Analyzing a Poem “Spelling” by Margaret Atwood

My daughter plays on the floor
with plastic letters,
red, blue & hard yellow,
learning how to spell,
spelling,
how to make spells.

I wonder how many women
denied themselves daughters,
closed themselves in rooms,
drew the curtains
so they could mainline words.

A child is not a poem,
a poem is not a child.
there is no either/or.
However.

I return to the story
of the woman caught in the war
& in labor, her thighs tied
together by the enemy
so she could not give birth.

Ancestress: the burning witch,
her mouth covered by leather
to strangle words.

A word after a word
after a word is power.
[…]

How do you learn to spell?
Blood, sky & the sun,
your own name first,
your first naming, your first name,
your first word.

A. As you analyze, consider:

Meaning: denotation/ connotation and symbolic

Pick 1 word or a phrase and state its symbolic or connotative meaning

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B. Critical Analysis: Analyze the poem using your knowledge of Critical Theories
Choose one and write 1 paragraph analysis from that theorist’s perspective

- **Saussurian reading of the poem:**
  - signifier/signified (title, words, names, and their meaning)
  - symbolic meaning (situations/scene, their interpretation, symbolic meaning)

- **Althusserian reading of the poem**
  - Power: ISA and RSA

- **Marxist reading of the poem**
  - Ideology of power of the ruling class
  - Commodification, Colonialist Ideology

- **Lacanian reading of the poem**
  - The Self-identification and restatement of Ego; yearning for the whole self
  - Mirror Image: the birth of new-self
  - Symbolic Order: Self-identification via symbols (name, image, colors, etc.)
  - The Order of Real: Self-identification through Others; Focus on whole complex of self in social setting;

- **Freud’s reading of the poem:** model of the mind
  - **Id:** the repressed desires
  - **Ego:** the “I” that mediates between desires and morals; duality of self
  - **Superego:** socially accepted morals, virtues, publicly approved behavior

- **Gender Expectations** (expected behavior, look, position in the society, etc.)

Write your analysis as a paragraph. Do not forget about the importance of Textual Evidence: Quote from the poem and/or restate the part(s) from it as a support to your interpretation/critical analysis.

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