



Child

Sylvia Plath

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.
I want to fill it with color and ducks,
The zoo of the new

Whose name you meditate -
April snowdrop, Indian pipe
Little

Stalk without wrinkle,
Pool in which images
Should be grand and classical

Not this troublous
Wringing of hands, this dark
Ceiling without a star.

Vocabulary

April snowdrop - a small white flower that blooms in Spring

Indian pipe - another small flower, sometimes known as a corpse plant

Troublous - agitated and unsettled

Wringing - twisting, clenching and unclenching of hands, often associated with emotional upset

Pre-reading task

- What feelings and emotions would you associate with the word Child?
- What expectations did the title create when you first read it?

Questions

1. To whom is the poem addressed?
2. What does the poet say her child's eye is in the first line?
3. What do you think the poet means by saying she wants to fill her child's eye with 'colour and ducks, the zoo of the new'?
4. Can you find an example of rhyme in the first stanza?
5. What effect does the rhyme have?
6. What is the main emotion expressed in the first two stanzas?
7. What do you think the two flowers mentioned in the poem could represent?
8. What does the poet want for her child?
9. What does she not want for her child?
10. How does the mood of the poem change in the last stanza?

Overview

The poet is addressing her infant child. She is obviously besotted with the child saying that its 'eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing'. However, this could also suggest that she is unsatisfied with everything else in the world.

She writes of her hopes for the child, that it will be happy, that she can fill its eye with 'color and ducks, the zoo of the new', perhaps traditional toys and stories. The simple rhyme of 'zoo and new' reminds us of nursery rhymes.

She anticipates her child lingering over the words 'April snowdrop' and 'Indian pipe', the repeated 'p' sound being attractive to the ear. The first flower is often seen as a symbol of hope and innocence, being first to appear after winter. The second has darker associations being referred to sometimes as a 'corpse flower'.

The mood of the poem changes as the poet fears that she cannot provide the love and care that she wants to but can only provide 'troublous wringing of hands', suggesting mental anguish. The final image of a 'dark ceiling without a star' is bleak and unsettling.

Key Points

- Deeply Personal
- Unusual Imagery
- Unsettling
- Anguish
- Depression
- Self-analysis

Word Bank

- Create a bank of words you might use when writing about the poet's work.
- Some are provided for you.
- Add your own.
- You can write definitions of words that you don't know.
- You can pick out suitable quotes to go with the words.

[illegible]

Past Questions

Honours

2019

4. **Sylvia Plath**

Discuss how effectively Plath uses a range of images to develop her themes and add drama to her poetry. Develop your response with reference to the poems by Sylvia Plath on your course.

2014

4. **Sylvia Plath**

“Plath makes effective use of language to explore her personal experiences of suffering and to provide occasional glimpses of the redemptive power of love.”

Discuss this statement, supporting your answer with reference to both the themes and language found in the poetry of Sylvia Plath on your course.

2013

4. **Sylvia Plath**

“Plath’s provocative imagery serves to highlight the intense emotions expressed in her poetry.”

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this assessment of her poetry? Support your answer with suitable reference to the poetry of Sylvia Plath on your course.

2007

4. **“The poetry of Sylvia Plath is intense, deeply personal, and quite disturbing.”**

Do you agree with this assessment of her poetry? Write a response, supporting your points with the aid of suitable reference to the poems you have studied.

2003

3. If you were asked to give a public reading of a small selection of Sylvia Plath’s poems, which ones would you choose to read? Give reasons for your choices supporting them by reference to the poems on your course.

1. (a) What feelings are expressed by the poet in the first three stanzas of this poem?
Support your answer with reference to the poem. (10)
- (b) What feelings are expressed by the poet in the last stanza of this poem?
Support your answer with reference to the poem. (10)
- (c) Choose two lines or phrases from the poem that appeal to you and explain your choice. (10)

2. Answer **ONE** of the following: [Each part carries 20 marks]

- (i) You have been asked to make a short video to accompany a reading of this poem on YouTube. Describe some of the images, colours, music, sound effects, etc. that you would use as a background to the reading and explain your choices based on your knowledge of the poem.

OR

- (ii) Which of the following word or words would you choose to describe the language used by the poet in this poem?

Unusual

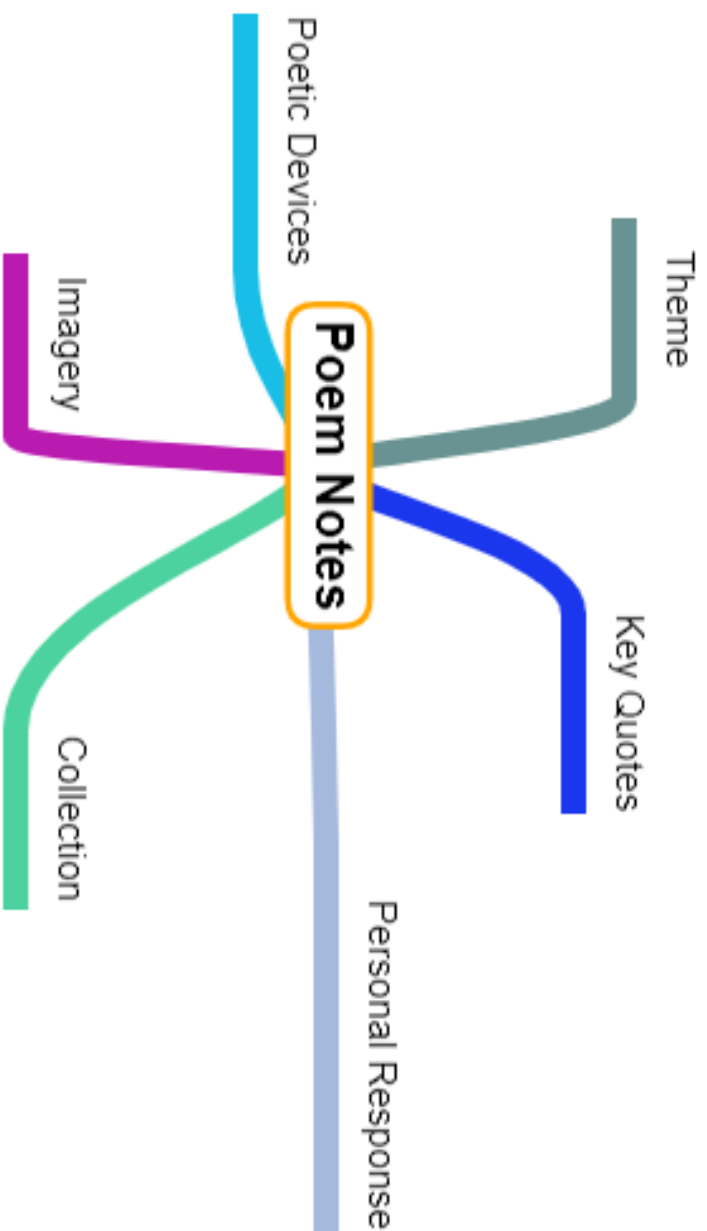
Descriptive

Appealing

Support your answer with reference to the poem.

OR

- (iii) There are three poems by Sylvia Plath on your Leaving Certificate English course: "Poppies in July", "The Arrival of the Bee Box" and "Child". Which of these poems by Sylvia Plath do you most enjoy? Explain your answer by reference to at least one of these poems.



Mind Map