

To a daughter leaving home analysis



I decided on the poem “ To a Daughter Leaving Home,” for its overall simplicity matched with the deeper meaning that I found within. It stood out to me immediately as I was able to relate to both the underlying connotation as well as the literal experience of learning to ride a bike. Poems can become complex and complicated, to me, and often lose their meaning. I found this particular poem to be straight forward, clear, and quite frankly, something I could understand.

“ To a Daughter Leaving Home” takes place in past times back in the 1950’s or 1960’s when life had a much slower pace to it. The speaker is the parent; the father is reminiscing about his daughter’s upbringing. The audience is the daughter; the girl is being talked to about the feelings her father felt as she grew up, learned her lessons, and left home. The setting is outside, at a nearby park, during a nice, sunny, Spring day. The park has a path which is where the girl is beginning to learn to ride a bike.

The hour is in the late afternoon about four or five o’clock. Dad and his girl are alone, at the park, somewhere in the rural United States. The daughter is eight years old when her father takes her to a local park to learn to ride her bike. At first, Dad ran alongside the girl to help steady her; however, she then pulls away, riding on her own. Dad is surprised and tries to run after and catch up to help her while expecting to hear the girl crash. (13/14) Instead, the girl laughs (20) as she continues peddling and riding off into the distance. 17)

The imagery of this poem is felt the heaviest at the end as the girl has grasped the idea of bike-riding and she goes “ pumping, pumping for your

life” (17/18) and “ screaming with laughter. ”(19/20) There is a visual imagery and an auditory imagery that is interlinked giving the reader a well-rounded feeling of it. You can almost hear the girl laughing as she tries to continue peddling and moving forward. It almost gives a feeling of accomplishment as the girl realizes that she is no longer reliant on her father.

Of course, this is the literal imagery. The figurative imagery is one of a happy childhood where father and daughter are close. As she grows, the girl learns and catches on quickly as Dad is forced to let go and watch his child continue on without his guidance. The simile of this poem also takes place at the end when the author describes the girl's hair “ flapping behind” (21/22) like a “ handkerchief waving goodbye. ”(22/23/24) This summarizes the concept of the idea that the ‘ child’ is gone forever; the little girl has grown up and has moved on.

The entire poem is a metaphor as it compares riding a bike to a child's upbringing and coming into adulthood. Simply put, the title represents nothing about what the poem is describing. The author parallels, or uses allegory, between his teaching to ride a bike and his life lessons taught in raising his child. An overstatement in this poem is found when the author states the girl is “ pumping, pumping for your life. ” (18/19) It gives the reader the mental picture of the girl pedaling as hard as she can. The function of this overstatement is to show that the girl has learned the lesson and is excelling in her way.

Literally, she has learned how to ride the bike, but figuratively, she has learned character, morals, trustworthiness, honesty, and success and is now ready to conquer the world on her own. The father watches in awe as he waits for her to crash, but she is fluent and no longer needs him the way she used to. The tone of this poem is one of happiness and reflection. The author is trying to describe feelings to his daughter as he expresses what they have been through together. The meter is very scattered as I found it difficult to provide any regular patterns or accents within.

The continuous form of the author's story relies more heavily on meaning than it does on repetition or rhyming. This poem left me thinking of the relationship between my father and I and all the experiences we have shared together. I believe that is the type of nostalgia (D&T) that the author is trying to convey and wants the reader to visualize. This poem has strong meaning conveyed in simple form and minimal words. The reader is able to understand the feelings of both the father and the daughter as well as feel a sense of happy sadness for what their relationship has gone through and become.