

Green beret by ho  
thien and the  
identification by roger  
mcgough essay



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The Identification and Green Beret are two very different poems, but they also have their similarities. They are both about conflict and have themes of loss and destruction but as they are from different eras and countries.

I will explore the numerous differences and similarities in this essay. The Identification is focuses on a young boy who was caught in an IRA bombing in Ireland. It is a poem going through a series of events, so it tells a story; the story of a man identifying his son's body. It's written in the first person which makes it personal to the narrator, almost as if the reader is inside the man's mind.

We can guess that the narrator is the father from the line ' He wouldn't disobey me. Not his father. ' We also can guess that the father is in a hospital or a mortuary, as this is where identifications of bodies usually take place. The reader has no introduction to the events except for the title and the first line ' So you think its Stephen? ' tells us that Stephen is being identified. Because we have no introduction or explanation, the reader has to use their imagination and piece together events through hints and small pieces of information given throughout the poem. I think this has a good effect because it makes the reader have to think through the poem and perhaps read it more than once in order to understand all of the events.

There are strong themes of loss and destruction in this poem, but never anger. The father doesn't show anger or hurt during his narration. I think this makes the poem more powerful because it means the reader can see the straight forward facts and events of the poem, although sometimes he goes off-subject and says things such as how he doesn't allow Stephen to smoke

and talks about him hammering studs into his belt. On the other hand, doing this gives us a bit more information on Stephen and makes us sympathise more with the narrator because Stephen seems so innocent and young. The father clearly wants to keep an innocent perception of Stephen because he tries to convince himself and the reader that Stephen must have been minding the cigarettes in his pockets for one of the older boys.

The mood is one of slight hope- if this body is not Stephen's, then this means Stephen might still be alive, however this hope becomes increasingly less throughout the poem as the father becomes more sure that this is his son's body. The narrator repeats how they always ' must be sure' and ' I'd best make sure' that the body is Stephen's or not, and even says ' one must pull out every splinter of hope', which is a tragic and sad phrase to use but makes it clear to us that he is hopeful that it isn't Stephen's body. The language of this poem is interesting as it is written as thoughts. The narrator uses questions and short sentences to portray his thoughts. The questions are to some unknown other person- we are not introduced to them but we can guess that they are the police or another family member.

We aren't given the other person's response to the questions but we can guess what they said from the following lines. I think doing this is slightly confusing but a good technique. The description of the boy's appearance is quite vague but there are some interesting phrases, such as the description of the boy's face- ' a mask of charred wood'- this is a powerful phrase to describe a human face, and means it must truly be destroyed. The poet repeatedly emphasizes the youth of the boy, referring to him as a ' boy' and ' child', which makes the poem all the more moving because it makes the <https://assignbuster.com/green-beret-by-ho-thien-and-the-identification-by-roger-mcgough-essay/>

boy seem more venerable and juvenile. By the end of the poem, when the father is sure that this is his son, the sentences are very short and they repetitively confirm that the body is Stephen's.

' Yes that's it. That's him. That's our Stephen. ' this gives the impression of shock and sadness.

I found the poem interesting and very upsetting. I don't usually enjoy this kind of poem but I think it was well written and touching, but a little hard to understand. I had to read it a few times to understand completely what was going on but I think this is because I have trouble with poetry. Green Beret is a poem telling the story of a young Vietnamese boy and his father taken by American mercenaries to question them. The troops assume that the young boy knows Guerilla information and secrets, and so they threaten the boy with the father's life. When he says nothing, one mercenary says that the boy has ten seconds, or they will kill his father.

When the boy continues to be silent, the mercenary commands for the father to be killed. The boy is distraught and the troops leave. We then discover that the boy knew everything all along; where the Guerrilla troops were hiding, their names and secrets. The poem is written so that it tells a story to the readers- we only know as much as we would if we were watching the scene happen, until the end, when we are told the boy knows more than he lets on. This is a good affect because it is unexpected and a twist at the end of the story. There are a few themes in this poem.

