

Suicide note -janice mirkikitani essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



The poem *Suicide Note* by Janice Mirikitani introduces itself with a small paragraph explaining how an Asian-American student reportedly jumped to her death after being unable to obtain a perfect four point grade average. What follows is the girl's suicide note, an apology to her parents in poetic verse, which is expressed in an understandably melancholy tone. The speaker in *Suicide Note* uses much symbolism to try to express the extent of her sorrow; additionally, she articulates her own feelings of inadequacy while at the same time delicately portraying the futility of the entire situation.

The very first simile in the poem, "ink smeared like birdprints in snow" (2) alludes to a metaphor that continues throughout the poem in which the author describes herself as a sparrow. The simile itself serves multiple purposes, the first and most obvious of which is the imagery it creates, comparing the black words she is writing on the paper to the footprints a bird would leave as it walks through snow. However, upon further reflection it also becomes apparent that the speaker is leaving her mark on the paper, just as a bird would in the snow, for others to find after she is gone.

The overall metaphor of the speaker as a sparrow, however, serves a different purpose and is used to accentuate her femininity. It is very obvious that, at least in the speaker's eyes, her parents would have loved her much more if she were male: "If only I were a son [?] / I would see the light in my mother's / eyes, or the golden pride reflected / in my father's dream / of my wide, male hands [?]" (10-14). So, throughout the poem the speaker expresses her perceived weakness as a woman by comparing herself to a sparrow, a small and delicate bird. An example of this can be seen in lines thirty six through forty: "It is snowing steadily / surely not good weather / for
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flying ? this sparrow / sillied and dizzied by the wind / on the edge.? These lines create a strong image of the frail bird being battered by the wind and snow, alone and most likely afraid.

Another instance in which the speaker uses metaphors in combination with strong imagery occurs from lines twenty five to twenty eight: ? Each failure, a glacier. / Each disapproval, a footprint. / Each disappointment, / ice above my river.? The first example, where the speaker compares her failure to a glacier, symbolizes the growing distance between herself and her parents. It has become a seemingly vast and deathly chilling expanse which separates her from their approval. And when she compares each disapproval to a footprint she is clearly depicting the unsavory mark that her parent? s dissatisfaction leaves on her soul.

This line could also be alluding to the fact that she feels downtrodden by her parent? s oppressive displeasure. The line in which each disappointment is compared to ice above her river is most likely describing how trapped the speaker feels at this point. Nothing she does will let her break through the thick layer of her parent? s discontent, and so she will be left to drown. Furthermore, the speaker uses the possessive ? my? when describing the river which could also mean that she is the river itself and with each disappointment she becomes a little more frozen, dying by degrees.

The next usage of symbolism occurs when the speaker says she will ?[?] make this ledge my altar / to offer penance.? (41-42) The ledge she refers to is the one outside her window, and the penance she offers is her own life. It is appallingly unfortunate that her state of mind is such that, although she

has done no wrong, she is wholeheartedly convinced that by failing to obtain a perfect grade point average she must forfeit her life to appease her mother and father. These lines also make heavy use of irony to accentuate the futility of the entire situation because, far from being appeased, her parents will undoubtedly still end up feeling disappointed, only this time in their own poor parenting.

It is also apparent that the speaker feels she has little choice in the matter when she describes them as ? thin as shaved / ice. [?]? (49-50). She has failed and so now she has no other option than to end her own life. This is a surprisingly common belief in Asia, especially in Japan. The roots of Japanese ritual suicide, also called seppku or harakiri, date back to the time of the samurai, an elite warrior class whose sense of honor left no room for failure. It was quite common that if a samurai warrior failed to perform their duties adequately they would either be requested to commit seppku, or would volunteer to do so themselves. This idea of failure not being an option has continued into modern Japanese society and is evidenced by the extraordinarily high student suicide rates, particularly around the time students take their notoriously difficult high school entrance exams. It is not clear if the speaker is of Japanese decent herself however, the author, Janice Mirikitani, is (Mirikitani Bio). Considering that information, in combination with the attitude the speaker displays towards failure, certainly leads the reader to believe that the speaker is, in fact, Japanese.

In this poem the reader is told a heartbreaking story of tragedy and pain in which all the speaker wants is love and acceptance from her parents. The

speaker uses many metaphors to convey her feelings of despondency and ends up not only succeeding in that endeavor, but also in showing the reader what life must have been like growing up in a family where even your very best wasn't good enough. And just like birdprints left in the snow to be found and commented upon later, so too will her words be left as marks to remember her by.