 Resource 14 - Out of Time

Discussion

* Slessor represents the human experience through the march of time, of loss and ageing
* Make connections with Slessor’s other poems, texts and yourself as a responder

Introductory Questions

1. What does march of time mean? What does it personify?
2. Have you heard this example of personification before?
3. Does running out of time, or losing time bother you?

Poem Annotation and Exploration Activities

1. Read through the poem silently on your own and right down any ideas that come to mind- words or phrases that stand out, any language features you can identify or any notable structural features or form.
2. Read the poem aloud. Do you notice anything different?
3. Read the poem for a third time this time using an old person’s voice, imagine yourself to be 78 or 89 years old.
4. Write down a short reflection on what you think the poem is about.
5. Annotate the poem with teacher direction.
6. Discuss poems imagery and themes.
7. Complete responding and creating activities.

Notes

The poem focusses on the enthralling and destructive aspects of time and is set on Slessor’s beloved Sydney Harbour, using the ever-present water imagery often used in Slessor’s poems to portray themes of death, grief, loss and time. ‘Out of Time’ is riddled with similes, with ‘Time flowing like a hundred yachts’, and extended metaphors and personifications of time. Time is eventually personified as ‘the bony knife’, a strong image of death. The poem is a statement on the inevitability of death and the human condition, our powerlessness against the persistent grip of time, ‘time takes me, drills me’. Time is introduced as an erratic entity, ‘thrusting under Harbour’s hair’, without morality, as a ‘knife, it runs me through’. It is the force which drives change, yet it remains untouched, as seen in the imagery of the unchanging seaweed a clear link to nature’s immutability, ‘water bends the seaweeds in the sea/The tide goes over, but the weeds remain’. Slessor’s oft used backdrop of Sydney Harbour provides an unchanging constant in the poem, unaffected by time and death. The narrator of the poem is aware of his powerlessness against time, “Time flows, not you’, yet still strives to escape its grasp, as ‘beauty dead entreats him to be still’. This leads to the symbolism in the poem of the cycle of life, ‘Birth, to be flesh, or funeral, to be ghost’.

The rhyme that flows into the last stanza of the interwoven trio of sonnets, worlds ‘Now’s and Here’s, he ‘keeps appointments with a million years’ does not give an answer to the inexplicable, but suggests through lyrical, majestic language, that through memory we can temporarily escape time’s clutches. Along with our powerlessness, we cannot fully comprehend time, for time is outside us, a fragile drop of water, “Fixed in sweet meniscus, out of Time’.In the end time will continue, highlighted with the repetition of ‘Time flows past them like a hundred yachts’, which is also the beginning line of the poem; reaffirmed by using a circular structure, the idea of the circle of life.

Responding

1. What is the subject-matter of the poem?
2. What are the main themes of the poem?
3. What tone of voice is employed by the poet?
4. What is the predominant mood of the poem? Does it shift from pessimism to optimism?
5. Describe the effect of the personification of time in the poem?
6. What is your personal reaction to the poem? Can you relate to the human experience he is portraying?
7. How successful is the poem as a work of art that portrays human experiences?

Creating

Create a visual text which showcases their understanding of ‘Out of Time’. Use visual language features to portray ideas and images explored in the text.