

11.2.2

Lesson 11

Introduction

In this lesson, students read and analyze the final stanzas (3–5) of Audre Lorde’s poem “From the House of Yemanjá” (from “All this has been / before / in my” through “night shall meet / and not be / one”). In these stanzas, the speaker calls out to her “mother” for “blackness,” and reflects upon the painful duality of her own identity (line 29). Students analyze how Lorde shapes and refines central ideas in her poem, and consider how these ideas interact and build on one another over the course of the text.

Students demonstrate their learning at the end of this lesson in a Quick Write response to the following prompt: Determine two central ideas and analyze their development over the course of the poem, including how they interact and build on one another. For homework, students add to their Ideas Tracking Tools, as well as continue with their Accountable Independent Reading (AIR) through the lens of the focus standard of their choice.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RL.11-12.2	Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
Addressed Standard(s)	
W.11-12.9.a	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. a. Apply <i>grades 11–12 Reading standards</i> to literature (e.g., "Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics").
SL.11-12.1.a	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues</i> , building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study;

	explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
L.11-12.5	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Assessment

Assessment(s)
<p>Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson. Students respond to the following prompt, citing textual evidence to support analysis and inferences drawn from the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine two central ideas and analyze their development over the course of the poem, including how they interact and build on one another.
High Performance Response(s)
<p>A High Performance Response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine two central ideas in the text (e.g., the mother has a dual identity and the daughter inherits a dual identity from her mother). Analyze how these two ideas interact and build upon one another over the course of the poem (e.g., In stanza 1, the speaker’s description of her mother’s “two faces” (lines 1 and 5) introduces the central idea that the speaker’s mother has a dual identity, because the daughter sees her as being two people at once. In stanza 2, the speaker says that she carries two mothers, one “dark” and one “pale” (lines 11–15). The contrasting imagery of “dark” and “ivory” (lines 12–13)—in the speaker’s description of the “two women upon [her] back” (line 11)—mirrors the contrasting imagery in the metaphor “I am the sun and moon” (lines 9 and 32) that the speaker uses to describe herself. Through this parallel imagery, Lorde develops the central idea that the speaker has inherited her mother’s dual identity. Lorde further develops the central idea that the speaker has inherited her mother’s dual identity through the imagery that the speaker uses to describe herself in the final stanza. The speaker describes herself as a “sharpened edge” (line 33), which suggests a blade or knife, and indicates that an important part of the speaker’s sense of self is a feeling of pain. The image of this “sharpened edge / where day and night shall meet” (lines 33–34) and never come together indicates that this feeling of pain results from the fact that the two identities the speaker has inherited from her mother cannot be united or melded together.).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None.
Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sense (n.) – a particular feeling, or an emotion; reason or purpose
Additional vocabulary to support English Language Learners (to provide directly)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> meet (v.) – to come together for a common purpose; to come together as contestants, opponents, or enemies

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
<p>Standards & Text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: RL.11-12.2, W.11-12.9.a, SL.11-12.1.a, L.11-12.5 Text: “From the House of Yemanjá” by Audre Lorde, stanzas 3–5 (Masterful Reading: poem in its entirety) <p>Learning Sequence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Lesson Agenda Homework Accountability Masterful Reading Reading and Discussion Quick Write Closing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5% 10% 5% 60% 15% 5%

Materials

- Student copies of the Ideas Tracking Tool (refer to 11.2.2 Lesson 9)—students may need additional blank copies
- Student copies of the Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 11.2.1 Lesson 1)

Learning Sequence

How to Use the Learning Sequence	
Symbol	Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol
10%	Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take.
no symbol	Plain text indicates teacher action.
	Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
▶	Indicates student action(s).
☞	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
ⓘ	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

5%

Begin by reviewing the agenda and the assessed standard for this lesson: RL.11-12.2. In this lesson, students analyze how Lorde shapes and refines central ideas in her poem and consider how these ideas interact and build on one another over the course of the text. Students demonstrate their learning at the end of the lesson by completing a Quick Write.

- ▶ Students look at the agenda.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

10%

Instruct students to take out their responses to the previous lesson’s homework assignment. (Conduct a brief search into Yemanjá, mentioned in the title of the poem. Record your research in a few sentences, and be prepared to share with the class. Additionally, reread the second stanza of “From the House of Yemanjá” and add to your Ideas Tracking Tool. Identify one central idea on your tool and be prepared to share with the class.)

- ▶ Students take out their homework.

Instruct students to form pairs and share the additions they made to their Ideas Tracking Tools and the central ideas they identified.

