start by asking students what springs to mind upon hearing the words "utopia" and "dystopia." A deeper conversation about utopian and dystopian visions will consider the question of who decides what an ideal society is and how readers may respond differently to varying notions of it.*

a. Examples of dystopian societies in science fiction:
    i. *Brave New World* (Author Aldous Huxley envisions a futuristic World State in which psychological manipulation and environmentally-engineered social hierarchy result in a nightmarish existence for humanity.)
    ii. *Hunger Games* (Extreme economic inequity meets a social appetite for violence. The result is a ritual of brutal games involving forced killing for purposes of entertainment for the elite residents of Panem's Capitol in this popular novel series from author Suzanne Collins.)
b. Examples of utopian societies in science fiction:
    i. *Avatar* (The Na'vi, who inhabit the moon Pandora, live in complete harmony with nature and worship a mother goddess named Eywa. Their sustainable lifestyle reflects an ideal envisioned by the writer/producer James Cameron).
    ii. *Left Hand of Darkness* (Author Ursula Le Guin portrays Gethan society as one with no fixed gender characteristics and subsequently no instinct for war, a communal sharing of the tasks of raising children, and an absence of rape and seduction.)
Note: Given time allowance and resource availability, excerpts can be read from original texts or film clips played to provide more complete illustrations of the examples provided.

3. What kind of world is described in *Taking of Name*?
From the prologue: *"The uedin neither struggle for survival nor face predators, and as a by-product of their androgynous nature and the absence of any innate mating competition, they are inclined toward neither warfare amongst themselves nor power struggle."* What other traits are attributable to the *uedin*? (Students may point out that the *uedin* are cooperative, spiritual, put high value on poetry and aesthetics, are herbivores, etc. Discussion should lead to general consensus that *Taking of Name* is intended to be more utopian than dystopian. Meaningful follow-up question might include *"Does gender need to be removed for a fictional world to seem truly utopian, or are there examples where gender remains?"* and *"How might the absence of predator threat and mating competition support or not support the evolution of a peaceful society?"*)

4. In *Taking of Name*, non-binary gender seems to emerge as an aspect of an idealized world. In contrast, consider *Star Trek's* episode entitled *"The Outcast,"* in which a non-binary society was "dystopian" for an individual who identified as female and was subsequently subjected to denunciation and conversion therapy.

[view YouTube video: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQ0xKWGU6b8**]

(Discussion may lead to the idea that persecution and oppression are problems which transcend the specifics of any particular gender or sexuality, especially in science fiction scenarios. Note that the barren are not persecuted in *Taking of Name*—further evidence that *uedin* society is conceived as being more utopian.)

5. For discussion: Consider the types of conflict that occur in literature to drive the plot.

Person vs. Person *Person vs. Nature* *Person vs. Society*
Person vs. Technology *Person vs. Supernatural* *Person vs. Self*
Person vs. Destiny

- ➤ Which types of conflict are particularly suited to dystopian science fiction?
- ➤ Which types are particularly suited to utopian science fiction?
- ➤ How does the idealized world of the *uedin* contribute to the development of the conflict in *Taking of Name*?
- ➤ How might the internal conflict of the protagonist (Elenn) in *Taking of Name* compare or contrast with internal conflict experienced by individuals who wrestle with gender identity and/or sexuality?

(Dystopian settings are particularly suited to external conflicts like Person vs. Person, Person vs. Society and Person vs. Technology. Utopian settings are particularly suited to internal conflicts like Person vs. Self and Person vs. Destiny. At the end of *Part 2,* the newly-named Elenn comes to the realization that he/she is barren. Given what we know about *uedin* society, individuals with the dreaded barren syndrome do not have to contend with social discrimination or ostracism. They are treated with compassion and respect. The struggle of the barren is not against bigotry, but rather, it is a struggle for self-acceptance and personal dignity. In our real-life society, the internal struggle of individuals who wrestle with gender identity/sexuality is complicated by external forces such as social discrimination and prejudice.)

