

On turning ten



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" On Turning Ten" Poetry Explication The poem " On Turning Ten" by Billy Collins highlights the anxiety children undergo as they mature into adolescents. Narrating the poem through his point of view, Collins conveys this anxiety in two ways. First, he establishes a metaphor between growing up and disease. Second, Collins reflects upon the joys of his early childhood. In the beginning of the poem, Collins compares his maturation into adolescence to disease in order to establish a sense of dread. To him, " the whole idea of [growing up] makes [him] feel like [he's] coming down with [a] stomach ache. The pain of being ill expresses the emotional trauma of growing up. Furthermore, the metaphor establishes that Collins wants to avoid growing up just as he would want to avoid contracting a virus. Additionally, Collins writes how his maturation negatively affects his state of mind. Becoming ten years old was " a kind of measles of the spirit, a mumps of psyche. " Since both measles and mumps were severe diseases that often caused death to its victims, Collins capitalizes on the fatality of the disease to instill a sense of doom and hopelessness in growing up.

In the latter part of the poem, Collins details the " perfect simplicity" that pervaded his early childhood. As a baby, Collins relished in his innocence and naivete. He imagined himself as an Arabian wizard, a soldier, and a prince. But now, Collins spends his days depressed. For him adolescence is " the beginning of sadness. " Instead of playing in his imaginary and engage in the fantasy of being a superhero or a movie star, he states " at the window watching the late afternoon light. " Despite his undeniable yearning to do all the activities he loved as a child, Collins is now an adolescent and has outgrown those things.

He can no longer revel in his imaginary world because he has to face reality. Thus, Collins expresses the torture of exiting childhood and maturing. He provides metaphors relating adolescence to disease and even bleaker imagery to portray the horrors of growing up. His depictions of maturation are rife with death and disease. However, his depictions of his childhood are almost utopian. As a child, Collins is happy, enjoying his imaginary world where he is a wizard and reality ceases to exist. As these luxuries disappear as he grows up, the happiness is "drained out of" his life.