- ▶ Students discuss the additions they made to their Ideas Tracking Tools.
- ☞ See the Model Ideas Tracking Tool at the end of this lesson.
- ☞ Students may identify the following central ideas:
 - The speaker’s mother has a dual identity.
 - The speaker has a dual identity.

- The speaker has a complex relationship with her mother.
- The speaker has inherited her dual identity from her mother.

Lead a whole-class discussion on the central ideas students identified.

Instruct students to take out the notes they compiled during their research on Yemanjá. Instruct students to form pairs and discuss their findings.

▶ Students take out their homework and discuss their research.

🗨 Student responses may include:

- Yemanjá is a mother goddess; she is the patron deity of women.
- Yemanjá is an orisha, or a spirit that is a representation of God.
- Yemanjá is from the Yoruba religion that began in Africa, but she is also an important figure in African-American religious communities in several North American, Caribbean, and Latin American countries.
- Yemanjá is associated with the ocean.
- Yemanjá protects children.
- Yemanjá is the essence of motherhood.

① This research and discussion activity supports students' engagement with SL.11-12.1.a, which addresses preparing for discussions and drawing on that preparation by referring to evidence from research on the topic. Students were introduced to SL.11-12.1.a in 11.1.2 Lesson 3.

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses. Explain to students that they will use their research on Yemanjá in the following reading and discussion activity.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students completed the alternate homework assignment provided in 11.2.2 Lesson 10, instruct students to share and compare the facts they found out about Audre Lorde, and their ideas about how these facts might contribute to her perspective as a writer.

🗨 Student responses may include:

- Audre Lorde is a civil rights activist, so she may have the perspective of someone who has experienced prejudice or bigotry.
- Audre Lorde is a radical feminist, so she may have the perspective of someone who criticizes or would like to see reform of power structures.
- Audre Lorde is a Caribbean-American writer, so she may have a trans-national perspective.

Activity 3: Masterful Reading

5%

Have students listen to a masterful reading of “From the House of Yemanjá” in its entirety. Instruct students to listen for repeating words and phrases.

- ▶ Students follow along, reading silently.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posting or projecting the following guiding activity to support students throughout this lesson:

Reread lines 21–36. Annotate for the introduction of a new idea.

Activity 4: Reading and Discussion

60%

Instruct students to form pairs. Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss.

Instruct student pairs to reread lines 21–26 of stanza 3 (from “All this has been / before / in my” through “no brothers / and my sisters are cruel”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class. Remind students to annotate as they read and discuss the text.

① This annotation supports students’ engagement with W.11-12.9.a, which addresses the use of textual evidence in writing.

To what does “All this” refer?

- 🗨 Student responses may include:
 - “All this” (line 21) refers to the speaker’s description of her conflicting feelings about the “two” mothers “upon [her] back” in stanza 2 (line 11).
 - “All this” (line 21) refers to the mother bringing the speaker “bread and terror” in her “sleep” (lines 17–18).

When are the actions of stanza 2 and 3 taking place? What is the impact of Lorde’s use of time in stanzas 2 and 3?

- 🗨 Student responses should include:
 - In stanza 2 the speaker says, “I bear two women” (line 11). This action is in the present tense, which indicates that the action in stanza 2 is happening now. In stanza 3 “has been” is past tense, which indicates that the phrase “[a]ll this has been” refers to something that has happened in the past (line 21).

- This shift between past and present suggests that the speaker’s experience is more than an individual incident or event at a specific point in time. It is a reoccurring feeling or experience.

What does the phrase “time has no sense” reveal about how the speaker currently feels?

🗨️ Student responses may include:

- The speaker feels that “time” (line 24) has no reason or purpose for her.
- The speaker feels that she has no “sense” (line 24) or feeling of time.
- The speaker feels that time does not anchor her or keep her in one place. Instead, she feels that she goes back and forth between the past and the present.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle with the multiple meanings of *sense*, consider posing the following question:

How is the word *sense* being used in the phrase “time has no sense”?

🗨️ Student responses may include:

- *Sense* in this context means a particular feeling, or an emotion. Lorde uses this definition of *sense* to indicate that the speaker has no sense, or feeling, of time.
- *Sense* in this context means reason or purpose. Lorde uses this definition of *sense* to indicate that time has no reason or purpose for the speaker. Time does not ground the speaker in any one moment.
- *Sense* in this context means being reasonable or understandable. Lorde uses this definition of *sense* to suggest that time is not understandable to the speaker, it does not “make sense” to her.

① Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard L.11-12.5 through the process of analyzing the nuances in word meanings.

