

# Analysis of "the bean eaters" by gwendolyn brooks



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "The Bean Eaters" highlights the loneliness and poverty of an old couple, people who have been forgotten by pretty much everyone. They have been forgotten by their kids who have grown up and moved out; they have been forgotten by the society and the government who kind of ignore the economic inequalities that they suffer, causing them to eat beans every single day. Even as our world modernizes, there are still people living in extreme poverty. This people are often ignored by politics and shunned by their society at large, a message that is elicited through literary elements such as symbolism, metaphor and rhyme

The message that the writer is trying to convey is that this poem is about an old poor couple who have yellowed like an old paper or an old leaf (they eat beans mostly, this old yellow pair). In the second and the third line of the first stanza, the author is trying to show that this couple does not have fancy preparations or planning for dinner, even their plates are chipped and old (dinner is a casual affair. Plain chipware on a plain and creaking wood). The author repeated the word plain twice in line 3 to emphasize on how poor they are. The old couple seems to be "casual" most probably because they are too poor to be anything more than that. Line 5 stanza two, (two who are mostly good) the author uses the word "Mostly Good". This is probably Brooks's way of telling us that the couple were not angels. They were mostly good, meaning they were like ordinary people like you and me, who have good and bad sides to us. They might have done some wrong in the past, but that does not entirely make them bad people. Lines 7 (But keep on putting on their clothes.. and putting things away). Even though they may have been forgotten by many, life still goes on for this couple, so they continue waking

up, and putting their clothes on and living another day of their sad and lonely life. The word remembering occurs twice, first in the 9th stanza and then the 10th stanza (And remembering.. remembering with twinklings and twinge). Because they are old, they tend to reminisce the good old days. They do this with twinkling and twinges. Some memories are happy so they reminisce with a twinkle in their eye while some maybe sad and painful which cause them to twinge in pain. The poem ends with the author listing a number of objects that the couple is surrounded with. The author is trying to show us all the things that the couple had accumulated over their life. Most probably those things once belonged to their children and now its all this couple have as a memory of their happier days.

The three literary elements central to this poem are symbolism, metaphor, and rhyme. The definition of symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense. The title of the poem is itself symbolic because it represents the poverty of the couple in the poem; beans are cheap food and can also be grown at leisure, and the couple eats them so often that they are referred to as " the bean eaters," indicating the severity of their poverty. The plain chipware, the tin flatware, the creaking wood are the other symbols of the couple's poverty. Beads, receipts, dolls, clothes, tobacco crumbs, vases and fringes might be a symbol of the couple's life before they became old and lonely.

The second literary element identified in this poem is metaphor. A metaphor describes one thing as another. The couple is referred to as a " yellow pair"

indicating that they are in their twilight years and have yellowed like how an old paper would after years of being under the elements.

The third literary element found in this poem is the rhyme of the poem. The rhyme of the poem is a very simple rhyme scheme - AABA BCDC EFDF whereby in the second stanza the second and fourth lines rhyme but the first and third line do not rhyme. This is called as a quatrain.

Two who are Mostly Good b

Two who have lived their days c

But keep on putting on their clothes d

And putting their things away c

Brooks is calling us to turn our attention to things we normally ignore and to show us that there are people living in dreadful situations; indeed, this poem has a very powerful message especially to teenagers and young adults. The author, besides highlighting the poverty of the couple also emphasizes the loneliness of the couple. The author uses many objects in this poem to show us that the old couple were surrounded by objects from the past without any other human contact. This is an indirect message to youngsters, that once they have grown up and are independent they should never abandon their parents who have sacrificed so much to raise them. Lines 9 and 10 (And remembering ...remembering, with twinkling and twinges) are moving because they paint an image of how an elderly couple who have lived their lives are now sitting alone in a room full of random items, reminiscing about the past, without anyone to share all their memories with. All they have are <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-the-bean-eaters-by-gwendolyn-brooks/>

those memories as their only link to their earlier life. That reality is quite sad, because once they age more, their memories will become faded and they might not remember anything much from their past.