

Synopsis, Themes, Symbols and Motifs

Dykin 2: Short Stories by Neledi Tafari

The Book Cover

The overall themes of **Dykin 2** are **realization, renewal and redemption**. The author held to the tenets of the Black literary themes of **progress and freedom**. Therefore, the cover of **Dykin 2** features the title written in marker on a bathroom wall which represents a place of daily *cleansing* and *renewal*. The elevated number two represents exponential power.

The acronym *KJV* carved into the right side of the black tile stands for the King James Version of the Holy Bible, a significant source of **redemption**. The scripture, *Ephesians 6:11*, is carved into the left corner. The *number seven plus or minus two* in the center is a theory of memory that is explored in the, **The Harlot and the Brain**. *The number 14* is also prominent throughout **Dykin 2 in homage to the genealogy of Jesus Christ**.

The pattern of images on the pink tiles were inspired by *Nigerian Nsibidi* symbols that sometimes appear on fabric. The relationship to Africa feeds the theme of **realization** in **Dykin 2**. In addition, the threads *of music and clothing* throughout the short stories express the very fabric of Black culture. The three symbols in the vertical row of center tiles are: *Woman, Unity and Love* respectively.

The symbols on the left and right sides of the center tiles represent the six aspects of the *Whole Armor of God* written in *Ephesians 6:10-18*. From the bottom up, on the left are: *loins girt with truth, the breastplate of righteousness (also the LH logo), and the helmet of salvation*. From the top down, on the right are: *the shield of faith, the sword of the spirit and the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*.

Ye Are the Church

The story opens with a vile comment similar to those used by *modern-day activists* who go to extremes to express their agendas. The uninvited media's role in seemingly unimportant church business is a testimony to the role of *journalism in society as propaganda*.

The reluctant *passing of the Holy Christian Right church* from grandfather to grandson, Stephon King, is an allusion to the *church age and the revelation of Jesus Christ*. The new People's Church is composed of reappearing characters from the original novel, **Dykin'**. The armed group of eight members, plus Diva, Jules, Kesean and Ronnie are reminiscent of *the 12 tribes* and *the 12 disciples*.

The underlying plot explores Ronnie Tabscott's *fear of being openly lesbian* while identifying as a Christian or attending church. Ronnie's *escape into the church* and the *"church clothes"* in the story, i.e., *the gloves, veil, cassock and Kesean's graphic t-shirt*, are bold pronouncements that *they are the body of Christ and that the kingdom of heaven is within*.

Lady Justice and the Hood

Justice and Connie represent the *metaphorical relationship between justice and the Constitution*, and the truth versus deceit. Connie seduces Justice under *the premise of jurisprudence* then uses her to advance her motives in the additional story line involving Solomon King. In the end, Justice learned that it will take a miracle to free the Constitution and the struggle is nobody's best friend.

Symbols of justice include: references to the *Dred Scott decision*, *the BLA shoot-out on the NJ turnpike in 1973* and *Lady Liberty*. *Legal and spiritual redemption* are juxtaposed by the *maritime flag and all other elements of the courtroom and its proceedings*. The author alludes to her hometown, with the *wood thrush in the scarlet oak tree* by the *Moultrie Courthouse* in Washington, DC.

The Great Debate

In keeping with the theme of *extreme activism*, **The Great Debate** explores *gay marriage* from the perspective of college students. The protagonist Danté Jackson, the Twin called Deuce in **Dykin'**, is trying to support her argument *against gay marriage*, while balancing the *challenges of being in a different environment* away from home.

Deuce is annoyed by her nemesis, Madison Meyers, who makes herself the center of attention and seems to have no problems adapting to college life. The fact that Madison *gains favors* as the teacher's pet and the *graduate students lobby for grades* is meant to expose *political action committees and non-profits that use minorities as mouthpieces for their causes*.

Gender identity is touched upon as Deuce *parodies the political correctness of the term lesbian* during a group project meeting with Madison and Fred. Unable to focus upon an angle for her *anti-gay marriage* speech, Deuce calls upon her ex Christal for advice. After her grandmother visits her in a dream, Deuce delivers her *call to arms* under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. *Jumping the broom refers* to a *Black wedding tradition* and *King Solomon* is also *Deuce's biological father's name*.

First Love

Ashanté Jackson, the Twin called Ace in **Dykin'**, *falls in love for the first time* when Kindra walks into her laundry. The *Whiter Than Snow* is aptly named for the process of *spiritual redemption*, and *Psalms 51:7. Music* is used throughout the story to highlight the idea in the opening sentence that *nothing is as it seems*.

Ace *likened Kindra to a show horse* because her first instinct was to tame her. However, Ace's *futile adoration* of the Janet Jackson look-a-like left her feeling like she was exploited by a porn star. Ace's Twin sister Deuce insinuates a darker side of Kindra's influence *through music lyrics and song*. Her rendition of "She Don't Love You," and calling Kindra names such as *gypsy woman and oogum boogum*

served to discredit Kindra. Still, Ace ended up playing "Cherchez La Femme," from Paris to Africa in search of her **First Love**.