6. Q & A for final projects. (Students should now be prepared to start outlining their projects and gathering sources.)

Assessment: Student engagement can be assessed informally based on discussion. If the class is large enough, breaking into small groups for discussion topics can provide opportunities to encourage greater participation and accountability as groups report back to the larger class. Optionally, journals can be visually checked to verify that students are participating as directed.

Assignment:

1. Read to page 181 (end of *Part 3*).
2. Write notes/commentary in your reading journals.
3. Gather at least 2 outside sources and write outline for project.
4. (optional) Log into *[instructor determined online discussion forum]* at *[designated time]* to discuss initial ideas about what constitutes a hero in the science fiction genre.

The Hero's Journey; Attention to Gender in Literary Analysis

Assumptions:
- Students have read the novel up to page 181.
- Students have written some notes/commentary in their reading journals.
- Students have gathered at least 2 outside sources and have written outlines for their projects.
- (if online discussion forums are being conducted) Students have had a preliminary discussion about what constitutes a hero in science fiction.

Detailed Activity Breakdown:

1. Journal check & discussion about assigned reading. Having read to page 181, students are at the end of Part 3. Elenn has received confirmation of barren status, survived a near drowning which presented a suicidal temptation, and finally experienced a traumatic event involving the death of a *wetuedin*. The masters who surround Elenn are consistently supportive but are limited in their capacity to help the protagonist face his/her crisis. Invite students to share any commentary from their journals or sketchnotes. Remind them that a primary focus of the journals should be reflection on the pronoun for their version of the book in addition to other observations about gender, *uedin* society, or the story in general. Ask if any student has any comment specific to pronoun usage. In addition to whatever they bring up, discuss the scene that occurs on page 165:

   > Henik tried to sustain the attitude of guard service, but there were disturbed tones in her voice as she spoke. "I would guess that the intruder caught the wetuedin with her hands and killed it by holding its back appendages and swinging it against these rocks. Then she must have cut open its skull with some sort of tool."

   How does this scene resonate differently by version? (A guard is describing a brutal act. Does the description of such brutality provoke different feelings if the pronouns change?)

2. Statement for discussion: "A pattern exists in human storytelling in which an individual embarks on an adventure, faces a great challenge, and returns home transformed; it is the archetype of the Hero's Journey."

3. Watch 11-minute video **The HERO'S JOURNEY – Joseph Campbell**:
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNPcefZKmZ0

4. Examples of the Hero's Journey in science fiction:
   a. Luke Skywalker of *Star Wars*.
   b. Katniss Everdeen of *Hunger Games*.

   Note: Luke Skywalker was not ultramasculine in *Star Wars*, and actor Mark Hamill, who played the role, once said that Skywalker's sexuality was open to interpretation. Likewise, Katniss Everdeen, a hunter and provider for her family, was not conformed to feminine

stereotypes. Perhaps hero identification is *necessarily* transcendent of gender roles. And yet, the simplified cartoon notion of the hero is often one of a knight (male) who rescues a princess (female). How is the concept of the hero evolving with society?

5. How does protagonist Elenn go through a type of Hero's Journey in the novel?
   a. Is Elenn a stereotypical protagonist/hero?
   b. What about her/his challenges? Is it difficult to think of internal/psychological struggle as a worthy challenge?

   Note: The crisis/challenge of the protagonist in *Taking of Name* is one of self-acceptance in the face of a disturbing and frightening notion of his/her personal future. Psychological victory over despair leads to strength and vision. This pattern of internal struggle and hope can be pertinent for the community of individuals with a vested interest in the evolving understanding of gender in the modern world. An essential feature of the Hero's Journey is the "ordinary" status of the protagonist at the onset of their adventure. *Taking of Name*, the first book of a sci-fi trilogy, paints a picture of a young and innocent individual who experiences a dark epiphany and sees their future life as one of derangement and doom. This may parallel the experience of many LGBTQ individuals who share a common traumatic childhood reckoning with an unwanted personal identity.

