

# [Half past two and hide and seek essay](https://assignbuster.com/half-past-two-and-hide-and-seek-essay/)

‘ Half Past Two’ and ‘ Hide and Seek’ are poems that attempt to capture a child’s experience of the world. Consider what that experience like, and how it is presented, paying particular attention to the techniques used to create and communicate the point of view of the child. Both poems, U. A. Fanthorpe’s ‘ Half Past Two’ and Vernon Scannell’s ‘ Hide and Seek’ aim to recreate a child’s experience, and also illustrates a learning curve to maturity, in their lives.

Both poets try to capture the much sought after qualities of children, such as naivety and innocence, as well as recreating the world, emotions, struggles and thoughts of children, which are in a deep contrast to adults. Both poems appear on the surface to be merely concerned with focusing on the concerns of the child, but more importantly, aim to use the child’s experience as a metaphor for an experience in society and the world as a whole. This means that both poems are not only concerned with childhood but also with something greater in the world.

Fanthorpe aims to give “ a voice to the voiceless” in expressing the views and opinions of those who are not usually heard in society, such as children, the old, and the disabled. She also tends to portray situations in which no-one is there to witness, therefore exposing events and experiences that are not generally shown. Vernon Scannell seeks to show the harsher side of childhood, examining the cruelty that children inflict and endure, breaks the illusion of childhood being an innocent, ‘ golden’ time of our lives. Both poems share a number of common themes.

Both look at isolation, in the way that Scannell talks of a child hiding “ in the toolshed” in a game, while Fanthorpe describes a child being punished at school by staying in “ the school-room till half-past two”. They also look at the theme of abandonment by outside forces: in ‘ Hide and Seek’ the boys supposedly looking for the child abandon him with “ laughter”, while “ Half-Past Two” shows the teacher, described only as “ She”, leaving the child on his own in a world of ‘ timelessness’. Both also show the naivety, innocence, and perhaps even ignorance of children as both children manage to misunderstand their situation.

In ‘ Half Past Two’ we see the child not able to “ click” the “ language” of the clock, hence being in a world of timelessness, while the child in Scannell’s poem is oblivious to the fact that his friends have left him alone in a cruel joke. Finally, both poems show the character experiencing an epiphany. The primary theme we see in both poems is abandonment. In ‘ Half Past Two’, after doing ‘ Something Very Wrong’, the child is abandoned by a teacher as a punishment. However, his childlike world has not yet prepared him either for understanding the concept of a detention or the concept of staying their “ till half-past two”.

This adult convention of time has not been explained to the child, who is bewildered and confused by the situation. By not knowing what time he is to leave, he is consequently stuck in a land where time does not exist, trapped in “ the clockless world of ever”. Being a resourceful child, he examines the clock and tries to “ click it’s language”, and compares it to the times he is aware of, such as “ gettinguptime, timeyouwereofftime, timetogohomenowtime” but does not manage to comprehend the concept of the clock and adult time. In ‘ Hide and Seek’ the child is also abandoned, but this takes the form of a malicious joke by his peers.

While playing a game of hide and seek, the boy’s friends abandon the child, as we see their words and laughter scuffle, and they’re gone”, leaving the child unaware of their departure. The child continues to hide in the shed, believing that the boys are “ getting more puzzled as they search all over”. The innocence of the child, seen as almost painful to the reader, is heightened as the child continues to hide until “ the sun is gone” finally bursting out, hoping to be triumphantly proclaimed the winner, only to find “ the darkening garden” watching, but no-one else.

The sense of isolation and sadness is heightened by the bushes which “ hold their breath”. The poets use a number of different techniques and methods to convey a sense of isolation. In ‘ Half Past Two’, Fanthorpe tries to show how alienated and isolated the boy is from the adult world. This is shown in the way the boy “ couldn’t click it’s language” when talking of the clock, and his alienation is shown in the way that he was “ beyond” and “ out of reach” of time, and therefore the regulation of the adult world.