The Stevie Wonder references and the use of his song title, "Rocket Love" exemplifies *the embryonic blindness of lesbian love that often ends unrequited due to societal expectations of women*. The meme of *Joséphine Baker* links **First Love** with her film "Zhou Zhou" which also involves *a twin laundress in Paris*. Kindra's sorcery using poetry, wine and the fig tree represent an abuse of love, but ultimately led to Ace's **realization** of her *true purpose in Christ*.

The Baller and the Wifey

The *fame obsessed contemporary culture* threatens Christal's relationship with her girlfriend Dominic, a professional basketball player who *wants to be a star*. Dominic gets new clothing and a promoter to match her new attitude. Christal is distraught when Dominic starts living *the party life* while her team is in the playoffs. To make matters worse, Christal is exposed by an enemy of her family.

Television, the Hot Blog and *VIP* are *THE* "places to be" for this modern-day generation. Consequently, *the media* in the **Baller and the Wifey**, including the independent blog, is meant to display *the inciting influence that gossip has upon society*. Thus, Christal's reputation, her coaching job as well as Dominic's contract are all at-risk due to her girlfriend's thirst for popularity.

The Ultimate Harvest

Queen Jackson has *repatriated to Nigeria* leaving her daughter Neo Jackson, to settle her estate. However, Queen's husband, refuses to leave the house. Environmental obstacles and a stubborn illness make Neo's task the more difficult.

Nonetheless, Neo is determined to secure one last crop from the unfruitful land. Her tilling techniques and the living water attest to the *natural healing power of the soul*. Neo's actions and motivations are further underscored by idea of *empowerment*.

The *planting and harvest* themes of the story are in line with biblical *sowing and reaping*. It is also a foreshadowing of *the harvest with the Second Coming of Christ* in Revelation. The *olive orchard itself, scriptural references, and the living water* continue the overall themes of **renewal** and **redemption**.

Rachel's Little Friends

In **Rachel's Little Friends**, Rachel and her partner Angelina host Kesean and Ronnie *to discuss marriage*. The Lewis' appear to have it all, but the truths of their relationship soon become apparent. Rachel's *warnings about childrearing* make Ronnie question whether she is ready to be a mother.

The story was *inspired by the life of Angelina Weld Grimké*, a writer and alleged lesbian who was abandoned by her mother. The title is a phrase from Grimké's play *Rachel*, in which the character *discourages birthing babies* into a world of suffering.

Ronnie's life parallels Grimké's in that she's *unable to fully express herself as a lesbian*. Rachel's empty lamentations over a former lover, on the other hand, are comparable to Grimké's *motherless void*. All in all, the visit with the Lewis' leaves the engaged couple's wedding plans in jeopardy.

Excess and affluence are symbolized by the couple's residence especially the ridiculous Christmas decorations in July. *Equality* and *reciprocity* are promoted by the author's *intentionally use of the word fiancée* to identify both Kesean and Ronnie, who reappear in **The Great Hope**.

The Great Hope and the Lady in Waiting

Ronnie and Kesean were to be *married* in Autumn. All they needed to do was satisfy one last pre-marital assignment. Ronnie was all set for her *wedding* until word got out that her *lady-in-waiting*, the maid of honor had slept with her fiancée. Heartbroken after the botched assignment, Kesean cancels the wedding and flies off to Vegas with her best friend.

The back story of Kesean's conversion to Christianity contributes to her *sanctified* persona. Thus, her experience with Pretty is a *testimony* to her *renewal*. Ronnie's indecisiveness is similar to religious backsliding, but her fiancée demonstrates the *fruit bearing spirit of patience* through and through.

The Harlot and the Brain

The Harlot and the Brain is a *cerebral piece* that explores the *depths of consciousness*, as Charlotte gains access to a genius' brain. *Mind control* is the main theme of the story, along with exploring the behavioral *influences of advertising*. During her journey, Charlotte navigates through *logic and the subconscious mind* to discover that *the keys to the kingdom are spiritual*.

Intelligence and *awareness* are emphasized by the art, books, and *icosahedron* in the genius' apartment. The geometrical shape is one of the five Platonic solids and is a central element of the plot. *Psychology* is also infused by the use of the *number seven plus or minus* concept of memory and the *duplicate nemesis projected by the character's ego* to suggest that earthly conditions are created by the universal mind.

The Tribe

Dykin 2: Short Stories concludes with **The Tribe**, which details the progress of the infamous Rainbow Tribe from the original novel. *The Tribe* and various *assignments* serve as motifs in at least six of the ten short stories in the book. The story highlights *alternative routes toward self-sufficiency* for teenage women and is intended as *a call to arms for Black lesbians* to become organized.

Day-Day Washington is set to become the youngest member of The Tribe is she can *stay out of trouble* long enough. Day-Day is *mentored* by Tribe mothers Diva and Jules and eventually becomes a mentor herself. The *roles and behavior of women in society* with respect to religion are thematic as the author attempts to reestablish *the matriarchal lineages between powerful women*.