

For April, which is poetry month, we decided to have a poem a day challenge and also read to verse novels and compare them. A verse novel is a book that is told in poem form, you might be asking so it's just a poem and that's where you are wrong. A verse novel is in poem form, but the book is not like a poem because it tells a story. Now you might be asking how it is different than a standard prose novel which is pretty simple it's written in poem form.

In this essay I will compare two verse novels, *The Weight of Water* and *Becoming Billie Holiday*, by these points: is the subject matter right for poetry, Is the protagonist right for poetry, and what does the poem look like on the page.

Before I compare these books, I would like to give you a summary about both of them. *The Weight of Water* is written by Sarah Crossan and is a Realistic Fiction with 205 pages. This book is set in present time in England. However, the book goes throughout the years of the main characters life. The book is told from a first-person viewpoint. The main characters names is Kasienka, she is 13 years old girl but she is put in a 5th-grade class because she is an immigrant for Poland. She starts off the book like any other immigrant would moving to a new country and a new school, pretty shy. However, as time goes on she starts opening up to people and making friends, and enemies. She came to the country with her mother when they received a letter saying that her father was in England and now they are searching for him. People mostly like Kasienka but not many people talk to her because she is still learning English.

My second book, *Becoming Billie Holiday*, this book is written by Carole Boston Weatherford and is a historical fiction with 109 pages. This book is set in Philadelphia, 1915 at the beginning of the story. However, the story moves throughout the years of her early life. This book is told from a first-person viewpoint. The main character's name in this book is Eleanor but she names herself Billie Holiday. She grows up jumping home to home because she is living with an only mother and is not well supported financially. At the start of the book, you see the main character stealing and getting into fights but then tries to turn her life around.

Finally, we will start comparing both of the verse novels now. In comparing *The Weight of Water* and *Becoming Billie Holiday*, it is important to consider if the subject matter is right for poetry. In *The Weight of Water*, the subject is mainly about Family, Immigration, and Bullying. One of the subjects is family because her mom and her are trying to find

her father all throughout the story. Another reason why it is about family is because at the start of the book her grandma and mom are arguing, For example, “Honey, you need to come back you have a child!” “ No! We will find him and we will not leave” (39). This shows that one of the subjects is family because Kasienka has to think if finding her father is worth it. Another subject that the book explores is immigration because Kasienka and her mom are from Poland and Kasienka is having to go to a class of kids that are way younger than her. For example, “ I’m 13 but I’m getting put into a class of 5th graders, they say it will help me learn”(47). This shows that one of the subjects is immigration because Kasienka is having to go into a younger age group for school because she is and learning English. **Bullying** is another main subject in this book. For example, “ Clair has finally stopped bullying me and is not just ignoring me, which I think is better.” (204) This shows that the book also talks about bullying because Clair was bullying her and she finally stopped.

For the other book, *Becoming Billie Holiday*, the main subjects that they talk about in the book are racism, poverty, and family. To show racism in this book is an understatement. For example, “ After being called “n\*\*ger wrench” down South and “high yellow in Detroit.” (108) This shows some of the extremely racist things that people have said to her on her journey to become an African- American female Jazz Singer. Another subject that is in the book is poverty. For example, “ Me and my mother never really had a set home we were always moving house to house and from family member to another family members house.” (57) This shows that they were in poverty when in the text it says we never had a set home. The last subject that the book explores is family. For example, “ The court took me away from my mother saying that she was unfit from parenting. They took me away and put me in all girls catholic school.” (40) This shows that the book is about family because she is trying to stay with her mom.

The way that books are similar is because both of them are about family and they are both getting put down by society. One interesting thing that I found about these books is that in *The Weight of Water* they are trying to put their family back together, but in *Becoming Billie Holiday* the society is trying to break them apart with her dad leaving Kasienka and her mom, and the government splitting them up and saying that she is an unfit mother. Also, another difference that I saw between this book is that they were both getting bullied, but they were getting bullied for different reasons. In *Becoming Billie Holiday* she was getting bullied because she was black which is racism, a form of bullying. In the book *The Weight of Water*, she was just getting bullied because she was the new kid and there were some mean people in her school. I believe that the book that has the better subject for poetry is *Becoming Billie Holiday*. I believe this because it went in deeper in the subjects. Also, another reason why I think that this book has a better subject for a verse novel is the fact that most of these problems are still prevalent

to this day like racism and poverty. Teens need to no these things so that racism goes away in the future.