Firstly the conflict; the conflict between the Vietnamese citizens and the

American troops in the time of the Vietnam war- even though the Americans  
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were supposed to be there to help they made things worse, but also the conflict which must have been in the boy's mind- the decision of helping the American troops and saving his father or working toward the greater good and not giving anything away, but sacrificing his father's life. There is a theme of loss- the loss of the father's life and also the loss of human kindness and nature- the American troop completely degraded the Vietnamese. There is also a theme of strength and courage from the young boy. There is a certain mood of shock, despair and sadness and then the twist at the end changes the mood completely. We can sympathize with the boy but perhaps less because he wasn't completely innocent and let his father die. There is no rhyming structure or verse pattern.

There are two verses, one which tells the story and the other which tells us the truth of the situation. I like the way it's structured because it is almost like the two sides to the story. The language is interesting in this poem. No one is actually named, only the main mercenary is called Green Beret. This is to emphasize the inhumanity of the situation; if you don't give someone a name, it takes away his or her humanity. I found the poem sad and sympathized with the boy until I found out he knew more than he was letting on.

I understand why he didn't tell the troops because they probably would have killed him and his father anyway, had he confessed. This situation was common in the Vietnam War and I understood this poem well having recently studied this conflict. There are many similarities between these two poems.

Both are about loss of a family member, so they both show the stress of that.

However, the Green Beret tells us of the boy's outward show of grief when <https://assignbuster.com/green-beret-by-ho-thien-and-the-identification-by-roger-mcough-essay/>

his father is shot when it says ' the boy cried out' and ' the boy shook with tears, as children do when their father dies'. The Identification shows no signs of grief but we can feel the narrator's pain as the boy identifies.

The Identification was written in 1972 around the time of the IRA bombings, which was when a lot of surprise bombs and attacks on innocent people were happening. It captures the mood of parents and others that cared for their children who were hurt or killed by the bombings. It is unknown when the Green Beret was written, but we can tell it was written about the Vietnam conflict, which was between 1959 and 1975. The peak of US involvement in the war was 1968 so we can guess it was written about this time. The mood in each is greatly different.

In The Identification, the mood is an increasing feeling of familiarity and sureness although at the same time great despair. In the Green Beret the mood is one of shock and despair and then a twist, which changes it completely. I think this difference is one of the most important between the two poems because it gives them a very different feel. When looking at the language of each poem, they are similar. Both use simple words with a few powerful uses of imagery, such as ' the silver hand shattered the sky' when describing the time running out for the young boy to confess in The Identification and ' the mask of charred wood' when describing the boy's burnt face.

Neither poem uses a lot of imagery or metaphors because they are both telling a series of events. The poems are both easy to understand because there aren't any particularly challenging words. The narrative in the

Identification is more personal because it is through the father's eyes- but we only know what he says out loud, not what he is thinking. He could be hiding his emotions from who ever is helping him identify the body, so we can't be clear what he is thinking. The narrative in the Green Beret is viewing it as a story more than through someone's eyes, and then tells us the extra information at the end.

I prefer the style of narration in the Green Beret because it lets us know the surprising twist and the Identification's narrative was harder to understand. I have mixed feelings about each poem. The Identification was harder for me to understand because of the narrative, although I understand why it was written that way. The more I read it the more I understood it and felt sorry for the narrator and for Stephen.

Although the poem is very well written, I feel that better language and metaphors could have been used but because of the narrative they couldn't be said. As I don't know a lot about the conflict in Ireland or the IRA, I can't put it all into perspective either. I find the Green Beret a lot easier to interpret because I know a lot about the Vietnam War so I know what perspective it fits into about the mistreatment of the Vietnamese citizens by American troops. However, it is a biased poem because it doesn't show anything about how young American men were forced to go to war and the majority didn't want to be fighting. Overall, I find both poems interesting but I could identify more with the Green Beret and preferred its structure.

I have explored the themes, moods, structures, settings, narratives and more of each poem and looked at the differences and similarities. Both are intriguing and an insight into different sides of conflict.