

Alice munro, day of the butterfly

[Literature](#), [Fiction](#)



Alice Munro, Day of the Butterfly Theme: - children's experience of class difference & social attitudes towards immigrants - girls and growing up
Purpose: - to investigate the ally's experience. (Ally meaning a person who crosses the boundaries set by society to reach out to marginalised others) " I realized the pledge as our fingers touched. " ' Pledge' refers to a heavy commitment Helen, the narrator, would take on by being Myra's friend - to provide a critique of adults' role in educating children about community responsibility or failure to do so (Ms Darling person who creates " dreadful unease", is not able to solve the problem but reinforces it : " let's be nice to Myra") - to critique adults' role in social reproduction a) Myra's difference is highlighted when Ms Darling draws the class' attention to her (contrast with Helen's attitude towards Myra (genuinely kind, committed). b) The characterisation of Myra's family as different, weird " she [Mrs. Sayla] told you the price in a little rapping voice, daring you to challenge her ... with open mockery in her eyes" could suggest that the narrator was the voice of the general privileged public that viewed the Sayla's as different - The child reproduces the adults' perception. Narration: - 1st person narration — to reflect the narrator's personal experience of being an ally and the internal conflict she faced by being an ally " if someone asked her where she got it, and she told them, what would I say? " - Point of view of a child and an ally " It was queer to think that Myra, too, read the comics" (Why the point of view of a child ally? Why not an adult's? — to show that youth have greater capacity to be agents of social change than adults. Difficult to teach an old dog new tricks/old habits die hard) - tone: distanced - not really knowing whether what her classmates are doing is right but instinctively senses that

it may not be — when she is talking about Myra and how the class' behaviour of bullying Myra and her brother. Honest, critical but not prejudiced or judgemental: comments about Myra having the smell of fruit or her clothes, which objectively point out her difference from others but does not judge her with contempt

Characterisation: - Myra

- Looks awkward (sleepy eyes suggests she is tired or heavy-laden with worry unlike other carefree children; her clothes too big for her suggest she has to take on an adult role when she is too young to do it)
- uncommunicative girl who doesn't fit in with the rest of the class
- poor (dress too big for her might be because it has been handed down), parents own fruit shop — she smells of ripe fruit. Her future is limited as she will probably have to help her family with the shop
- Immigrant - 'Brown skin', her language is not American in its style 'please teacher...my brother has wet himself'
- Has to take on responsibility at a young age and does not have much opportunity to be a child
- Is quite frail and sickly — linked to poverty

Helen

- The narrator whose point of view the reader takes
- a person trying to be friendly to Myra. She is trapped between her sympathy for Myra and the rest of the class — takes the role of an 'ally'
- lives in the country (farm girl), also a little insecure — she used to do the same thing as Myra slowing down in case whoever was behind wanted to talk to her

Class

- A microcosm of 'society'
- A group that has "leaders" like Gladys Healey who bully students like Myra and "force" others, who act as followers to do the same or face similar marginalisation

Gladys Healey

- The class 'leader' that the other classmates follow
- She enjoys wealth and is popular because she has access to all good things associated with childhood — quality clothing -

Teacher a) significant female adult character trying to help but in fact, may be more a part of the cause — artificiality (birthday party when it is not Myra's birthday), persuading the class to play with Myra (because she is left out) " Do you think you would be very happy, if you were left back there? "

b) represents the role of adults in social reproduction of class difference

Mood: - Reflective — which goes with the narrator reflecting on this childhood experience when she is a lot older " This sound [children playing on the street] made Myra's future turn shadowy, turn dark. Imagery - symbol of blue butterfly, symbolising freedom (breaking the ice, relief, dreams). The butterfly is also a brooch — not a real butterfly (artifice) - metaphor: birthstone, representing the social position you are born into, fate - dress that is too big for Myra - not really having a childhood (she cannot play but has to take on an adult role of taking care of her little brother). - Myra's ' illness' — more broadly refers to social ills - sleepy eyes — Myra seems tired or burdened - lipstick and make up set — artifice (supports the artificiality of the party and the class' niceness towards Myra — the artificial butterfly) Plot: Significance of giving presents: giving the butterfly to Myra — charity? Friendship? Myra giving her the lipstick set — Myra does not want artifice for herself. She is generous since it is one of the nicest presents she gets — poor people and sharing Structure - Chronological - In the period of time coinciding with Myra's and Helen's lives, no flashbacks - Story divided into six parts: 1. Introduction, Myra's and her brother's position at school (pp. 19-20) 2. The effect of Ms Darling's attempt to integrate Myra (pp. 20-21) 3. Myra's family in contrast to Helen's family (pp. 21-22) 4. The " day of the butterfly" (pp. 22-25) 5. Myra is sick (pp. 25-26) 6. The birthday party (pp.

26-29) Analysis of the "birthday party" Characterisation of the class - how does this scene appear to you? - What is the role of the teacher? What is their relationship to Myra like? - What is the role of Gladys Healey? - What about the relationship between Helen and Myra and the rest of the class? - What is the effect of the birthday party referring to the class? (always give evidence) Analysis of the butterfly symbol: - What are some associations with butterflies? E. g. carefree, light-hearted, pretty, girlhood - Why do you think the title is 'Day of the Butterfly'? - What is the significance of Helen giving the butterfly to Myra?