

Literacy analysis of the theme of "chee's daughter"

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"Chee's Daughter," a story by Juanita Platero and Siyowin Miller, is about a young Navajo who loses his wife to sickness before finding that his daughter has been taken away by his wife's parents because of old customs and traditions. The story mainly revolves about his love for his daughter, his brotherhood with the land and Navajo traditions. Through literal description and various figurative techniques in presenting the setting, plot and characterization, the authors clearly convey the theme that if a man takes care of his land, the land will never fail him. One of the many things that contribute to the theme in "Chee's Daughter" is the time setting because it introduces when the story is set which determines whether or not Chee would have succeeded.

We can deduce that the story takes place in the present-day through the technology such as "cars", a "highway", "cans", and "gasoline pumps". Also, the fact that instead of traditional Navajo headwear, Chee wears a Stetson, a cowboy-type hat, helps determine the time period. While describing the time setting in "Chee's Daughter", the authors use purely and solely figurative language because instead of writing directly, "Chee's Daughter takes place in the present", they use the technology and clothing in the story to convey when the story takes place. By setting the story in contemporary times, the authors are able to establish a strong contrast between one who takes care of his land and one who doesn't because if it was set in the time of the early colonists, the land would be the only way to survive and there would be no difference in lifestyle. Overall, the time setting allows the difference in lifestyle, leading to the story's existence without which, the theme could not be demonstrated.

Another important thing that contributes to the theme is the physical setting because it influences the characters' lives and behavior and illustrates the contrast between their bonds with the land. For example, the land where Chee lives on obviously contains extremely fertile and rich soil because Chee can successfully grow large amounts of crops on it such as melons, corn, "squash and pumpkin", "carrots and onions" and "moisture-loving chili". Also, the weather at Little Canyon is suitable for farming because of Chee's different crops which all have different needs. In summer, there is heavy rainfall, creating enough "overflow" to feed the plants. In winter, there is sometimes snow, which creates "lots of grass" for "the sheep". Unlike Little Canyon with beautiful peach trees "shedding fragrance and pink blossoms", Red Sands, where the trading post is and where Old Man Fat lives, is situated on "drab, treeless land".

Instead of having true Navajo hogans and structures like at Chee's home, Red Sands has a highway and a modern-looking trading post with things that are completely unrelated to Navajos such as "red gasoline pumps", "Sandwiches", "Groceries" and "Cold Drinks". The only hogan there belongs to Old Man Fat with "brightly painted pseudo-Navajo designs" on the roof and a "garish blue door" facing north instead of the traditional east to honor the sun, an important aspect of the Navajo's life. While describing the physical setting, the authors don't cram everything into a single paragraph which tells it all to the reader at once. Instead, they slowly scatter the descriptions throughout the story, leaving the reader to find them and pierce them together themselves. The physical setting contributes heavily to the

theme because it allows Chee to choose to be a farmer as it enables him to grow multiple crops.

The highway at Red Sands allows Old Man Fat to collect “ money from the trader who rented this strip of land beside the highway” and “ money from the tourists” that come to watch his shows. Also, the complete absence of plants and growth at Red Sands enforces the idea how Old Man Fat has no connection with the land. Overall, the physical setting is absolutely vital to the theme since it allows the characters to choose their individual lifestyles, enabling Chee to take back his daughter from Old Man Fat through his belief in the land – the thing that drives this story. The social setting also contributes significantly to the theme because it creates all the major conflicts in the story and leads to the reason why Chee has only one possible solution. Through the descriptions in the story, the Navajos are apparently governed by the whites, or in other words, the US government. However, although the whites settle all disputes, they generally try their best to respect Navajo customs and traditions.

That means that Chee can't use force to snatch away the Little One or ask the government for help because the government would support Old Man Fat. Also, Chee's own family would give Old Man Fat support because they believe in the old customs. Evidence is that his mother stops him when he wants to chase Old Man Fat, saying that there is “ nothing he can do” because Little One is “ a girl child” and “ belongs to her mother's people” as “ it is custom” and when Chee says to himself that his own family would “ uphold” the old custom of children belonging to the mother's people. To describe the customs, the authors use literal language, but use solely <https://assignbuster.com/literacy-analysis-of-the-theme-of-chees-daughter/>

figurative language to introduce the reader to the fact that the whites rule the Navajos but respect their customs when Chee tells himself that he would have to give up Little One if the case were "brought before the Headman of Little Canyon" and he would have no "better chance" before a "strange white man in town". The social environment contributes significantly to the theme because it presents the conflict, why Chee couldn't use force because he would have no support and why Chee has to rely on the land as his tools.

