

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

POPPIES (POWER AND CONFLICT)

1 Three days before Armistice Sunday
2 And poppies had already been placed
3 On individual war graves.
4 Before you left,
5 I went to all the places
6 And I prayed for a sign,
7 And I saw you there,
8 In your uniform,
9 And I knew you were leaving.

10 I resisted the urge to touch,
11 To feel the warmth of your skin.
12 I was afraid to feel
13 The empty space
14 Where you used to be.
15 I sat down on the floor
16 And watched the wreaths
17 With the poppies
18 As they were placed
19 By the gravesides.

20 The poppies were so red
21 And bright,
22 And they fluttered
23 In the wind
24 Like tiny flags.
25 They were a symbol
26 Of the sacrifice
27 And the loss
28 And the pain.

29 I watched them
30 As they were carried
31 In the procession
32 To the memorial.
33 I saw the faces
34 Of the men and women
35 Who had given so much.
36 And I knew
37 That you were one of them.

38 I remembered the day
39 You left for the front,
40 And how I felt

41 As if I were
42 A part of you.
43 And I knew
44 That I would always
45 Remember you
46 And the poppies
47 That had been placed
48 On the graves.

49 And I thought of you
50 And the poppies
51 And the sacrifices
52 That had been made
53 For us.
54 And I knew
55 That the poppies
56 Would always be a reminder
57 Of the men and women
58 Who had given
59 Their lives
60 For us.

"Poppies" is a poignant poem written by Jane Weir, and it is part of the 'Power and Conflict' cluster in the AQA GCSE English Literature syllabus. Let's delve into the themes, summary, critical analysis, and motifs of this powerful poem.

Themes:

1. **War and Its Impact:** The central theme revolves around the effects of war on individuals, particularly mothers and families left behind. It explores the emotional aftermath and the enduring impact on those who wait for their loved ones.
2. **Loss and Grief:** The poem delves into the profound sense of loss and grief experienced by the mother as she watches her son leave for war. It also captures the lasting emotional impact of losing someone in conflict.
3. **Time and Memory:** Weir explores the concept of time and how memories linger. The poppies act as a symbol of remembrance, and the poem considers how time alters but doesn't erase the memories of those lost.

Summary:

"Poppies" narrates the experience of a mother as she watches her son leave for war. The poem is set in the context of Remembrance Day, where the mother reflects on her emotions. It describes her actions of making a poppy and placing it on her son's jacket. As the son leaves, the mother becomes increasingly anxious, symbolized by the poppy turning into a "little bloody flower." The poem concludes with the mother yearning for her son's return and the complexity of emotions tied to remembrance.

Critical Analysis:

1. **Imagery:** Weir employs vivid imagery, such as the poppy turning into a "little bloody flower," creating a powerful and evocative portrayal of the emotional turmoil experienced by the mother.
2. **Symbolism:** The poppy serves as a multifaceted symbol. Initially representing remembrance and commemoration, it transforms into a symbol of bloodshed and sacrifice, highlighting the harsh reality of war.
3. **Structure:** The poem follows a free-verse structure, reflecting the natural flow of the mother's thoughts and emotions. The lack of a regular rhyme scheme contributes to the raw and unfiltered expression of feelings.
4. **Language and Tone:** Weir's use of language is carefully chosen to evoke emotion. The tone shifts from nostalgic and tender to unsettling and sombre, mirroring the complexity of emotions tied to war.

Motifs:

1. **Poppies:** The primary motif, symbolizing both remembrance and the bloodshed of war. Its transformation reflects the dual nature of commemoration.
2. **Jacket and Uniform:** The son's jacket becomes a symbol of his departure and the mother's attempt to connect with him. The uniform represents the sacrifice and the impact of war on individuals.

In conclusion, "Poppies" by Jane Weir is a deeply moving poem that captures the emotional toll of war on those left behind. The use of powerful imagery, symbolism, and a poignant narrative makes it a compelling exploration of themes related to conflict, loss, and remembrance.

