

I Knew

*I knew I would write
The moment I saw a winter night,
The soft flicker of candlelight
Like a moonbeam in the cold frost,
Like waves in hand-blown glass. I didn't listen.
I didn't write. But I caught impressions like mosaics
of paint, aqua and blue, the brilliant flare of red
and green, the paler shades of light. I found
them, wove them together with sound and word.
I saw the kindergarten laughing,
The music teacher playing warm, airy notes,
the old preacher in his rectory.
I caught them all and held them, impervious
to time and light. I tasted the snow,
wet and cold, woven like a tapestry,
small threads fine like webs, and fragile,
yet strong enough to see, to feel, to have
just once in this life, lost forever,
but for a word. I knew that one day I would
write.*

1. The poem uses similes. Find some examples of similes in the poem. Make an X next to the similes that you find. Do these add to or detract from the poem, or neither?

2. What is an extended metaphor that used throughout the poem? Mark the metaphor with an underline. How does this metaphor contribute to the poem?

3. Repetition is also used in this poem. Find at least one example of a repeating image and mark it with a *. How does this add to the rhythm?

Name _____ Date _____

Questions for discussion:

Take some time to read the following questions. Jot down some impressions that you would like to be sure to share. Then discuss the questions.

1. What does the speaker mean when she says she “caught impressions like mosaics/ of paint, aqua and blue...?” How does she think?

2. Why do you think the speaker in this poem knew she would write when she saw candlelight in the window? Have you felt the urge to write before? When? Why?

3. The speaker refers to the music teacher as playing “warm notes”. What impression does this give you of the music?

4. How could the speaker hold everything “impervious to time and light”? What does this have to do with writing?

5. The speaker wants to capture certain experiences, to hold them in time. Have you wanted to do this?

6. What are some experiences you wish you could hold onto forever? What if you could? Write about this. Is it best that our favorite moments don’t last? Can writing capture time? What do you think?

7. What are some historical instances in which authors have captured time? How would civilization be affected if we didn’t have words in the past, and if we didn’t have them now?

8. How important are words to you? Do you think people value words as much as they should?

9. Do words add to our experiences, distort them, or both?

ANSWER PAGE

Devices Used:

1. Similes include “ like a moonbeam,” “ like waves,” “like a tapestry,” and “like webs.”
2. Extended metaphor: The speaker is a catcher, holding the ball of time, marking the memory with words.
3. For discussion.

Discussion Questions

The discussion questions are an opportunity for students to share their thoughts and experiences, either in a whole-class discussion or in groups. All discussion points are valid as long as they remain on topic. However, here are some thoughts to bring to the discussion if the students seem to need guidance:

1. The speaker catches impressions of colors, sounds, and experiences like an artist painting. The speaker synthesizes, fuses together the parts to form the whole. The speaker is a right-brained thinker.
2. Have students share thoughts and experiences.
3. Have students share thoughts. “Warm notes” suggests soft, soothing, appealing music.
4. The speaker can’t really hold everything impervious to time and the fading effects of light, but the speaker can preserve down her experiences with the written word. Words have long been a way of preserving the moment, of keeping the past alive for future generations.
5. Have students share.
6. Have students share. It’s best that things not last, because we would tire of them, and we wouldn’t grow, wouldn’t change and learn from new experiences.
7. Only a few historical instances include: the Holocaust, Pompeii, segregation, the Crusades, the Protestant Reformation, revolutions, wars... Without words, we wouldn’t remember the past and wouldn’t learn from it.
8. & 9. Open for student thought.

You may wish to have students choose one discussion question to write about.