6. Gender-focused literary analysis of science fiction can explore the following:
   a. How do sci-fi characters perpetuate or challenge traditional gender stereotypes?
   b. Who are sci-fi writers who deal with gender issues in their writing?
   c. How does gender play into sci-fi literary patterns including:
      ✓ utopian/dystopian elements
      ✓ Hero's Journey archetypes
      ✓ Sci-Fi functioning as a vehicle for contemplating the future and evaluating the present
      ✓ literary features commonly found in science fiction (aliens, space exploration, telepathy, speculative technologies, etc.)

7. Final Project – reminders, Q & A.

Assessment: Student engagement can be assessed informally based on discussion. If the class is large enough, breaking into small groups for discussion topics can provide opportunities to encourage greater participation and accountability as groups report back to the larger class. Optionally, journals can be visually checked to verify that students are participating as directed.

Assignment:

1. Read to page 236.
2. Write notes/commentary in your reading journals.
3. Complete first draft of project.
4. (optional) Log into *[instructor determined online discussion forum]* at *[designated time]* to discuss thoughts about how nonbinary characters are being developed in the novel.

Treatment of Binary & Non-binary Gender in SF

Assumptions:

- Students have read to page 236.
- Students have written notes/commentary in their reading journals.
- Students have completed their first drafts of projects.
- (if online discussion forums are being conducted) Students have had a preliminary discussion about how nonbinary characters are developed in the novel.

Detailed Activity Breakdown:

1. Journal check & discussion about assigned reading. Having read to page 236, students have read about the calamity at Redrock outvillage. Elenn is deeply moved by the death of Hela. Invite students to share any commentary from their journals or sketchnotes. Remind them that a primary focus of the journals should be reflection on the pronoun for their version of the book in addition to other observations about gender, *uedin* society, or the story in general. Ask if any student has any comment specific to pronoun usage. In addition to whatever they bring up, discuss the following:

   a. Students reading Version F encounter no occurrence of masculine pronouns throughout the novel, but Students reading Version M will notice that both Lern Beyana and the Vadime are referred to with the alternate (feminine) pronouns. What is the result of the author's decision to use feminine alternates for Version M but not masculine alternates for Version F? *(The use of feminine pronouns for both Lern Beyana and the Vadime within Version M serves to contrast those beings from the uedin, but the author apparently saw risk in the masculine associations that would have occurred in the opposite situation. For example, referring to Lern Beyana with masculine pronouns might have been overly reminiscent of the western notion of a paternal God.)*

   b. Elenn's feelings about Redrock outvillager Nehu introduce a scenario that may register as same-sex physical attraction to readers. Reader response is likely to vary according the reader's own gender identity and sexual preference. Compare:

      (Version M)

      One of the outvillage masters, Master Nehu, was one generation his elder, the same as Master Deben. Nehu had a brightness and an energy in his eyes, but Elenn tried never to look at him. The first time he had met Nehu, ELenn had noticed the fat, pronounced vein that ran in a curve up the back of Nehu's neck to his skullwomb. Now, he felt ashamed of himself every time he saw him, regardless of the angle.

(Version F)

> *One of the outvillage masters, Master Nehu, was one generation her elder, the same as Master Deben. Nehu had a brightness and an energy in her eyes, but Elenn tried never to look at her. The first time she had met Nehu, ELenn had noticed the fat, pronounced vein that ran in a curve up the back of Nehu's neck to her skullwomb. Now, she felt ashamed of herself every time she saw her, regardless of the angle.*

2. Statement for discussion: "Nonbinary gender is attributed to characters in sci-fi literature as it increasingly stretches to describe a world which could transcend gender roles." (What examples can you think of? Have recent science fiction narratives done this in a way that you think is successful?)

