

Study Guide for Jehanne Dubrow's *Stateside*

General Questions for Writing, Discussion, and Review

1. **Stateside** is divided into three sections, corresponding to the before, during, and after of a deployment. Choose a poem from each section that you think best exemplifies the three stages of deployment. What do these three poems tell you about the spouse's emotional journey of enduring a deployment?
2. Military jargon is an integral part of at least eight **Stateside** poems. Look at poems like "Secure for Sea," "O'Dark Hundred," "Sea Change," "Whiskey Tango Foxtrot," "Nonessential Equipment," "Situational Awareness," "Stateside," and "Surface Warfare." How does Dubrow use military jargon to express the challenges of the "military spouse" experience?

Questions About Part One

1. In "Assateague Island, March", the speaker exclaims "Goddamn our domesticity" after a sleepless night spent on the beach. Why is "domesticity" treated as a problem in the poem? What alternatives to "domesticity" does the poem offer?
2. Traditionally, sonnets are thought of as best suited for love poems. What do the references in "Love in the Time of Coalition" to "weapons of mass destruction," "a congressional inquiry," and "have you no sense of decency" evoke? How do these political references pair with the poem's sensuous language?
3. "Sea Change" recounts the speaker's anxiety over her husband's imminent departure and her inability to keep him safe while he's away. Look at the poem on the page. How does the poem word placement, punctuation, and spacing to convey the wife's varying states of mind?
4. In military jargon, "Nonessential Equipment" is equipment slated for disposal. What things become "nonessential equipment" in this poem?
5. Compare Stephen Crane's "War is Kind" to Dubrow's "Reading Stephen Crane's 'War is Kind' to my Husband." How is Crane's use of tone and imagery reflected in Dubrow's handling of these devices?

War Is Kind

Stephen Crane (1899)

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind,
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,
Do not weep.
War is kind.

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,
Little souls who thirst for fight,
These men were born to drill and die.
The unexplained glory flies above them.
Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom--
A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.
Because your father tumbles in the yellow trenches,
Raged at his breast, gulped and died,
Do not weep.
War is kind.

Swift blazing flag of the regiment,
Eagle with crest of red and gold,
These men were born to drill and die.
Point for them the virtue of slaughter,
Make plain to them the excellence of killing
And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,
Do not weep.
War is kind!

6. Audiences seem to love war movies. How does Dubrow's "Against War Movies" offer a different perspective of the genre?

Questions About Part Two

1. The poems in Part Two are written in the voice of a modern-day Penelope and update the myths we associate with the “typical” military wife. In spite of changes in women’s roles and in military marriage, what characteristics and experiences remain constant in the lives of military wives?
2. How do poems like “The Rooted Bed,” “Ithaca,” and “In Penelope’s Bedroom” address the isolation that the husband’s deployment imposes on the wife left behind?
3. In “Penelope Considers a New ‘Do,” the speaker refers to self-help and women’s magazines that offer advice about how to cope with breakups and other personal catastrophes. What are some of the things that Penelope can’t alter, no matter what physical changes she makes?
4. “Penelope, Stateside” begins with “On an island called America.” Why does Dubrow refer to the United States as an island?

Questions About Part Three

1. What are the speaker’s reactions as she awaits her husband’s return in “Situational Awareness”?
2. Look at the iconic photograph of a sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square on VJ Day. Why, in the poem “VJ Day in Times Square,” does Dubrow cite the kiss now famous around the world?
3. How does the poem “Navy Housing” deal with the concepts of home and of fitting in?

Jehanne Dubrow on *Stateside*

Visit Brian Brodeur’s blog “How a Poem Happens” to read the interview with Jehanne Dubrow about the writing of her poem “Eastern Shore”:

<http://howapoemhappens.blogspot.com/2011/03/jehanne-dubrow.html>

Listen to an interview on “Maryland Morning” in which Dubrow discusses the writing of *Stateside*:

<http://mdmorn.wordpress.com/2010/05/27/528103-stateside-poems-of-a-military-spouse/>