

Flower's Critical Essay

Q. Choose a novel or short story or work of non-fiction which explores a theme that interests you. By referring to appropriate techniques, explain how the writer makes this theme interesting.

"Flowers" is a short story written by Robin Jenkins which displays his anti-war beliefs through the key themes of loss of innocence and far-reaching effects of war with the effective use of literacy techniques such as plot, language and imagery. By doing this, the reader becomes captivated by these interesting themes concerning the horrors of war and those permanently affected by it. The story revolves around a young girl named Margaret who is a child evacuee that is refuging in an unfamiliar rural Highland village. She disapproves of this change so ignores all warning to go down to the shore where she makes the horrific discovery of the dead bodies of two airmen, resulting in her irreparable traumatism, engaging the reader with these interesting themes.

The author successfully further interests the reader in the gripping themes of loss and innocence and the far-reaching effects of war through the main character, Margaret. At first, this young girl is described as "smiling shyly". The word choice of "shyly" connotes timidness and tranquility suggesting that Margaret is only an innocent child, who reacted to the first sight of the airmen in such an immature manner, not understanding the truly horrific reality of the far-reaching effects of war, furthering her innocence. However, this innocence is quickly diminished when she is "screaming...weeping...yelling". The word choices of these distressing verbs clearly display Margaret's terror and traumatism upon this inflicting sight, overturning her childlike immaturity. Here, Jenkins effectively unveils the cruel reality of the war, and its sheer ability to destroy innocence and deeply impact those considered to be safe from its horrors. Through these deep and enthralling themes, the reader is shocked and conscripted to these engaging themes.

Jenkins effectively displays the provoking themes of loss of innocence and far-reaching effects of war through the destruction of the airmen. At first, the airmen were described to be "most precious, most beautiful". The word choice of "precious" connotes admired and fragile suggesting that the airmen were praised for their brave efforts by the older generation, who praised them for their heroic status and idolised them to be their saviours. However, having encountered the far-reaching effects of war the airmen are described as "unrecognisable as human" suggesting that they had a brutal death which has left them disfigured and mutilated. The word choice of "unrecognisable" connotes unseen and unidentifiable suggesting that the airmen represent the many anonymous men who died serving in the war of which they were

never recovered. This deeply contrasts with the expectations of the older generation who assumed they would die a glorious and impactful death rather than silent and unnoticed. By this, the readers are continuously interested in this thoughtful and fore-longing theme of far-reaching effects of war in this aspect.

The setting is also impacted by these thrilling themes effectively produced by Jenkins. Firstly, the scenery was described to be "gold and silver spangles...swimming in it like wonderful swans". The choice of colours connotes luxury and wealth, suggesting that the scenery is illusive in richness. Just as swans are idyllic deemed to be majestic, so too is the scenery described to be graceful and angelic, furthering the purity of the setting before the destructiveness to come. However, again unveiling these impactful themes, the setting is now tainted by the death of the airmen, faltering the scenery to now be "sweet nasty smell mingled with the tang of the sea". Now, the scenery is spoiled by the sour smell of the airmen's decomposing bodies as described in the word choice of "mingled" which connotes contaminated suggesting that the death of the airmen relates back to the theme of far-reaching effects of war conveying that the stain the war has left on this once thriving scenery will forever be irreparable. This depressing outcome relates to the key themes, keeping the reader engaged in this sad but interesting, developing plot, leaving them wondering about all aspects of these enthralling yet ever deepening themes.

Jenkins explores her dark themes of loss of innocence and the far-reaching effects of war in an interesting but twisted manner in order to keep us invested in these themes through the use of the symbolism of the flower. At first, the flower was described as; "Yellow flower...its beauty, harmlessness, and loneliness", showing all of Margaret's characteristics, since the colour yellow represents vividness and brightness, suggesting that she is full of life which effectively conveys her innocence. The word choices of "harmlessness" and "loneliness" suggest that the flower is set in a remote, tranquil location- relating to the fragility and gentleness of Margaret's character, empathising her delicate childhood innocence at this time. However, the description of the flower changes dramatically when Margaret locates the dead airmen's body, and the flower is now "crushed into a green and black mess". The colours described here represent death and decay and deeply contrasts with the description of the flower before, signifying the corruption of Margaret's innocence and her traumatised and frenzied state to this exposure to the far-reaching effects of war resulting in her loss of innocence whilst drawing comparison to the nature of the airmen's death. This is particularly effective in concluding the drastic effects the war had on Margaret through the symbolism of a flower, and the mental agony that she has suffered as a result. This outcome shocks the reader to feel compassion and sorrow towards Margaret and is intrigued in these dwelling themes of loss of innocence and far-reaching effects of war.

Flowers, by Robin Jenkins expresses their pacifist views against warfare to effectively aim the themes of loss of innocence and far-reaching effect of war at the reader to become deeply invested and analyse these captivating but morally argumentative themes. This is done so by the use of plot, language and imagery.