3. In 1970, Ursula Le Guin won both the Hugo and the Nebula awards for her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* which featured a race of androgynous humans. A famous line from novel read, "The King was pregnant." Watch 7-minute video **The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula K. Le Guin | Review**

    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwMkzMhR3kQ

    Discuss: Why do some contemporary readers take issue with Le Guin's decision to refer to the androgynous Gethenians with masculine pronouns? Do they have a legitimate complaint?

4. Science fiction franchise *Star Trek* has been reflecting the American imagination since 1965. Gender issues have been explored in multiple episodes. For a light-hearted sampling of images dealing with non-binary characters, watch 4-minute video **More Non-Binary Characters on Star Trek TNG.** (Before starting the video, tell students to write down—either in their reading journals or on a piece of scrap paper—any thoughts that come to mind as they watch the video collage of Star Trek scenes which address alternative gender identities. Challenge them to have at least one comment to share.)

    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_qKN7ht-fQ

    Share notes and discuss reactions after viewing the video.

5. Final Project – additional Q & A, review of requirements.

Assessment: Student engagement can be assessed informally based on discussion. If the class is large enough, breaking into small groups for discussion topics can provide opportunities to encourage greater participation and accountability as the groups report back to the larger class. Optionally, journals can be visually checked to verify that students are participating as directed.

Assignment:

1. Read to page 283 (end of book).
2. Write notes/commentary in your reading journals.

3. Commence with final draft of project (try to have it half complete by next class).
4. (optional) Log into *[instructor determined online discussion forum]* at *[designated time]* to discuss gender stereotypes in science fiction.

CLASS /SESSION 6 – LAST DAY OF UNIT COVERAGE IN CLASS
Review of Novel and Related Gender Topics; Media Literacy; Discussion of Final Projects

Assumptions:

- Students have finished the novel.
- Students have written notes/commentary in their reading journals.
- Students are approximately half-way through with the final drafts of their projects.
- (if online discussion forums are being conducted) Students have had a preliminary discussion about gender stereotypes in science fiction.

Detailed Activity Breakdown:

1. Journal check & discussion about assigned reading. Having completed the novel, students have read the outcome of Book 1 of the Barren Trilogy. Elenn, deeply moved by the tragic events at Redrock, nonetheless feels great reluctance to accept the medical intervention. But after witnessing another barren beautifully engaging in shifting exercises, Elenn decides that there is nobility in perseverance and decides to accept the intervention. Ask if any student has any comment specific to pronoun usage. In addition to whatever they bring up, discuss the following passage from pages 267-268, first looking at Version F:

> "What school did you come from, Master?" asked the child-uedin.
> "I'm from Quarterhouse," answered Elenn.
> "Oh, Quarterhouse," said the child-uedin, "You must know lots of verses."
> "Yes, I know hundreds of them," said Elenn.
> "Tell me a verse."
> Elenn tried to think of something suitable. She thought of one that had the word 'bells' in it.
> "All right—here's a verse written by a server. She lived long ago, and she liked riddles.
> *Fluttering feathers back and forth*
> *Swinging bells back and forth*
> *All things reaching back and forth*
> *They always reach for me.*
> Who am 'I'?"
> The blind child-uedin smiled ticklishly. "No, I don't know. What is it?"
> "Are you sure? Think about it," said Elenn. She repeated the verse.
> "I don't know what it is, but I like the part about the bells!"
> "Well, now, that's right, your school is Bells, isn't it!" She waited a minute to see if the child-uedin could figure out the riddle, then gave the answer.
> "Shall I tell you? All right… it's *gravity*!" said Elenn.
> "Oh yes, *gravity*!" said the unnamed with excitement. "*Gravity*." She said it again, proud of knowing the word. It was a big word for a small child-uedin, but she knew what it meant. "That's a very clever riddle!" She reached her little hand over and patted Elenn on the arm. "Tell me another one!"

