**Barbie Doll**

This girlchild was born as usual  
and presented dolls that did pee-pee  
and miniature GE stoves and irons  
and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.  
Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:  
You have a great big nose and fat legs.   
  
She was healthy, tested intelligent,  
possessed strong arms and back,  
abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.  
She went to and fro apologizing.  
Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.   
  
She was advised to play coy,  
exhorted to come on hearty,  
exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.  
Her good nature wore out  
like a fan belt.  
So she cut off her nose and her legs  
and offered them up.   
  
In the casket displayed on satin she lay  
with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,  
a turned-up putty nose,  
dressed in a pink and white nightie.  
Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said.  
Consummation at last.  
To every woman a happy ending.

Marge Piercy

Barbie Doll: Advanced questions on theme

1. Why does the girlchild go "to and fro apologizing"? What's the speaker trying to say in these lines?
2. What's with the absurd imagery of the girl cutting off her nose and legs? Is there anything symbolic about the girl's actions?
3. How is society at large portrayed in this poem? Do you agree or disagree with how the speaker depicts "everyone"?
4. What's the point of the girlchild having a "putty nose" and wearing a "nightie" in her casket? How does this image make you feel? Why do you feel that way?
5. How are appearances depicted in a physical sense and behavioral sense in the poem? What should the girlchild look and act like?
6. Would it have made any difference if the girlchild's classmates didn't tease her for the way she looks? Would she have felt and acted differently in the end?
7. Is it ever really possible to see beyond appearances? Why or why not? Do you think there are ways to encourage folks (and kids) to look beyond the surface? If so, how?