How does the phrase “time has no sense” further develop the idea that “All this has been / before”?

🗨️ The phrase “time has no sense” (line 24) suggests that the speaker feels like time has no meaning because nothing has changed between the past and present. “All this has been / before” (lines 21–22) because the speaker still experiences the feeling of “two women upon” her “back” (line 11).

① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle to make these connections, instruct them to review their analysis of the central ideas introduced in stanza 2 recorded on their Ideas Tracking Tools.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses. Instruct students to take out their Ideas Tracking Tools and add any new ideas discussed to their tools.

Instruct student pairs to reread stanza 4, lines 27–31 (from “Mother I need / mother I need” through “as the august earth needs rain. / I am”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

What effect does the repetition of “Mother I need” have on the tone of this stanza?

🗨 Student responses may include:

- The repetition of the speaker’s request “Mother I need” (lines 27–29) creates a desperate and urgent tone, because it sounds like the request of someone who needs something so badly that they must repeat their request over and over to get a response.
- The repetition of the speaker’s request “Mother I need” (lines 27–29) creates a longing and aching tone, because it sounds like a child crying for its mother or someone grieving and crying over a loss.

How does the phrase “as the august earth needs rain” develop what “blackness” means to the speaker?

🗨 The speaker “need[s] ... blackness” (line 29) like “the august earth needs rain” (line 30); therefore, “blackness” represents something that the speaker is deprived of and thirsty for, like dry ground is for rain, or something that is necessary for her life and survival, just as rain is necessary for the survival of the earth.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing a description of the weather typically associated with the month of August in the United States. For example, August is a month with high temperatures and little rain, so the ground is dry.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students require additional support, consider posing the following question:

What does the speaker “need”? From whom does she need it?

🗨 The speaker needs “blackness” from her “mother” (line 29).

What might the imagery in stanza 2 suggest about why the speaker is in “need”?

🗨 The imagery in stanza 2 suggests that the speaker needs “blackness” because her “dark and rich” (line 12) mother is “hidden / in the ivory hungers of the other / mother / pale as a witch”

(lines 12–15). Although the speaker carries the blackness “upon [her] back” (line 11) she cannot access it because it is “hidden” (line 12) within the “pale” mother (line 15).

How might the imagery in stanza 2 further refine what “blackness” represents to the speaker?

- The image of the two women, one “dark” (line 12) and one “pale” (line 15) on the speaker’s back, suggests that the “blackness” (line 29) the speaker needs represents the “dark” part of a dual identity that the speaker has inherited from her mother.
- ① Students may infer that the speaker’s need for “blackness” represents her desire for a particular racial identity. Students have the opportunity to explore this connection further in their analysis of the African goddess Yemanjá later in this lesson.
- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider encouraging students to extend their analysis by providing the following question:

How does the phrase “in my mother’s bed” relate to the phrase “[a]ll this has been / before”?

- Student responses may include:
 - The phrase “in my mother’s bed” (line 23) suggests that “[a]ll this has been / before” (lines 21–22) because just as the speaker has inherited her mother’s dual identity, her mother may have also inherited her own dual identity from her own mother.
 - “All this has been / before” (lines 21–22) could refer to earlier generations of mothers and daughters.

Who is the “mother” who the speaker is addressing?

- Student responses may include:
 - The title “From the House of Yemanjá” references an important goddess in the Yoruba religion who is the mother of all gods and people as well as the protector of all children. Therefore, the speaker may be addressing the mother goddess Yemanjá when she says “Mother I need” (lines 27, 28, and 29).
 - The speaker may be addressing her biological mother who she describes as “cook[ing] up her daughters / into girls” (lines 2–3) in stanza 1.
 - The speaker may be addressing the “dark and rich” (line 12) mother that she “bear[s] ... upon her back,” who is “hidden” within the body of the “pale” mother (lines 12–15), because she calls out for her mother’s “blackness” (line 29).
- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Remind students of the research they conducted on Yemanjá and the discussion they had in the homework accountability for this lesson.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider asking the following optional extension question to deepen students' understanding:

How does the repetition of “Mother I need” support the idea that the “mother” in lines 27–29 is Yemanjá?

- 💬 The repetition of “Mother I need” (lines 27–29) creates the sense that the speaker is praying, as one would to a goddess like Yemanjá.

What might “brothers” and “sisters” represent to the speaker?

- 💬 Student responses may include:
- If the speaker is addressing her biological mother, then her “brothers” and “sisters” (lines 25–26) may represent her biological siblings, or her family.
 - If the speaker is addressing Yemanjá, who is the “mother” of all people, then the speaker’s “brothers” and “sisters” (lines 25–26) may represent all of humankind.