Compare to Version M:

> "What school did you come from, Master?" asked the child-uedin.
>
> "I'm from Quarterhouse," answered Elenn.
>
> "Oh, Quarterhouse," said the child-uedin, "You must know lots of verses."
>
> "Yes, I know hundreds of them," said Elenn.
>
> "Tell me a verse."
>
> Elenn tried to think of something suitable. He thought of one that had the word 'bells' in it.
>
> "All right—here's a verse written by a server. He lived long ago, and he liked riddles.
>
> *Fluttering feathers back and forth*
> *Swinging bells back and forth*
> *All things reaching back and forth*
> *They always reach for me.*
>
> Who am 'I'?"
>
> The blind child-uedin smiled ticklishly. "No, I don't know. What is it?"
>
> "Are you sure? Think about it," said Elenn. He repeated the verse.
>
> "I don't know what it is, but I like the part about the bells!"
>
> "Well, now, that's right, your school is Bells, isn't it!" He waited a minute to see if the child-uedin could figure out the riddle, then gave the answer.
>
> "Shall I tell you? All right… it's *gravity*!" said Elenn.
>
> "Oh yes, *gravity*!" said the unnamed with excitement. "*Gravity*." He said it again, proud of knowing the word. It was a big word for a small child-uedin, but he knew what it meant. "That's a very clever riddle!" He reached his little hand over and patted Elenn on the arm. "Tell me another one!"

The scene describes interaction between a caring adult and a vulnerable child-uedin. Does the use of feminine or masculine pronouns bring any subtle difference to the mind of the reader? (Traditionally, females are more associated with nurturing, tender, or motherly behavior towards small children. This scene may therefore elicit associations as the reader sees the "female" Elenn as *appropriately* gentle and kind, or the "male" Elenn as *exceptionally* so. Have we humans traditionally held an assumption that women are kinder toward children than men? Do we still hold that assumption? Is it a legitimate notion, given that women bear children?)

2. Statement for discussion: "When messaging is overtly manipulative, it is sometimes called propaganda, but when it is presumptive, socially integrated, and presupposed by both the producer and the receiver of the messaging, it is better recognized as a <u>cultural default</u>. Cultural defaults regarding gender have greatly changed in contemporary society, and they are continuing to change." (What cultural defaults regarding gender have you encountered? How do you think these are changing as you have grown older?)

3. Discuss media literacy and changing of gender roles in popular science fiction. Shifting societal expectations and cultural defaults with regard to the role of women are reflected in popular science fiction. Early science fiction had a very limited view of women at a time when women's roles were bound by traditional male-dominated societal values. The genre has served as a

vehicle for watching the evolving potential and complexity of female psychology and identity. Watch the 11-minute video **Sci-Fi Short Film "Evolution of Women in Hollywood" | DUST** :

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxn10plAL98

Possible topic for follow-up: What is meant by the statement made at the end of the video, *"The future is female, and Hollywood is starting to understand that"*? How does this notion play out in the roles of all gender identities?

4. Invite students to share: How did the concurrence or contrast between your own gender identity and the version of the novel you read have an impact on your experience of the novel? Was students' ability to relate to the protagonist influenced by whether they concurred or contrasted in gender identity with the version that they read? Did the story in general suggest a more male or female experience? Or did the story succeed in putting the reader in the mindset of a *uedin*—a non-binary/non-gendered individual?

5. Review of theme in *Taking of Name*. What is implied at the end of the novel by Elenn's agreement to receive the medical intervention, even though it means facing a future of uncertainty? (It important to note that the utopian setting for the novel resulted in an internal rather than an external conflict. The protagonist did not have to confront an antagonistic society. Instead, the protagonist had to resolve internally to live with what appeared to be a particular, personal misfortune. Inspiration to accept the challenges of an unwanted fate came from seeing virtue and courage demonstrated by others. So, even though the conflict was internal, it was resolved with external influences.) In conclusion, watch this 5-minute video on the power of stories to change our point of view, **How Fiction Can Change Reality – Jessica Wise:**

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctaPAm14L10

After the video, follow-up discussion can wrap up any remaining thoughts or commentary on the novel or the unit.

