

# Poem appreciation on the death of a next-door neighbor by billy collins essay exa...

[Art & Culture](#), [Symbolism](#)



## **Type of poem**

The poem *On the Death of a Next-door Neighbor* by Billy Collins is a Free Verse type of poem. This is so because the poem does not have scheme, rhyme or meter. The poem however bears several literary images such as repetition, a rhetoric question and personification and among others. The poem consists of 8 stanzas each bearing three lines.

## **Prosody and imagery in the poem**

There is ample imagery in the poem. The most prominent literary style used throughout the poem is personification. The poet states “ death had blundered once again” (Collins, Stanza 1, line 3). Further ahead, the author continues to personify death stating, “ sent his dark car” (Collins, Stanza 2, line 3) and “ it was me he was looking for” (Collins, Stanza 3, line 1). In the last stanza he states, “ if only death had consulted his” (Collins, Stanza 8, line 1) Personification aids to give weight to the hurtful emotions in the poem. The poet is seemingly conversing with himself on the cruelty of death having taken someone he knew and loved.

The poem also bears a major rhetoric question “ was it that sent his dark car up the wrong winding driveway?” (Collins, Stanza 2, line 3) This question affirms that the poet was troubled with the issues he raises in the poem. It also provokes readers to feel the emotions and the weight of why death had to take such a person.

The poem has some few instances of repetition; the weight of my clothes, not his the harmony of his house, not his” (Collins, Stanza 7, line 1) Repetition stresses on the theme of the poem and draws the attention of the readers.

There are some instances of symbolism in the poem. The first is in reference to the family that had lost a member had “ a tall, young son”. Though literary the son could have been tall, the word could have been used to symbolize, energy, success and athleticism.

## **Seven elements of literature**

### **Theme**

The theme of the poem is death. Throughout the poem, the poet is lamenting on the cruel nature of death for having taken his “ undeserving” neighbor. He thinks that he deserved to die as compared to his deceased neighbor.

### **Character (persons and characteristics)**

The characters in the poem are a neighbor with a “ tall, young son” who is now deceased and the narrator himself. Death has been personified to the point of being made into a key character in the poem full with some character traits and therefore death can suffice as the third character in the poem.

The character of the narrator comes out as a loving, unselfish and considerate person. Throughout the poem, the narrator is lamenting why the young man had to die while was the more deserving one. Given a choice, the narrator would have chosen to die in place of the young man, “ surely it was me he (death) was looking for” (Collins, Stanza 3, line 1). This shows an unselfish and loving character of the narrator. He is also humble and down-to-earth as exemplified by the line “ not standing barefoot in this kitchen”.

The narrator was referring to himself in that statement and this is a sign of

his humble character.

Death is characterized as cruel and blunderous, “ it seemed that death had blundered once again”. Throughout the poem, the narrator is wondering why death had to claim a young “ undeserving” man while he was ready to die on the young man’s behalf.

## **Plot**

The poem begins by the narrator stating that death had “ blundered once again” and claimed a young man. He goes on to wonder what made death take the young man, “ was it poor direction that sent his car up the wrong” (Collins, Stanza 2, line 3). In the third stanza the narrator states that he was the one death was looking for and in the subsequent two stanzas he justifies that it was he who deserved to die. In the sixth and seven stanzas, the narrator is imagining how it would be if it was he who had died while the last stanza is a wish of what death could have done to avoid taking the young man.

## **Setting**

The setting of the poem seems to be the countryside because of the mention of “ house above ours on a hill” There is also the mention of “ winding driveway” and “ colorful leaves beyond the window” (Collins, Stanza 5, line 3) which paints the picture of a countryside setting. It is in the month of October “ on a sun-shot October morning after eight days and nights of downpour”.

## **Point of view**

In the narrator's point of view, death had erred to have claimed a " tall, young son" instead of him.

### **Conflict**

There is a conflict in that death had claimed the " wrong" person. The narrator takes time to come to terms with the conflict that while he wanted to die, he was spared death and in " his place" death took a young man who probably never wished to die.

## **Tone**

The poem is presented in a somber tone. The narrator laments the death and does so in a tone characterized by subdued enthusiasm and rife with somberness, regret, remorse and hurtful feelings.

## **Symbols**

There are few and subtle instances of symbolism in the poem. The symbols used include " standing barefooted" to mean poor, wasted and desperate. The mention of a " closet" symbolizes a casket among a few others.

## **Conclusion**

The poem On the Death of a Next-door Neighbor is a free-verse poem in which the narrator laments the death of his young neighbor. He is convinced that he was the one who deserved to die. Death has been extensively personified to the point of becoming a " character". There are also few instances of repetition and symbolism. The poem fits descriptions in all seven elements of literature. The theme is death which brings about a

somber tone of narration, while the setting (October after the rains) has a setting that exemplifies the theme. The poem is thus appreciably discussed.

## **References**

" Billy Collins reading at the 2006 Dodge Poetry Festival." YouTube. YouTube, 25 Sept. 2008. Web. 2 Dec. 2013. .