

My Box

- by Gillian Clarke -

Activities

A

Each suggested word choice by individuals or groups should be open to scrutiny: does it fit the syntax, does it illuminate character, does it cohere with other parts of the poem?

B

Sorting out the pronouns can help clarify the people involved in the poem and also the timescale implied. The way 'he' changes to 'you' can be discussed, and also who 'them' might refer to.

C

The number of verbs used can be discussed, and how far this emphasises the work and effort involved in creating the box. Learners can compare the impact of using 'and' between each verb with the more usual arrangement - only using 'and' for the last in the list.

D

Learners can explore work-related verbs compared with pleasure-related verbs. They can also discuss how far these verbs hint at a shared life and developing relationship over time.

E

The connotations of 'harvested' can be discussed, with each example conjuring up very different processes: 'apples and words and days'.

F

Learners can experiment with reading these lines aloud and experiencing for themselves the effect on speed and rhythm. They could also identify how similar words have moved to different places within the line and discuss the effect of these sequence changes. They should go on to discuss how far form matches meaning - any links between a sense of lack of fluency in the words and the effort involved in creating poems or boxes or gardens or relationships.

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G

It will be useful if learners can link the nouns in these two lines with earlier references to the same or similar items, including in the title. They can then discuss why they think the poet has chosen to end the poem with just these nouns.

H

This task is designed as an overview, and also an opportunity to discuss why other titles might have been discarded. It could have been more logical to choose a title referring to the relationship between the two lovers, and learners can discuss how far this could have been more or less effective. Titles arouse expectations about the content of a poem: does an author always want to be explicit from the start?

Further activities

I

If you consider the title as a metaphor, and the whole poem as an extended metaphor, what comparisons are being made, do you think?

What does the quality of the box imply about the quality of the relationship?
What is being 'made' in the time span of the poem (apart from the box)?

J

Identify how many syllables there are in each line of the poem. Identify any choice of rhyme or half-rhyme. How do the poet's choices in terms of rhyme and rhythm contribute to the impact of the poem?

Learners could consider the following:

Which stanza(s) has/have the most regular pattern of rhythm?

Which stanza has the least regular pattern of rhythm?

What is the effect of this choice of rhythm?

What is the effect of the choice of rhyme/half-rhyme?

Does it match or contrast with any pattern in the rhythm?

Suggest possible reasons for your findings.

These Teachers' Notes, provided to support the teaching and learning of GCSE English Literature, contain some ideas which teachers could use to stimulate discussion and debate, in conjunction with other materials and sound classroom teaching. Context is not assessed in this non-examination assessment.