6. Final projects – remaining Q & A

Assessment: Student engagement can be assessed informally based on discussion. If the class is large enough, breaking into small groups for discussion topics can provide opportunities to encourage greater participation and accountability as the groups report back to the larger class. Optionally, journals can be visually checked to verify that students are participating as directed.

Assignment:

1. Completed final projects along with reading journals will be collected at the beginning of the next class.

READING JOURNAL

Please keep a reading journal and write down at least a few notes with every increment of assigned reading. The notes you take will factor significantly in developing content for your final project. Notebook checks will provide accountability to help you keep up with reading and encourage you to engage and respond to the story as it unfolds.

The alien "uedin" world described in *Taking of Name* is genderless, but you as a human readers bring a point of view highly influenced by traditional gender norms. Depending on which version of the story you read (employing either feminine or masculine pronouns), you may encounter characteristics which concur or contrast with expectations associated with the gender of the pronouns. This reveals an array of biases which might typically go unnoticed. The objective of your journaling is to *notice* them. Notes should be primarily focused on issues of gender as they occur to you as the reader. Here are examples of types of notes which might later be helpful in developing ideas for the final project:

- *As I read Version F and encounter characters referred to as "she," I imagine a feminine society. One scene that comes to mind is…*

- *As I read Version M and encounter situations involving characters referred to as "he," it occurs to me that social biases may occur to contemporary readers, such as…*

- *I am reading Version F, but I find that I imagine Elenn, the protagonist, as more masculine than feminine. One scene in which this happens for me is…*

- *Pronouns aside, I feel that the description of the uedin effectively portrays an androgynous race. Behaviors that reflect a nonbinary psychology include…*

- *Elenn's struggle to accept her barren identity may be similar to some people's struggle with their gender identity. For example, …*

- *I find it interesting that even in Version M, Lern Beyana is referred to with feminine pronouns. One reason the author may have chosen to do that is…*

- *As I read Version M, I find myself imagining the community of capital guards as a masculine environment. I realize it is my own mind that projects masculinity because…*

- *The uedin are a very gentle race. If I contrast them with the Klingons of the Star Trek franchise, the uedin seem feminine and the Klingon seem masculine. This makes me think about…*

If you are interested in an alternative form of journaling, you may consider using Sketchnotes, a mode of recording information which involves drawing and idea mapping. For more information including a mini-workshop video, visit:

https://rohdesign.com/sketchnotes/

FINAL PROJECT

For your Gender in Science Fiction final project, address the following in an essay, research paper, or approved alternative format:

The alien "*uedin*" world described in *Taking of Name* is genderless, but we as human readers bring a point of view highly influenced by traditional gender norms. Depending on which version of the story you read (employing either feminine or masculine pronouns), you have encountered characteristics which concur or contrast with traditional expectations associated with the gender of the pronouns. This reveals an array of biases which might typically go unnoticed. The objective of your essay is to *notice* the biases, discuss them, and extrapolate what they indicate with regards to our changing society. Please integrate **at least two** the following into your project:

- Referring to notes taken while reading whichever version of the novel you were assigned, identify social biases which may occur for contemporary readers. Example: The adult *uedin* are addressed *with the honorific "Master" such as with Master Domas, Master Benar, etc. A reader of version F may find it odd that "she" is called Master Domas. Why? Because we associate the word "master" with maleness*? Select 3-5 such occurrences and discuss in depth why they are noteworthy and what they reveal.

- Identify the novel's genre and provide commentary on how gender pronouns do or do not factor in genre category.

- Discuss utopian/dystopian elements and provide commentary on how gender does or does not factor.

- Discuss whether gender does or does not have an effect on the archetype of the Hero's Journey and describe how Elenn's story can be seen as following a Hero's Journey in *Taking of Name*.