In addition to considering if the subject is right for poetry when understanding the similarities and differences between *Becoming Billie Holiday* and *The Weight of Water*, we must also consider if the protagonist is right for poetry.

For the book, *The Weight of Water*, the protagonist, Kasienka, believes that she needs to find her father in England. So they move to England from Poland and search for him. The main character at the start of the book is set on finding her father and making things right and having a family once again, But as the poem moves on the character is realizing that her father is not trying to find her and her mother. I believe that the main turning point for her is when she meets her father and they have this conversation. For example, "Will you come see Mama?" I ask./ Tata looks at the clock again/ And says,/ In English/ "Eventually." This is so significant because it shows that her father is kind of moving on. I can tell that because if you are the father or husband of a family the first thing you would want is to make sure that your kids or your wife are safe but he says that he will Eventually come see Kasienka's mom. Another reason why It shows that the father is moving on is that in the text it says, " In English/ "Eventually." What is interesting about this is the fact that throughout the book, the poet has never said if when the mother or daughter are speaking if they are speaking in Polish or English but here they do. I believe that this shows that her dad is moving on when he is talking to her in English and this is how the author shows it. I believe that the author here is hinting at the fact that he is moving on. I believe that this proves that the protagonist is good for poetry because she is constantly changing what she thinks and in poetry the tone and the mood change in the poem often and I think that they are kind of connected in a way where she cannot make up her mind on her father.

On the other hand, the second verse novel, *Becoming Billie Holiday*, is about a girl named Eleanor but she kind of changes her name to Billie Holiday. What she mainly has to go through is the fact that she is living with her mom, who is a single mother, and they are looking for a home. So they keep bouncing from family member to family member living with the for a little bit. For example, " Me and my mother never really had a set home we were always moving house to house and from family member to another family members house." (57) She also has to deal with plenty of racism because she is an African American girl who is trying to be a singer. " After being called "n\*\*ger wrench" down South and "high yellow in Detroit." Although she was met with extreme racism and prejudice, she was still able to keep her cool. She was able to keep her cool because she knew if she got mad and freaked out she would never get this opportunity again. I believe that this shows that the protagonist is good for poetry because she is calm when