After his epiphany, he is finally introduced back into the adult world as Fanthorpe says he is “ slotted back into schooltime” by the teacher. In ‘ Hide And Seek’ Scannell tries to use language to portray a sense of silence and darkness, as he uses words such as “ salty dark” and “ smell like the seaside” to show that the child’s other senses have been heightened as he is in the dark. The reader is aware at this point the child is in total isolation as the other children leave him with “ laughter”. When the child finally bursts out a climax is created by Scannell as he writes ironically “ I’ve won! Here I am!

Come and own up I’ve caught you! ” A gloomy sense of isolation is built up here as we see the only spectator of the incident and his humilation was the “ darkening garden”, and a sense of dreary lonliness is created by the way the “ sun is gone” and “ the bushes hold their breath” which conjures dark, hushed imagery in the reader’s mind. With these techniques, I believe that Scannell is trying to show the child’s first introduction to adult life and the disappointments associated with it, shown in the painful climax that is reached, when the child’s innocence is shattered when he discovers he has been tricked.

Scannell is also trying to show that although these events are saddening, they are also necessary for maturing into adulthood and emotional development. However, I believe that Fanthorpe’s ‘ Half Past Two’ has a different aim in her writing. Fanthorpe tries to show adults that children are blissfully ignorant of the world around them, as they posses the ability to escape from constraints such as time and regulation through their ignorance.

Both Scannell and Fanthorpe try to recreate a sense of uncertainty and fear in their pieces, and both achieve this aim in different ways. ‘ Half Past Two’ focuses on the way that the child does not understand adult time due to his limited knowledge of this alien “ regulation” that occurs around him. This is shown when the teacher “ hadn’t taught him Time / He was too scared of being wicked to remind her”. Not only is unknowing shown here, but also fear. The child is powerless and vunerable and his blind fear overtakes logic in his mind.

This image of confusion is juxtaposed with that of the child trying to work out when “ Half Past Two” is by parcelling his day by the events that occur daily, such as “ Gettinguptime, timeyouwereofftime, Timetogohomenowtime, TVtime”. These compounded words, or enjamberment, manage to create a familiar childhood world, structured by events. The capitalisation of the word “ She” referring to the teacher, showing the fear he shows for her, as well as the confusion he has for the petty incident has been involved in which was “ Something Very Wrong”.

Capitalisation not only suggests that the child believes the thing is important to the adult world, but he is also unsure as to what it’s meaning is. In ‘ Hide And Seek’ a different type of fear and uncertainty is shown. This is because it is partly mixed with excitement as the child is playing a game. The beginning of the poem opens with short, sharp sentences portraying juvenile excitement, such as “ Call out. Call loud” and “ They’ll never find you in this salty dark, But be careful that your feet aren’t sticking out”.

Suspense is built as first and second person voices are mixed together, the second person being Scannell, the child in retrospect, or the child’s subconscious mind. I believe it is more likely that it is the child’s subconscious mind, as it would make more sense for the child to be thinking to himself rather than a grown adult, already knowing the outcome, giving the child commands. This second person gives commands such as “ Don’t breathe. Don’t move”, warning the child to be calm and still.

Excitement is shown as well as fear when the boys looking for him are described as hunters or predators who “ come prowling in”. After this, a slow creeping of pain and choking envelops the boy as he firstly fears first being found, “ And here they are, whispering at the door”, then not being found, and finally being left on his own indefinitely. Here the tone of the poem becomes oppressive and dark, with phrases like “ the dark damp smell of sand moves in your throat”, using alliteration to create a more brooding and negative atmosphere.

The uncertainty of the boy is finally bought to a head when he finds the “ darkening garden” the only spectator to his abandonment and humiliation. The darkness of the outside world mirrors the darkness that has also shrouded him. The use of staccato sentences throughout the piece not only lend a sense of pace and excitement when necessary, but also recreates the simplicity of a child’s world and the fear in his mind. In ‘ Half Past Two’ Fanthorpe presents an epiphany to the reader from the perspective of the young boy, so a small element of fear is to be expected.

Fear is not shown prominently, however the child may have been slightly frightened of not only the teacher, described only as “ She” due to her authority and power and his powerlessness, but also the strange, magical experience that he underwent. He is curious of his “ lockless land of ever”, which may instil fear. In “ Hide and Seek” however, we see the child also being powerless in his life, only being able to witness the results of the situation where he was abandoned rather than being able to do anything about them.

