“Left” Beginner’s Guide Questions

1. In what context have you seen the “counting-out song” before?

2. Circle ways in which residents are described in stanza two. What is Finney trying to show about them?

3. Finney carefully uses the word “insist” here instead of another word. What can readers indirectly learn about the grandmother?
   a. What does this tell readers about the power of language?

4. Describe the conditions of New Orleans in the wake of this natural disaster.
   a. How can people live in these conditions yet not be “broken”?

5. Refer to the shaded text and paraphrase (rewrite in your own words) its meaning in one sentence.
   a. Do you think those in power would agree with you?
   b. How does society place value in one’s life?

6. Scan through what you have already read and underline ways in which the helicopter is described.

7. What traditional characteristics of poetry does this poem break?
   a. What does this tell you about poetry?

8. Who is Finney, the author criticizing in the shaded text to the left?

9. Who do you think is speaking “the counting-out song”? What does this tell readers?

10. The word “observation” is repeated throughout the poem. What is the message in doing this?

11. How does Finney describe people in San Diego?
    a. What is unique about the italicized words?

12. What people is Finney referring to here?

13. Who is the audience for this poem? Is the poem any more/less meaningful if you aren’t the targeted audience? Explain.