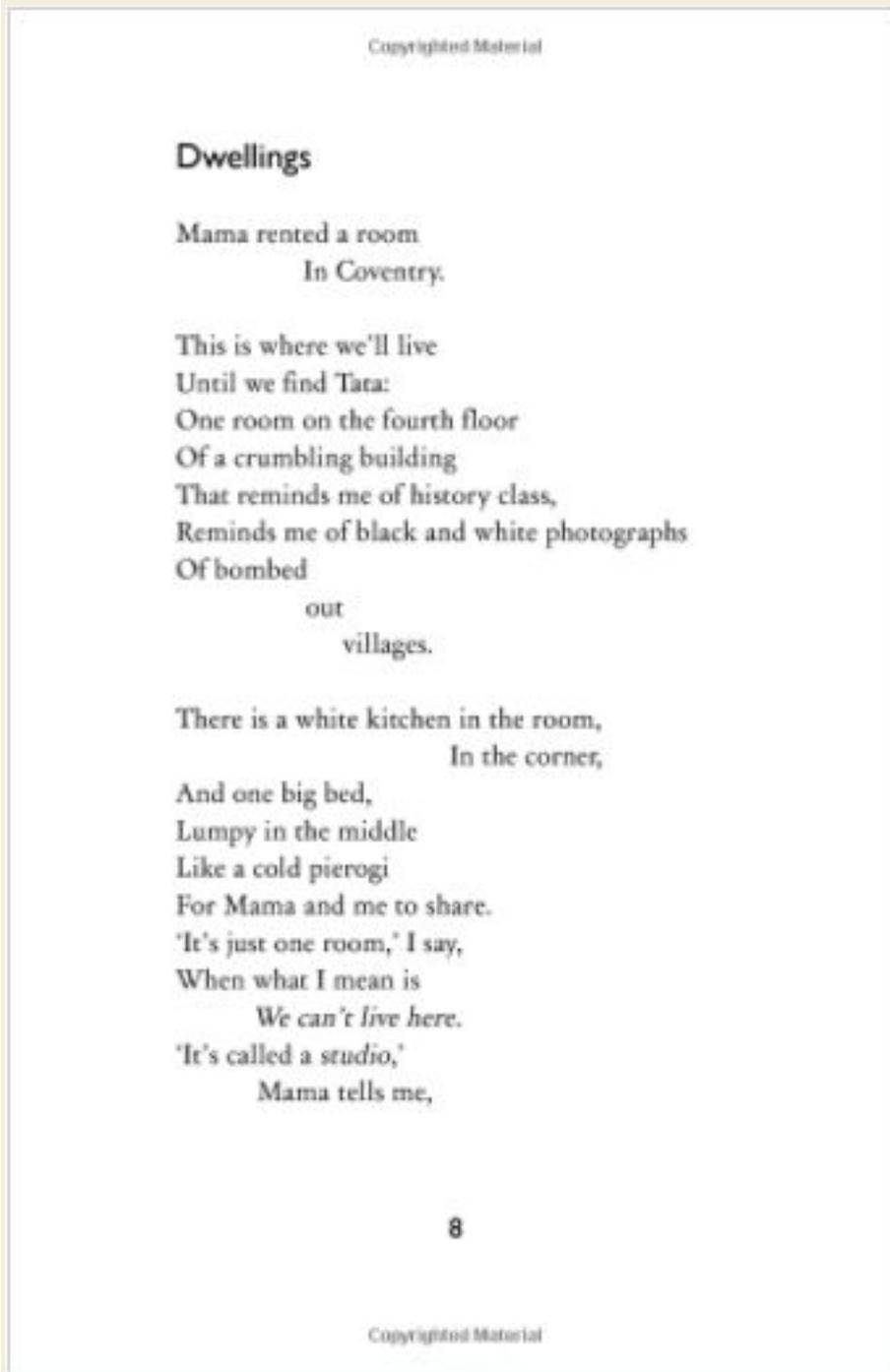
she needs to be and very angry when she needs to be. Since she is able to change her mood, this adds a lot of different tones and mood to the story which I believe is really important in a verse novel. Some of the benefits of having a main character like this is that you are able to explore many different tones and mood which can add a lot of different things that the author can do with the story.

Now for the similarities and differences between these two protagonists. I feel like these characters are more similar than they are different. First, let's go over some simple similarities. They are both at the start of the book teenage girls and you get to see them grow up. The second reason that I find these characters similar is that they have moved from their original home. For example, In *The Weight of Water* "Honey, you need to come back you have a child!" " No! We will find him and we will not leave" (39). Also, in the book *Becoming Billie Holiday*, " Me and my mother never really had a set home we were always moving house to house and from family member to another family members house." (57). This shows that they were not where they were not where they were originally from. Another reason that both of these characters are similar is the fact that they are both getting bullied maybe not in the same way because In *The Weight of Water* she is getting bullied because she is a new student, but in *Becoming Billie Holiday* she is receiving racism. The ways that these characters are different are that they are not the same race and that is having an effect on how Billie is being treated because she is African American. Another way the characters are different is that their main goals are different. In *The Weight of Water*, the main characters main goal is to find her father and be a family again, but in *Becoming Billie Holiday* her main goal is to become a jazz singer with the odds highly stacked against her. I believe that the book that does a better job with is the protagonist right of poetry is *Becoming Billie Holiday* I believe this because the main character, Billie Holiday, adds more tone and I feel like is dealing with a harder situation but gets through it and preserves to become what she wanted to be.

Moving on, in comparing these two verse novels in addition with if the subject is right for poetry and if the protagonist is right for poetry it is also important to consider what the poems look like on the page. This is important because with poetry you can add page breaks and gaps between the word. The reason that poets do this is to show mood or tone in the text.

