

Not Adlestrop

- by Dannie Abse -

Background information

The famous poem 'Adlestrop', published in 1917, describes an uneventful journey that Edward Thomas, the Anglo-Welsh poet, took on 24 June 1914 on the Oxford to Worcester express; the train made an unscheduled stop at Adlestrop railway station. He did not alight from the train, but describes a moment of peace in which he heard 'all the birds of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire'. The station closed in 1966. However, the village bus shelter contains the station sign and a bench that was originally on the platform. A plaque on the bench quotes Thomas' poem.

Dannie Abse deliberately echoes this poem in 'Not Adlestrop'.

Edward Thomas reads 'Adlestrop': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JovV9Pnx55k>
(This wrongly refers to Edward Thomas as an English poet at one point.)

Richard Burton reads 'Adlestrop': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0J1Ze5QXG8>

Dannie Abse reads 'Not Adlestrop': <https://poetryarchive.7dgtl.com/releases/3297189>
(A small payment may be required for the whole poem.)

Please note that for assessment purposes it is not valid to compare 'Adlestrop' and 'Not Adlestrop'.

Activities

A

Once a poem is seen on a page, it often seems inevitable that just those words are used. However if learners, even to a small extent, co-create the poem, the choices seem far less inevitable and the poet's choices loom larger.

The key here is for learners to justify their choices in logical ways, which should include reference to alliteration, repetition and patterning.

B

Apart from the similarities and differences highlighted, learners can be encouraged to explore other comparisons, for example whether the poet is inside or outside the train; no human interaction/human interaction.

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C

Learners can experiment with reading these lines out loud, and discovering what happens to the speed of their reading/whose reading they think works best. They can explore the effect of alliteration and also the effect of the punctuation. But then they should move on to discuss how this contributes to the mood of stanza 1 before the last two lines.

D

Learners can explore the contrast between the negatives of 'Not', 'no', 'Nor' and 'wrong' in lines 1 to 4 compared with the impact of these two lines. The use of repetition and italics can also be discussed, as well as the effect on pace and mood of the line lengths.

E

Body language - show not tell - is clearly a device being used here, and learners can discuss what the implications of her body language are.

F

Words such as 'stared' and 'scrutiny' suggest a directness which contrasts with the girl's response. The words 'under the clock' could perhaps have associations with a place where couples meet up for an evening out.

G

The way words are repeated and balanced against each other can be a helpful route into discussing the way this 'relationship' is presented. The oxymoron 'daring and secure' is also worth exploration.

H

Learners can explore why they think the poet has used the words 'hurrying' and 'atrocious' in unexpected contexts, and what this reveals about his inner thoughts and emotions.

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Further activities

I

How, if at all, do your thoughts and feelings about the poet change during the course of the poem? How far is there a difference in responses between females and males in your class?

Learners may consider:

- Does his honesty about his staring and 'scrutiny' make you admire him more or less?
- Does his honesty about his 'much married life' make you admire him more or less?
- What if the girl had not responded in any way?
- Does any element of humour in the poem make a difference?

J

How far do you agree with this comment:

As in the poem it is not, this poem records an unexpected instant, unrepeatable, and yet one that almost everyone will recognize. Edward Thomas' extraordinary poem, that seems somehow magically to engage all the senses, celebrates the moment in such a way as to suggest that full living exists only in these brief spots of time (to borrow Wordsworth's version). Dannie Abse takes us out of the rural and places us in the mundane, perhaps a more urban, world. The effect, however, is the same. Life has been lived, albeit for a brief few seconds.

Wynn Wheldon

Source:

<http://www.wynnwheldon.com/2011/07/not-adlestrop-by-dannie-abse.html>