The plot of "Chee's Daughter", especially the climax, is important to the theme as well because it demonstrates how Chee can take back his daughter through his care of the land. In the story, almost all of it is rising action because the climax is at the very end, during Chee's second visit to Old Man Fat. The rising action has a whole series of crises and conflicts that finally lead to the climax, starting with the first crisis when Chee is returning home after his visit to the sanitarium and finds his daughter missing because of custom. Before long, the first conflict, external conflict, starts as he decides to go and take her back and enters conflict with the Navajo society for not following custom. Later, the second conflict, again external conflict, starts when he visits Old Man Fat and argues with him over Little One.

Old Man Fat enters conflict as well-with Chee. When Old Man Fat says no and Chee returns home, Chee then enters internal conflict as he wonders if he should accept defeat and leave Little Canyon or stay and keep on fighting. Afterwards, Chee works hard to grow supplies and tries to convince Old Man Fat and his wife by planting the idea that the Little One is an extra mouth to feed in their minds and Old Man Fat and his wife are considering the offer. The climax is reached when Old Man Fat is in internal conflict, struggling to

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decide if he should take Chee's offer or not. The authors clearly do not point out directly that that point is the climax, letting the reader figure it out by themselves.

The climax's importance to the theme is very high because it shows it - Chee has taken care of his land and in return, it has taken good care of him. After the climax, the authors finally reinforce the idea of Chee's close connection to the land one more time with his song as he returns home with Little One, singing "...My corn embrace each other. In the middle of the wide field... Yellow Corn Boy embrace each other", which shows his thanks to the land. Using crises and conflicts which gradually lead to the climax of the plot, the authors successfully bring out the theme of the story. Just as the authors use time physical setting to establish a contrast in the story, they use contrasting characterization to illustrate the differences between the protagonist and antagonist.

The protagonist, Chee, has a rather flat, static character because there is basically no change in his attitude throughout the story. He is obviously very hardworking, getting up in " half-light" to work by herding the sheep. He is full of perseverance and is persistent and diligent. Also, he obviously has a great love of his daughter since he works " tirelessly" and " zealously" with the " sun hot upon his back" to grow enough supplies to try and retrieve Little One. While describing Chee, the authors don't really use any literal language since they don't directly say " Chee is hardworking" or " Chee is persistent" or " Chee loves his daughter".

Instead, they use figurative language, such as through Chee's own words and his actions. Chee's character contributes to the theme because of his "feeling about the land - that a man took care of his land and it in turn took care of him" helps stick it in the reader's mind. Besides, he not only believes, but also tries his best to live according to the theme persistently with determination. When the theme's idea actually works on him, it burns the idea into the reader's brain even more. To demonstrate the theme, there is a need for a character that has a deep belief in the land and Chee is a perfect example.

On the other hand, the antagonist in Chee's Daughter, Old Man Fat, is unlike Chee because he has completely no respect or feeling for the land. Instead of relying on crops, Old Man Fat relies on the rent from the trader and coins from the tourists who visit his hogan. Also, unlike Chee who is full of love for the Little One, Old Man Fat takes her in only because of custom and he doesn't really take good care of her, selling her dress's "silver buttons". The authors use both literal and figurative language while describing Old Man Fat. They write that he is "fattest" in the middle and convey his greediness through the words "beads of greed shone in his eyes".

To introduce his laziness, they use a phrase from Chee's mother - "when you see a fat Navaho, you see one who hasn't worked for what he has". To tell the reader about his zero respect for the land, they use Chee's own thoughts when he thinks that Old Man Fat "no longer was tied to the land". Old Man Fat, the antagonist, contributes to the theme because he is the perfect example of what happens if you do not respect the land. With the presence of two contrasting main characters with different beliefs, the <https://assignbuster.com/literacy-analysis-of-the-theme-of-chees-daughter/>

difference between one who cares for his land and one who has no respect for it is clearly illustrated that reflects the theme of the story. In the story, the authors effectively introduce the idea that if a man takes care of his land, it will never let him down through the vital and sufficient time, physical and social setting, attention-grabbing crises and conflicts, heart-stopping climax, easily believable plot along with the contrasting and convincing characterization of the protagonist and antagonist.

Eyes of readers will be attached to the pages as they read about Chee's love for his daughter, respect for the land and persistence in the battle against Old Man Fat using the land as his weaponry. The theme may attract lots of attention because it is a new idea to people who live in cities and do not farm for a living. To conclude, the story of "Chee's Daughter" and its interesting theme is an amazing piece of literature that deserves massive amount of respect and admiration.