- Explore the barren condition and how it resonates with different gender pronouns.

- Discuss how gender roles would shift in our society if some of the *uedin* principles and traditions were implemented or if humans had the same life cycle as the *uedin*.

- Explore secondary sources which may include (comparative) sci-fi short stories, documentary or sci-fi videos, relevant articles on gender and/or science fiction, or other approved outside sources. You may use any of the sources referenced in the duration of the unit (See WORKS CITED page) or any of the other suggestions (See ADDITIONAL SOURCES/RECOMMENDED READINGS page). Secondary sources must be cited in APA format.

DUE DATE: _____

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ADDITIONAL SOURCES / RECOMMENDED READINGS

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Although the unit is designed for post-secondary students with an expectation of minimum basic academic skills, an important component of successful teaching consists of receptivity and planning for multiple forms of learning taking place simultaneously within the same course structure and schedule. Given that the benefits of learning differentiation are not limited to K-12 education, college students will demonstrate more significant and rewarding learning experience as instructional outcomes are pursued with differentiation.

The differentiation needs can be organized into the following categories:

1. Ample opportunity for practice and reinforcement. Individual students may require extra time and practice to achieve unit goals. The novel on which this unit is based happens to be written at a level that accommodates a wide range of reading skills. That, in addition to the journaling, which is executed at a skill level determined individually by all participating students, provides practice and reinforcement that potentially benefits students in academic pursuits even beyond the unit and the course in which it is taught. Completing the reading assignments and keeping up with journaling requirements may provide momentum for the additional outside reading and final project which demand greater diligence. If you have a student or students who require remediation in reading and writing skills, you can assist by making specific recommendations with regards to their outside reading selection, and reviewing their journal entries with them to provide feedback related to grammar and composition.

2. Emphasis on depth and proficiency over speed. To the maximum degree that scheduling allows, it is best to deemphasize deadlines and exercise flexibility as needed on an individual basis with regards to performance and task completion. The reading is assigned in increments designed so that the unit can be completed over the course of six class sessions, but where necessary, it should be adapted to make sure that all students can absorb the content and engage meaningfully in the accompanying discussions and analysis. If you have a student or students who have exceptional difficulty keeping up with deadlines, you can make accommodations by either adjusting the length requirements or extending deadlines to the degree admissible by the academic standards of your institution.

3. Learning by doing. Unit objectives will be best met by engaging in related activities throughout the process. As much as possible, students should be directed to actively take part in the higher-level thinking skills involved in unit goals. Avoid a lecturing format, and build lessons around inquiry that demands participation and engagement. If you have a student or students who need additional coaching and support, keep the unit goals in mind. Encourage the students who are feeling challenged to engage with the topics of the unit by soliciting their opinions and taking them seriously.

4. <u>Team-based learning</u>. Collaborative learning can be arranged by putting students in groups for class discussions and online forums. The forums included as optional assignments may be especially valuable for students who need additional modeling and suggestion from their peers when it comes to analytical tasks. If you have a student or students who struggle to meet expectations working alone, you can be cognizant of the peers with whom they are grouped for discussions and forums. Even if no need for accommodation is evident, group dynamics will result in shared insight and greater success for all participants.

5. <u>Instruction designed for student attainment</u>. Regular clarification of outcome goals with frequent check-ins will maximize student success. Note that each lesson includes a reiteration of what students have done in preparation for the class and a review of the assigned reading and journaling. Similarly, each lesson ends with reminders of work expected and opportunities to address the requirements of the final project. In general, student attainment will be maximized when they are allowed to pursue their own learning styles according to their strengths. An example of this is giving the option of sketch-notes as an alternative journaling format. If you have a student or students who require stronger guidance and clarification of unit goals, meet with them individually to help them stay on track.

Barren: Taking of Name is the first book of *The Barren Trilogy*. All three books of the trilogy are available in both versions M and F in paperback or as eBooks. For more information, please to go jonanthonyperrotti.com.