How does the speaker’s “need” introduce a new idea of the poem?

- 💬 Student responses may include:
- The speaker’s “need” for her “mother[’s] blackness” (line 29) introduces the new idea that the speaker chooses to value one aspect of the dual identity that she has inherited over the other; she values the “dark and rich” mother (lines 11–12) more than the “pale” (line 15) mother.
 - The speaker’s “need” (lines 27–29) is a plea to the goddess Yemanjá for “blackness” (line 29). A plea to the goddess Yemanjá might suggest that the speaker’s hunger or longing for “blackness” is a desire for a racial or national identity that this African goddess represents.

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses. Instruct students to add to their Ideas Tracking Tools.

Instruct student pairs to reread stanza 5 (from “the sun and moon and forever hungry” through “night shall meet / and not be / one”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the following definition: *meet* means “to come together for a common purpose; to come together as contestants, opponents, or enemies.”

- ▶ Students write the definition of *meet* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

How does line 32 relate to line 31? What is the impact of this structural choice?

Line 32 continues the sentence begun in line 31 with the phrase “I am.” This structural choice cuts the fourth stanza off at “I am,” leaving the reader unsure about how the speaker identifies herself.

① Differentiation Consideration: If students struggle to analyze the impact of this structural choice, consider posing the following question:

How does the punctuation at the end of stanza 4 compare to the punctuation at the end of the previous stanzas?

There is no punctuation at the end of stanza 4 because it ends in the middle of a sentence, whereas the previous stanzas all end with a period.

How does the speaker describe herself in line 32? What does this description suggest about the speaker?

The speaker says “I am / the sun and moon and forever hungry” (lines 31–32). This contrast suggests that the speaker feels like she has two opposite or contrasting identities at the same time.

Why is the speaker “forever hungry”?

The speaker is “forever hungry” (line 32) because she “need[s]” her mother’s “blackness” (line 29), but cannot access it because it is “hidden” in the body of the “pale” mother (lines 12–15). The speaker’s hunger is a result of one part of her identity being buried or concealed by a more dominant, aggressive part.

How does Lorde use contrast throughout the poem?

- Student responses may include:
- Lorde uses contrasting imagery to describe the mothers on the speaker’s back. One mother is “dark and rich” and the other mother is “pale” and has “ivory hungers” (lines 12–15). This contrasting imagery mirrors the contrasting imagery in the metaphor “I am / the sun and moon” (lines 31–32). This develops a connection between the “sun and moon” (lines 9 and 32) and the “two women” upon the speaker’s “back” (line 11). Therefore, the speaker feels like she is two conflicting entities at once, the “sun and moon” (lines 9 and 32) because she carries the weight of her mother’s dual identity, or has inherited this dual identity from her mother.
 - Lorde uses contrasting imagery in her description of the speaker’s “mother” bringing her “bread and terror” in her “sleep” (lines 17–18). The contrast of a comforting gift—bread,

- and an unpleasant feeling—terror, develops the idea that the mother brings her daughter conflicting thoughts or emotions. These conflicting thoughts and emotions are reflected in the speaker’s sense that she is two contrasting things, the “sun and moon” (lines 9 and 32), at the same time.
- Lorde’s description of the mother’s breasts as “exciting anchors” (line 19) develops the contrast between the mother’s identity as “steady and familiar” (line 16) (she is an “anchor” in the “midnight storm” (lines 19-20)), and her identity as someone who is exhilarating or “exciting” (line 19). This conflicting identity is reflected in the daughter’s own conflicted sense of self as the “sun and moon” (lines 9 and 32), once again suggesting that the speaker’s dual identity is related to, or a result of, her mother’s dual identity.

How does the image of the “sharpened edge” develop the metaphor in line 32?

- The image of the “sharpened edge / where day and night shall meet” (lines 33–34) develops the metaphor of the “sun and moon” (lines 9 and 32), suggesting that these two contrasting components are separated by a painful division.
- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle with this analysis, consider posting or projecting the following scaffolding question:

What imagery does the speaker use to describe herself in lines 33–36? What does this imagery suggest about how the speaker feels?

- The speaker describes herself as the “the sharpened edge / where day and night shall meet / and not be / one” (lines 33–36). This image suggests that the speaker feels pain or like she is dangerous because the description “sharpened edge” (line 33) sounds dangerous like a knife or a sword that can inflict pain.

How does the phrase “not be / one” refine a central idea in the poem?