First, for the book *The Weight of Water*. This book does change up the way the word are in line in the poems. It might not be all the time but it is noticeable and you can see where the poet made a really good decision in making it that way because you can see

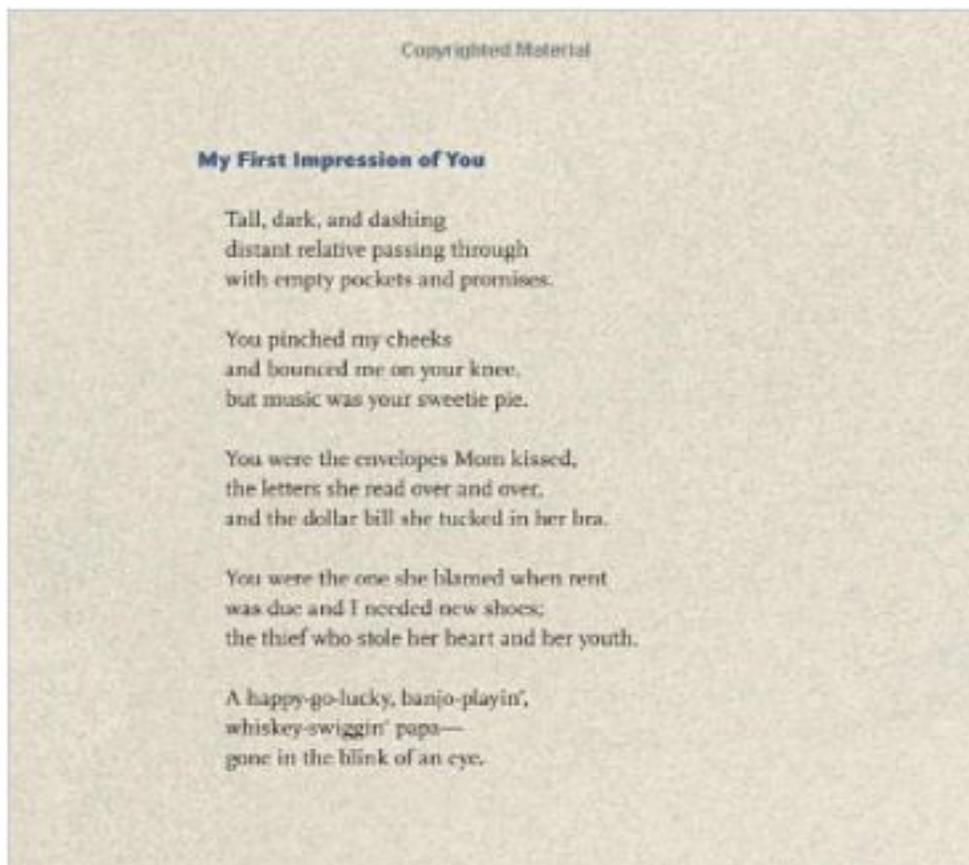
the mood in the way the words look. For example, look at the picture below.



Here when the poet writes “ Of Bombed/ out/ villages.” you can tell here that the main character, Kaisenka, is realizing where she is going to have to live until she finds her father. And the way that they make the text shows that she is not excited about an

thinks it pretty lame. I can tell this because the poet uses the one-word lines and stretches them out.

Now, I will talk about *Becoming Billie Holiday*, this book very rarely changes the form of the text and usually keeps the form of the text pretty standard. For example, look at the picture below titled “My First Impression of You”.



The text feature that this book uses a lot are pictures. This adds a lot to the story, what the characters look like, specific places, etc. here is an example of one of the pictures with the main character Billie Holiday, look at the picture below.



What this book lacks in changing text spaces and gaps, it makes up with pictures. Don't get me wrong, this book still has a lot of tone and mood and I like the fact that the author added pictures to the book.

The similarities, and differences in these two books for their text features and how the poem look on the page. There are not that many things that are similar between these

books. The main difference is that one book, *Becoming Billie Holiday*, doesn't change the text at all but it has pictures. However, the other book, *The Weight of Water*, doesn't have any pictures but it does change the text in the poems. These books when you talk about text features and how the words look in the poems are the exact opposite.

The main thing that I want people to know about verse novels is that they are amazing. What I mean by this is that normal book tends to have 3 times the amount of words a verse novels, but the verse novels still have to fit detail and emotion in their story. Another thing about verse novels is that they are different from both prose and poetry. The way that they are different is that in poetry you are not able to tell a story, but in verse novel, you can write in poem form and have a story. Also, prose novels can't have their text in poem form but verse novels can. What I find amazing about this is that the authors of verse novels have to make sure every word counts and they can't have a lot of space to say whatever they want. That's what I find so interesting and I hope I shared that with you in this Comparison Essay and I hope you realized that as well.