

An analysis of a favourite grace nichols poem essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In this essay I will be writing about one of the Grace Nichols poems that I have studied. I will refer to other poems that have the same theme or technique that Grace Nichols uses. I have decided to analyze “ Childhood”.

Grace Nichols was born in Georgetown, Guyana in 1950.

She was educated at St. Stephan’s Scot School, PPI High School and Guyana’s University. She worked as a teacher, a Guyanese Government employee and a freelance journalist before she moved to Britain in 1977. She is now regarded as the most authoritative spokeswoman among contemporary black women poets in Britain today. The Fat Black Woman’s Poems”, which she wrote in 1984 uses humor to deconstruct a racial and sexual stereotype, this collection of poetry is the one I have studied and will be analyzing an extract from. This poem describes about growing up in another culture.

The way it’s expressed is by using the aspect of catching fish. When she moves from the culture she’s adapted to and arrives another where they catch fish differently, she finds it strange. She has a lot of positive memories of her culture and now she is in a new one, it contrasts with the way she was brought up. Religion and morals are questioned in this poem because where she was brought up it was ok to catch the fish in that way, but now she’s in a new culture she is surrounded by opinions that say that is the wrong way.

She’s obviously homesick, as she is not used to this culture that makes the poem have a depressing tone to it. I believe the writer is trying to express how simplistic the way she lived before she was brought into a different culture. Her life followed a regime that meant she didn’t have to worry about

anything and she could enjoy herself. But when she arrives into another culture, which is more complex and everything has to be thought through and has a consequence, she thinks it's strange and can't become accustomed to it. " We didn't learn to pray, for the dying freshwater souls of fish".

" We" means more than one of them didn't learn to pray properly. This shows that her whole community is like her in their state of mind. She doesn't understand why they didn't learn to pray for the fish in her society, but they do in the new society she has been introduced to. We don't have to kill fish when were young, but her community and her are brought up to kill fish and animals and therefore they don't learn to pray for them.

Our societies are different in this way and in many. Another poem that shows differences in our society is " Fear" which is also in the same collection as " Childhood" Another point I think she is trying to put across is that her community was very religious and must have been a tightly woven community to be able to have the same religion without some sort of protest. This is in contrast to our society, which is mostly secular these days, and yet we still have very strong opinions on killing animals. If she is religious she may not understand why we have a problem with killing animals because God had given man rule over all animals and therefore should be able to kill them to live of. " At Sunday school".

This tells us that the society she grew up in had religion and must have been educated enough to understand it. The word " at" shows that she's been or she knows what is there. Again contrast between our societies that could be

related to the poem “ Fear”. I also think the Grace Nichols has made it sound like she’s looking through rose-coloured glasses.

“ My Childhood” indicates that what she talks about in the poem is mostly a memory; based on other poems like “ Two Old Black Men on a Leicester Square Park Bench” we may think that this memory is distorted. Childhood is simple and happy. Its almost “ blind to reality” and completely carefree as you have hardly any responsibilities. This poem has a melancholy undertone to it and a feeling of being homesick is all the way through this poem.

It makes the reader feel sad to read about this person being confused and regretful that she came to a different culture that she wasn’t used to. “ A watershed of sunlight”, a watershed is like a line or parting from the sunlight she was used to as a child. The word sunlight makes me think positively of thing and the sunlight is supposed to represent her homeland. A watershed is also imposed to protect people from something that may be offending but the emphasis on sunlight pulls us away from thinking that her childhood was bad, but makes us think that she was either protected and safe or protected from the truth of the world. Watershed can also mean summit, so perhaps these were the happiest and brightest days of her life and from then the enjoyment and excitement had no where to go but downhill. Also the word “ watershed” makes me think of water and the mixture of water and sun causes a twinkling image, which is how she perceives her childhood.

Watershed is a turning point in events. This section of a stanza is a perfect example of what the poet is trying to make the reader feel. Grace Nichols tries to make you understand the happiness of her childhood but at the same

time know that its no longer there. She wants us to see what she has lost since coming over to our culture. This poem almost makes me feel bad for how our society is. It makes me think perhaps our society means that we will never be as close as hers was.

It makes me feel like our society is too hard to let people like Grace Nichols come into it and still retain some of their culture. They have to change to be assimilated into our system. Grace Nichols writes her poems so that it emphasizes words and makes the reader understand it in several denominations but all ending up to mean the same thing. She does this by the way her sentences are structured and by the language that she uses. She not only uses customary techniques that all poets use but she also uses interesting words from her culture or she spells the words differently to emphasize a point.

Grace Nichols uses enjambment all the way through this and most of her poems to create a rhythm that relates to the mood of the poem or phrase being written. “ The fishes before a drought. ” The non-standard form of the plural indicates the author isn’t comfortable with the English language. This might not just be misspelling however, it could also link into the idea of childhood. The non-standard form could represent the way a young child would speak.

Here she uses the misspelling of a word to create either a sense on not belonging in our culture and she isn’t used to it completely or she’s trying to make us see her as a child as she reminisces her past. “

Sunfish/patwa/butterfish. ” Her Grace is just saying words but it gives us the

impression she is remembering all the tropical and exotic fish living in the author's homeland. Sunfish is a brightly coloured fish and a butterfish is like an eel. However, " patwa" is an irregular spelling of patois, which is an informal variation of a language. This maybe because she doesn't know how to spell it or she wants all the words to fit with each other.

She has written it in the way she has to quicken the rhythm like a list. The forward slashes is what causes the rhythm and pace and creates this listing effect. To use a simple conjunction would slow the line down. " Beneath the mirror surfacing.

" She is using the same word that means two different things. It could mean the surface of the water is like a mirror linking back to the image of the sunlight or it could mean the fish coming to the surface of the water. Bare hand I gripped. " The word order is unusual.

Due to the word order it causes the sentence to be ambiguous. It could mean she grips the fish or it could mean she's gripping her hands in frustration or anger. I chose this poem over the others given to me because I think that it has a very clear message that our culture needs to take heed to. It's my favourite because this poem seems to be about Grace Nichols' life rather than her experiences of things, which makes me think its more personal.