

# Idea of perfection



Paper One Commentary The Idea of Perfection, by Kate Grenville This extract from Kate Grenville's 'The Idea of Perfection' explores the idea of heritage and the need to preserve cultural landmarks. Furthermore, the author addresses the theme of beauty, touching on the idea that perfection can alter the perception of beauty. The author uses a variety of features in order to convey her views, each of which I shall consider. In particular, I shall focus on imagery, grammar and sounds. The precise structure of this text serves to emphasise the author's focus on order and tidiness. The text can be divided into three distinct sections. The first section comprises lines 1 to 20 which describe the character's journey towards the bridge. This section has an inquisitive tone, the character curiously searches for the bridge which she recognises "from its picture in the paper". The character appears to be secretive and is very self-aware, "She glanced around, as if someone might have heard her." The second part of this text is made up of lines 21 to 46. Throughout this section, the character adventurously searches the surroundings of the bridge as she admires the shapes and materials of the cultural symbol. Finally, the last section of this text includes lines 47 to 58. In this final part, the character repeatedly draws the bridge in her notebook, carefully examining each aspect of its structure. The great lengths to which the woman goes to in order to draw the bridge shows her appreciation for its value and splendour. Throughout this text, Kate Grenville explores three central themes. Primarily, Grenville deals with the idea of natural beauty and the manner in which it is preserved. The protagonist's actions revolve solely around the historic bridge which has been numerous times repaired to prevent its collapse. The paradoxical beauty of the bridge stems from its repair, the bridge is badly damaged, yet it is the bridge's repair which makes it

attractive, “ Each timber had its own colour and its own personality. ”

Secondly, the author examines the theme of perfection and the way in which it is desired. The central character appears to have a yearning for perfection, although superficially she sees beauty in the old decrepit bridge, she notices how its shapes “ fitted together in a satisfying way. ” In addition, Grenville explores the theme of culture, concerning particularly the restoration of archaic features, which symbolises the need to preserve an area’s cultural heritage. The bridge signifies the division of the community, between those who wish for the bridge to be preserved, and those who want it to be demolished and replaced. Grenville uses imagery to highlight the importance of nature by giving importance to objects and animals. The author uses metaphors to describe the bridge in great depth which demonstrates its complexity in terms of its symbolic importance, “ One was pink-grey with fine streaks of red like dried blood in the grain. ” The reference to blood suggests a link between the deteriorating bridge and the ancient heritage of the area. The author uses the metaphor to signify the symbolic landmark as a representation of the importance of history. The author also uses similes to contrast seemingly normal objects or actions to those of magnificence, “ Like aircraft in formation”, “ In which some cows stood all lined up ... like ornaments along a mantelpiece”, “ It was like two people holding hands”, “ Like an old-fashioned marcel wave”. These similes serve to show the splendour of the natural environment. Grenville uses similes to reinforce the theme of perception of beauty, highlighting that even aspects which are deemed insignificant in terms of appearance can too be considered striking. Furthermore, Kate Grenville uses the literary technique of anthropomorphism, to show the abstract nature of the setting, “ The dog

twisted its head to look up at her in surprise". Conversely, Grenville gives bestial qualities to the female character, " She laughed aloud, suddenly, a noise like a bark. " Complimenting the use of anthropomorphism, the author uses personification, " A humble little thing, the bend giving it an apologetic look. " By using these techniques, Grenville succeeds in giving unnatural qualities to basic objects or animals which furthers the author's theme of depicting common objects as extraordinary. The author uses grammar to reinforce the symbolic significance of the bridge in terms of its importance within the local area. The definite article ' the' is used to describe the character's findings, " And then all at once there was the river, and the bridge. " The impact of this is that it serves to show the landmarks as individual and well-known, this develops the theme of culture and the need to protect and preserve it. Grenville uses a form of superlative to create a calming atmosphere, " The palest kind of blue", which in turn links to the theme of perfection as it implies that the cloudless sky is beautiful and enriching. This extract is written in third person about a nameless character, thereby making the scenario anonymous and in a sense impersonal. The impact of this is that the reader learns more about the setting as opposed to the protagonist's appearance or lifestyle, therefore forcing the focus upon the location. In the final section, repetition is used to show the excitement of the character upon examining the bridge, " She got a notebook and pencil out of her pocket and stood drawing squares and long rectangles that interlinked and interlocked. " The methodical manner in which the character draws the bridge depicts how she strips it down to its basic core, drawing shapes as opposed to copying the bridge exactly. Having satisfactorily drawn the bridge, she "[shades] the squares and rectangles with her pencil. "

Grenville uses these actions to show the very essence of beauty. Kate Grenville uses sounds in this extract to contrast the initial calm tone, to that of a progressively harsher one. In the first section of the text, the author uses soft vowel sounds to create a tranquil and gentle atmosphere, " She looked away up into the sky: the palest kind of blue, a big quiet light. " This contrasts to the harsher, rougher consonant sounds of the second section, " A clutter of primitive timbers wedged against each other into crude simple joints. " Similarly, the contrasting sound of the two place names depicts the bridge as a picturesque setting, " Cascade Rivulet", " Hanging Rock". The soft vowel sounds of " Cascade Rivulet" portray the bridge and its environment as a desirable place. In addition, the author uses the alliteration of ' s' words, " the slope, so steep", with sibilance, " washing away", to create the sound of the " transparent amber water" flowing below the bridge. To conclude, Grenville successfully shows the importance of one landmark by using calming sounds and vocabulary which consequently evoke sympathy. The final line of the extract is a metonym for life, suggesting that superficial appearances are not wholly representative, " Arranged in a way that was not as simple as it seemed. " Finally, throughout this extract, Kate Grenville combines the use of imagery, grammar and sounds in order to portray the central themes of her novel.