We also see an element of fear creeping into him with the final rhetorical question of “ where are those who sought you”, where fear is introduced to the boy for the first time, near the end of the poem. In both poems the children experience an epiphany of some kind. In ‘ Half Past Two’ the epiphany occurs in verses 7 and 8, and is understood in verse 10. The boy undergoes the experience of being in a state of timelessness, where time is not important or relevant and therefore magical. This is portrayed in the way that the child becomes “ Out of reach of all the timefors” and “ Into the smell of old chrysanthemums … he silent noise his handnail made … into ever”.

Fanthorpe describes that the child, through being completely unaware of any sort of constraints of time, has escaped into ‘ infinity’ where he can truly appreciate the smells of flowers, silence in the room and all the elements around him, as all his senses are heightened. The syntax used in these two verses is more free than other verses, mirroring the theme of the section. Words such as “ escape” are used to portray the fact that the child has left for a world which adults can never venture in.

When the epiphany is over, we see the teacher, now appearing much less important “ scuttling” like an insect, unaware of what the child has experienced. The importance of the epiphany is not realised by the child until verse 10, when he realises how constrained the world he lives in, with his “ timefors” and “ nexttime, notimeforthatnowtime”. With this in mind, the author leaves us with the lines “ he never forgot how once by not knowing time, He escaped into the lockless land of ever”, showing us this has been an indelible mark in the child’s mind.

We can see it was a positive experience for the child, as an image of pregnancy is brought into the piece in the last line as the phrase “ Where time hides tick-less waiting to be born” is used, showing us that the boy’s life has only just begun. The boy has learnt that he must ‘ crack the code’ of time as he has just done to survive in the world, while time moves on mercilessly, never waiting or pausing. We are left with a positive, encouraging, if enviable image as the poem finishes, although a hint of negativity is also present as we know that no-one, not even the young and ignorant, can escape permanently from time.

In ‘ Hide And Seek’ a very different epiphany is presented towards the end of the poem. The previous few lines build up a negative atmosphere, talking of “ the darkening garden”, finally building to a rhetorical question, where Scannell asks “ where are they who sought you? ” The fact that he has been betrayed dawns on the boy, and makes him aware that his beliefs friendships have been undermined. This brings a much darker edge to the poem than Fanthorpe’s, where instead of undergoing a life enriching experience, the boy encounters a painful experience which at best will strengthen him for further events in life.

The lesson learned for the child is not to be so gullible and to accept defeat and betrayal. Both experiences are both isolating a child’s experience, but at the same time a metaphor is presented for life as whole. Scannell suggests that life is full of shattered dreams, spoilt optimism and humiliation, in the same way the child, who was full of innocence and joy, had his emotions crushed by two similar children. This relates to our world every day, in the way that many people find their opportunities cruelly lost, and dreams shattered by the careless behaviour of others, or by forces beyond their control.

Fanthorpe suggests that time is the most powerful force in the world, and can only be escaped momentarily. It will not wait for us, as it tick on mercilessly, which is shown when the child is eventually “ slotted back” into time again. The poem ends with a paradox as the author suggests that without time the world is magical, free and liberated, yet at the same time isolating as the child is restricted and confined from the rest of the time-driven world.

In conclusion, both poems are metaphors for larger and more important issues in life as well as childhood, but both have significantly different tones; ‘ Half Past Two’ begins on a more negative note, as the teacher scolds the child, but ends happily as we see a child undergoing a magical epiphany, while in ‘ Hide and Seek’ we see the poem begin with a playful, innocent note, and end with a more dark note as the child grimly realises that he has been abandoned and humiliated.

However, both two share the same view of childhood being a struggle to get through, living in a oppressive adult world. Both poems try to convey to us that society is not as free or as perfect as we believe it to be, reflecting the fact that human nature is constrained and at times malicious. Both poems also try to allow the reader to gain something out of the pieces by making them more aware of the society they live in; ‘ Half Past Two’ encourages people to stop their lives being governed by time, and ‘ Hide and Seek’ advises us to see childhood as a less innocent time of one’s life.