

# Sredni vasthar essay sample



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The story of Sredni Vasthar is one of oppression and conflict. Set in the Edwardian period, the social context of the story is that of a family of wealth and middle class values. This aspect of the Edwardian society was seen to be rigid and more concerned on maintaining their status. In this essay I intend to show the reader how the use of language affects the conflict as a whole.

The opening paragraph supplies the reader with enough information so that we are automatically made to feel sympathy towards Conradin as well as involving the reader in the story ' The doctor had pronounced his professional opinion that the boy would not live another five years'. This shows the reader that he is terminally ill, which is the reason for our immediate sympathy. Later on in the paragraph, we learn that he is an orphan in the care of his Cousin.

We are made aware of the fact that his cousin and guardian Mrs De Ropp frequently uses his condition as a justification to coerce him. We are given an indication of her feelings towards her treatment of her nephew: thwarting him ' for his good' was a duty which she did not find particularly irksome. Learning about the tyranny of Mrs De Ropp makes the reader even more sympathetic towards Conradin's plight. This oppression that Conradin experiences at the hands of Mrs De Ropp, is the main conflict in this story.

He manages to find solace in his imagination, using it not only to help escape his solitude and boredom but also to undermine Mrs De Ropp's tyranny. We also learn of his fate if it were not for his imagination: Without his imagination, which was rampant under the spur of loneliness, he would have succumbed long ago. I believe this emphasizes the power of his imagination

and the importance of the purpose it serves in giving Conradin a means of escaping his oppressive guardian. A disused tool shed serves as his haven away from Mrs De Ropp.

He succeeds in rebelling against her and invents a new religion for himself, which centres around the idolization of a polecat-ferret: ' from that moment it grew into a god' he calls Sredni Vashtar. The name Sredni Vashtar itself is a clear example of the power and vivid nature of Conradin's imagination ' Out of Heaven knows what material, he spun the beast a wonderful name'. The tool shed was also home to a Houdan hen ' on which the boy lavished an affection that had scarcely another outlet'. These pets symbolize Conradin's longing and need for love and guidance, which he seldom receives from anybody else.

We have already learnt that Conradin's imagination plays a vital role if he is to survive Mrs De Ropp's relentless subjugation, which begs the question why does she bother to care for him? Does she actually care for him out of love, after all they are related? I believe not. We are given an insight into her feelings towards him. ' Mrs. De Ropp would never, in her honestest moments, have confessed to herself that she disliked Conradin' this extract from the story implies that she does actually dislike him. Also we learn that she is a Christian so maybe she believes she has a responsibility in the eyes of god.

Her status and wealth allows her to provide him with the basic necessities, and to do so might be frowned upon. It is safe to assume that she didn't partake in the general day to day care of Conradin; I believe that duty was

left to the maids. The narration helps the reader to identify with Conradin as it is biased towards him. An example of this is shown through the narrator's use of the term 'the women', a derogatory term coined by Conradin, which the narrator uses when referring to Mrs De Ropp when she is seen 'Thwarting' of Conradin.

The other characters that feature in the story Mrs De Ropp, the Polecat ferret and the Houdan hen are only important because of what they represent to Conradin. We are engrossed in Conradin's thoughts and feelings and follow in his experiences 'He saw the Woman enter, and then he imagined her opening the door of the sacred hutch and peering down with her short-sighted eyes' Had the story been narrated in the first person, the affect would be completely different.

For one it would have none of the witty and sarcastic commentary used in Srendi Vastar, it would come across more informal and unambiguous, even conversational at times when addressing the reader. 'When she comes I will meet, but there they are' this is an extract of a story narrated in the first-person, taken from 'Everyday Use' by Alice walker. Note the informal and direct style in which Mama (the narrator) addresses the reader as if you are in her company.

As Sredni Vasthar is told in the third person narrative, it allows the narrator to be detached from the actual events; this in turn gives the narrator license to have a slightly wry and darkly humorous view on proceedings for instance 'If the malady had lasted for another day the supply of nutmeg would have given out'. Making light of the fact that his cousin's pain is a cause for

celebration. Another example is at the end of the story ' and while they debated the matter among themselves, Conradin made himself another piece of toast'.

This example shows that Conradin has a nonchalant attitude to the death of his cousin and sees it as nothing more than a chance to indulge in forbidden pleasures. The emotive language: ' Woman ransacked his bedroom' is purposely used, to make you have empathy towards Conradin's conflict with his cousin, not only because he is a dying orphan, but because it portrays Ms De Ropp as a cold hearted and vile woman, who is slowly trying to systematically try to break Conradin's child spirit through her subtle oppression: he would succumb to the mastering pressure of wearisome necessary things.

She seems disappointed at the fact that selling the Houdan hen does not provoke a reaction from Conradin. ' With her short-sighted eyes she peered at Conradin' this implies that she is trying to entice him into a reaction, which she will simply ' rebuke with a flow of excellent precepts and reasoning'. When she first notices Conradin's interest in the tool shed, her immediate response is to put an end to it, She goes on to ' Ransack' his room, which makes her come across as inconsiderate because to ransack his room is to not only invade his personal space, but to have no consideration for his personal belongings.

Figurative languages such as similes are used sparingly, but when they are used, they come across as vivid as his imagination. The fruit trees are described as being jealously apart from his plucking, as though they were

rare specimens of their kind blooming in an arid waste. This is to say that for any fruit to grow ' In the dull, cheerless garden' is considered a miracle and to not to be eaten The story has a chronological flow as he as we only learn of events as and when they happen means a simple structure to the story.

The style is formal towards the reader ' After a while Conradin's absorption in the tool-shed began to attract the notice of his guardian'. But the tone that is used is sympathetic and genuine towards Conradin: ' he would grow ever more sickly under her pestering and domineering and superior wisdom'. Ms De Ropp getting rid of the Houdan hen, which was Conradin's only outlet for his affection is the catalyst for a growing intensity of Conradin's hatred of his cousin, thus he loses his sense of control.

Conradin hated her with a desperate sincerity which he was perfectly able to mask' Conradin becomes disillusioned believing that his imagination can affect his reality: Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar' is a clear example of Conradin believing that his god (the pole cat ferret) can liberate him from his oppression. The climax of the story begins when his cousin sets out to discover his god. ' He knew that the Woman would triumph always as she triumphed now' shows that Conradin was all but already to accept his worse fears.

The conflict is resolved when his reality and imagination becomes one, with the death of this cousin at the hands of Sredni Vasthar resulting in a change of the status quo. The climax of the story leaves the reader with the feeling that justice has been done and that Ms De Ropp received her ' comeuppance'. The climax of the story coincides with the theme of Sredni

Vasthar which is one of oppression and justice. We learn how one would react if all outlets for love were to be taken away.

Ms De Ropp we could say instigates her own downfall by taken away the Houdan hen, meaning he was just left with his malice towards his cousin instilled in him through her oppression. The theme also portrays the neglect and emptiness of the middle class Edwardian society. This could be said is portrayed through description of the house and garden as given by the narrator: In the dull, cheerless garden. In conclusion, Sredni vasthar might be seen as a child's dream of fighting a world ruled by uncompromising and non understanding adults.