

Reading responses to a poem

Literature



**ASSIGN
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The First An Identity-Defining Moment in Soto's (1995) "Oranges" March 16, First s can have a large impact on people's lives, either making or breaking their self-esteem and self-image for many years. In "Oranges," Gary Soto narrates a young boy's first date, as part of the rites of passage to adolescence. He describes the boy's fears and apprehensions, in relation to the setting and its symbolisms, which the boy eventually conquers through his resourcefulness and courage. The poem has setting, form, and symbolism that portray the power of a fleeting childhood experience in developing abilities that enable them to surmount challenges which consequently develop their identities, and these elements affected my reaction to the content of the poem by making me appreciate the beauty and meaning of life's little moments.

The setting of the poem highlights the challenges of growing up. The cold environment represents hindrances to social development. Soto (1995) described the cold that weighs down the boy (line 3) with "[f]rost cracking" (line 5), as he walked. The coldness seems to want to stop the boy from his quest, as if he is a knight with different impediments in his path to glory. Wilson (2002) underscored that the cold environment contrasted with the "warmth and temerity of the young boy's feelings" (p. 1). The coldness is the first element that the young boy surmounts, which can derail him from his journey to proving the warmth of his feelings for the girl. Some environmental elements further aim to discourage the boy from his ultimate goal of dating the girl and proving his love for her. For instance, the barking dog (Soto, 1995, line 12) and "narrow aisle of goods" are barriers to the young boy's quest (Soto, 1995, line 24). The barking dog seems to be the

guardian or soldier at the gate of the girl's palace, while the narrow aisles in the pharmacy represent the " cramped, uncomfortable tension between the boy and girl as they make their selections" (White, 2005, p. 122). These aisles indicate that the boy also has a conflict between himself and his target of affection because of their differences in their choices, where the boy actually wants to share an orange with the girl, while the girl wants something else. The environment says something about the diverse barriers to the boy's rite of passage to adolescence.

Aside from the setting, the form has distinct functions in capturing the theme of identity formation through depicting stories about life-changing moments and obstacles in rites of passage. The poem uses enjambment where thoughts are connected from one line to another without pauses. An example is the first two lines: " The first time I walked/With a girl, I was twelve" (Soto, 1995, lines 1-2). These lines encapsulate how brief moments can be shining memories for life where dating at the age of 12 reveals and tests the boy' identity. These enjambments further talk about obstacles to identity-development. Soto (1995) describes the boy's environment and feelings: " Cold, and weighted down/With two oranges in my jacket" (lines 2-3). The shortness of the lines " emphasize the brevity of the experience: a moment in time, a brief slice of life" (Wilson, 2002, p. 1) that are critical to self-development. He might be weighted down by the cold, but the oranges in his jacket inspire his courage. Wilson (2002) says that these are images that stress " the thrill and angst of a first date, the dominant images are those associated with cold and warmth" (p. 1). Thus, the form functions to highlight the brevity and meaning of life's moments.

Besides form, the poem uses several symbols to stress the boy's journey to adolescent maturity through courage and resourcefulness. The oranges symbolize the feelings of the boy. The two oranges in his jacket are the shield against the coldness. White (2005) explained that because the "oranges are not in season, they, too, like the boy's feelings, are vulnerable to the cold" (p. 123). However, the oranges also represent the inner spirit of the boy that he nourishes. The bright color of the orange makes the boy think that others might perceive he is making fire in his hands (Soto, 1995, line 55). The perception signifies how oranges are the fire of his strength, as if he went through fire itself to become transformed. The candy is also symbolic of materialism (White, 2005, p. 123). The absence of money for the boy shows his poverty, but it is not enough to dampen his resourcefulness. Thus, these symbols underscore that the boy used courage and resourcefulness to become a better and more mature person.

The form made an impact on my reaction to the poem by making me realize how beautiful little moments are in themselves. These moments tend to be overlooked because they can happen fast. However, "Oranges" made me appreciate them more as they contain diverse feelings that evoke the state of being alive. In addition, the form underscores that life is short, but it can be as long as the people who treasure it. "Oranges" inspired me to think about my own life experiences and how I remember them in full detail. An example is my first time to bike, and how my senses are acutely aware of my emotions and expectations in flux which contrasted to my surroundings that are more certain and stable. These are memories that allow me to feel the past in my present conditions.

Apart from the form, the symbolisms in the poem underscore the role of life's little moments in developing maturity and personality. I realized that these small glimpses of our lives are not unimportant and detached moments. They are part of who I am and who I am becoming. I also see oranges, for instance, as symbols of natural fire in my heart that helps me mature as a person. Its orange color reminds of the sun that gives life to all, which means that oranges can also represent the driving force of life that can motivate people to reach their dreams. If the boy in "Oranges" had oranges to help him deal with obstacles in life, I remember that I also once used my fear of swimming to become a stronger and more confident person. Furthermore, the symbols in the poem underscore that moments are purposeful. An example is the moment where I tripped before in front of many people. I was embarrassed, but I understood that many people remembered me because of that, which gave me instant friends and acquaintances, some of whom I am still close to up to now. The poem offers symbols about small moments that are big definers of my identity.

"Oranges" demonstrates the journey from childhood to adolescence. It is a single defining moment that captures the beauty of experiences in forging stronger identities. I can identify with the boy who has diverse hindrances in life, but he did not allow himself to be discouraged. Instead, these obstacles became stepping stones for testing and extending abilities. Thus, people all have oranges in their lives, things that represent the fires in their souls that help them transform into vibrant mature souls.

References

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