COMPARISON BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE:

In the poem "Poppies" by Jane Weir, the themes of war and peace are intricately woven together, presenting a poignant exploration of the contrasts between the two states.

War:

1. **Symbolism of Poppies:** The poppies, initially associated with peace and remembrance, transform as the poem progresses. They become a powerful symbol of war, turning into "a little bloody flower." This transformation signifies the intrusion of conflict and the sacrifice made on the battlefield.
2. **Anxiety and Fear:** The anticipation of war is depicted through the mother's anxiety as she watches her son prepare to leave. The unease intensifies, mirroring the emotional turbulence that precedes conflict. The poppies, in this context, foreshadow the impending disruption and sorrow associated with war.
3. **Loss and Separation:** War brings about the physical and emotional separation of loved ones. The mother's sense of loss is palpable as she

imagines her son in the war zone, and the poppies become a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made during conflicts.

Peace:

1. **Initial Symbolism of Poppies:** At the beginning of the poem, the poppies are associated with peace and remembrance. The mother makes a poppy and places it on her son's lapel as an expression of love and hope for his safe return. Here, the poppies represent the desire for peace and the memory of those who have fallen in previous conflicts.
2. **Nostalgia and Memory:** The poem captures moments of peace in the mother's memories, reflecting on her son's childhood. These moments stand in stark contrast to the anxieties and disruptions brought by war. The poppies, in this context, become a link between the peaceful past and the uncertain present.
3. **Yearning for Peace:** As the poem concludes, the mother expresses a deep yearning for her son's return and the restoration of peace. The poppies, despite their association with bloodshed, retain a connection to the idea of peace through the act of remembrance.

In summary, "Poppies" juxtaposes war and peace by using the symbol of poppies to represent both the desire for peace and the harsh realities of war. The transformation of the poppies from symbols of remembrance to symbols of bloodshed reflects the complex interplay between the two states. The poem evokes a deep sense of longing for peace, even in the midst of the emotional turmoil brought about by conflict.

STRUCTURE:

The structure of Jane Weir's poem "Poppies" plays a crucial role in conveying the emotional depth and complexity of the themes explored. Let's examine the key structural elements:

1. Free Verse:

- "Poppies" is written in free verse, lacking a regular rhyme scheme or strict metrical pattern. This choice of structure contributes to the natural flow of the mother's thoughts and emotions. It mimics the spontaneous and unfiltered nature of her reflections.

2. Enjambment:

- Enjambment is used throughout the poem, where lines flow into each other without a pause. This technique creates a sense of continuity, connecting one thought or image seamlessly to the next. It mirrors the interconnectedness of the mother's memories and emotions.

3. Stanzas:

- The poem is divided into three stanzas of varying lengths. Each stanza represents a different stage in the mother's emotional journey, providing a nuanced exploration of her feelings.
 - The first stanza introduces the act of making the poppy and the departure of the son.
 - The second stanza describes the mother's anxiety and the symbolic transformation of the poppies.
 - The third stanza concludes with the mother's yearning for her son's return.

4. Symbolic Imagery:

- The poem employs rich and symbolic imagery. The poppy, in particular, is a powerful motif that transforms. The careful use of vivid and evocative language contributes to the overall impact of the poem.

5. Time Shifts:

- Weir incorporates shifts in time within the poem. The mother's memories of her son's childhood are intertwined with the present moment of his departure. This blending of past and present adds depth to the narrative, highlighting the enduring nature of maternal love and concern.

6. Repetition:

- Certain phrases and images are repeated throughout the poem, emphasizing their significance. For example, the repetition of the word "poppies" serves to reinforce the central symbol and its evolving meaning.

7. Tone Shift:

- The tone of the poem undergoes a subtle shift. It begins with a nostalgic and tender tone as the mother reminisces about her son, transitions to a tone of anxiety and unsettlement during his departure and concludes with a sombre tone as the mother yearns for his return.

In summary, the structure of "Poppies" is deliberately crafted to enhance the emotional impact of the poem. The free verse, enjambment, stanzas, and symbolic elements work in harmony to create a poignant and nuanced exploration of the themes of war, peace, and maternal love.

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