- The phrase “not be / one” (lines 35–36) refines a central idea of the speaker’s inherited dual identity because it emphasizes that the two pieces that make up the speaker’s identity (“day and night” (line 34)) will always be separate and will never merge into “one” unified identity (line 36).

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses. Instruct students to add to their Ideas Tracking Tools.

Activity 5: Quick Write

15%

Instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

Determine two central ideas and analyze their development over the course of the poem, including how they interact and build on one another.

Instruct students to look at their annotations to find evidence. Ask students to use this lesson’s vocabulary whenever possible in their written responses. Remind students to use the Short Response Rubric and Checklist to guide their written responses.

- ▶ Students listen and read the Quick Write prompt.

① Display the prompt for students to see, or provide the prompt in hard copy.

Transition to the independent Quick Write.

- ▶ Students independently answer the prompt using evidence from the text.
- 🗨 See the High Performance Response at the beginning of this lesson.

Activity 6: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to reread stanzas 3–5 (from “All this has been / before / in my” through “night shall meet / and not be / one”), and add to their Ideas Tracking Tools. Students should determine which ideas are central ideas on their Ideas Tracking Tools.

Also for homework, students should continue to read their AIR text through the lens of a focus standard of their choice and prepare for a 3–5 minute discussion of their text based on that standard.

- ▶ Students follow along.

Homework

For homework, reread stanzas 3–5 (from “All this has been / before / in my” through “night shall meet / and not be / one”) and add to your Ideas Tracking Tool. Determine which ideas added to your Ideas Tracking Tool are central ideas.

Also, continue reading your Accountable Independent Reading text through the lens of a focus standard of your choice and prepare for a 3–5 minute discussion of your text based on that standard.

Model Ideas Tracking Tool

Name:		Class:		Date:	
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Directions: Identify the ideas that you encounter throughout the text. Trace the development of those ideas by noting how the author introduces, develops, or refines these ideas in the text. Cite textual evidence to support your work.

Text:	“From the House of Yemanjá” by Audre Lorde
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Stanza #	Ideas	Notes and Connections
1	The speaker’s mother has a dual identity.	Lorde introduces this idea through the metaphor “my mother had two faces” (lines 1 and 5).
1	The speaker has a dual identity.	Lorde develops this idea through the speaker’s metaphorical statement “I am the sun and moon” (line 9). These are two opposite entities, and the speaker is both of them at once. The speaker’s own sense of duality connects to the duality she sees in her mother.
1	The speaker has a complex relationship with her mother.	Lorde develops this idea through the speaker’s statement “I am the sun and moon and forever hungry / for her eyes” (lines 9–10). Although the mother provides the speaker with nourishment in her kitchen, the speaker still desires a connection with her mother, or recognition that she has not received.
2	The speaker feels that her mother’s dual identity is a burden.	Lorde introduces this idea through the image of the speaker “bear[ing] two” mothers “upon [her] back,” one “dark” and one “pale” (lines 11–15). This image suggests that the speaker feels that her mother’s dual identity, as illustrated through the contrasting images of the two mothers, is a burden that she carries with her.
2, 5	The speaker inherits her dual identity from her mother.	This idea is developed through the mirroring of dark and light imagery in stanza 2 when the speaker describes her mother’s dual identity as “two women,” “one dark and rich” and the other “pale” (lines 11–15), and in stanzas 1 and 5 when the speaker describes her own dual identity as the “sun and moon” (lines 9 and 32) and “day and night” (line 34).
3	The experiences the speaker describes have been felt before.	Lorde introduces this idea with the line “All this has been / before” (lines 21–22).

4	The speaker needs or longs for one of her mother's identities—the "dark and rich" identity more than the other.	In the fourth stanza, the speaker is begging for only one aspect of her mother's identity, the "blackness" (line 29) of the "dark and rich" (line 12) mother. Therefore, the speaker's relationship to her mother's dual identity is conflicted, because she values one of the "two women upon [her] back" more than the other (line 11). This further develops the speaker's conflicted relationship to her mother's dual identity.
4	The speaker desires or longs for only one aspect of her identity.	Lorde introduces this idea with the speaker's plea, "mother I need your blackness now" (line 29). The speaker desires the "dark" mother "upon [her] back" (lines 11–12).
5	The speaker's dual identity cannot be united.	Lorde introduces this idea in stanza 5 with the line "I am ... / the sharpened edge / where day and night shall meet and not be / one" (lines 31–36). This painful image suggests that the dual identity that the speaker inherited from her mother is painful for her, and that she believes the "dark" (line 12) piece of herself and the "pale" (line 15) piece of herself cannot be united.