P. 2 Mirror

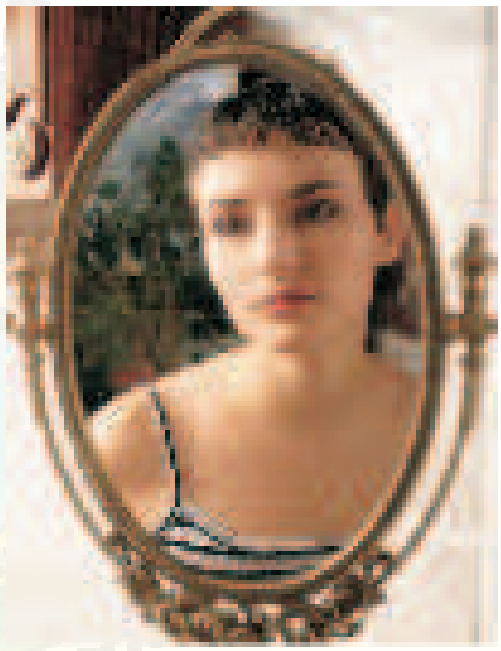
by Sylvia Plath

1. In pairs discuss the following questions:

(a) When do you generally use a mirror?

(b) Is a mirror essential for us?

(c) Given below is a list of possible reasons why a person uses a mirror. Tick the ones you agree with:



(i) to check one's appearance

(ii) to look beautiful

(iii) to make sure one is neat and tidy before going out

(iv) to check for a pimple or grey hair

(v) to apply make-up

(vi) to make a phone call

(vii) as a decorative item at home

2. The teacher will now play a recording of the poem. Listen carefully and answer the questions that follow:

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful -
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
Most of the time meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day like a terrible fish.

About the Poet

Sylvia Plath (October 27, 1932 - February 11, 1963) was an American poet, novelist and short story writer. Born in Massachusetts, she received acclaim as a professional poet and writer. She married fellow poet Ted Hughes in 1956 and they lived together first in the United States and then England, having two children together: Frieda and Nicholas. Following a long struggle with depression and a marital separation, Plath committed suicide in 1963. Plath is credited with advancing the genre of confessional poetry and is best known for her two collections The Colossus and Other Poems and Ariel. In 1982, she became the first poet to win a Pulitzer Prize posthumously for The Collected Poems. She also authored The Bell Jar, a semi-autobiographical novel published shortly before her death.

3. On the basis of your understanding of the poem, answer the following questions by ticking the correct choice

(a) When the mirror is being described as being 'unmisted by love or dislike' we understand that the mirror is

i. not misted

ii. not prejudiced

iii. has four angles

iv. is silver in colour

(b) The other word for *'contemplation'* is……..

i. contempt

ii. meditation

iii. mediation

iv. thoughtful

(c) When the mirror says *'it has no preconceptions'* it means that:

i. it reflects back an image objectively

ii. it modifies an image as it reflects it

iii. it beautifies an image as it reflects it

iv. it gives a biased view of a person/object

(d) The mirror has been called *'a four-cornered god'* because:

i. it is square shaped

ii. like God it watches you unbiased and fair from all four angles

iii. it reflects back all that it sees

iv. it never stops reflecting

(e) The *'speckles'* refer to:

i. a pink object

ii. the opposite wall which has spots on it

iii. a person with pink pimples

iv. pink spots in general

(f) The phrase *'agitation of the hand'* suggests that the person is:

i. very ill

ii. very upset

iii. very angry

iv. very happy

(g) By saying *'Now I am a lake'* the narrator wants to show that

(i) the poem is not only about external beauty but also the inside of a person

(ii) the lake can also reflect surfaces

(iii) the depth of the lake is important

(iv) the lake does not show as exact an image as a mirror

4. Answer the following questions briefly

(a) What is the poetic device used when the mirror says *'I swallow'*?

(b) How does the mirror usually pass its time?

(c) What disturbs the mirror's contemplation of the opposite wall?

(d) Why does the mirror appear to be a lake in the second stanza? What aspect of the mirror do you think is being referred to here?

(e) What is the woman searching for in the depths of the lake?

(f) How does the narrator convey the fact that the woman looking at her reflection in the lake is deeply distressed?

(g) What makes the woman start crying?

(h) What do you think the *'terrible fish'* in the last line symbolizes? What is the poetic device used here?

5. Read the poem silently and answer the following questions:

(a) List out the adjectives that have been used to describe the mirror. Add a few more adjectives to the list.

(b) In the second stanza why has the narrator replaced the mirror with a lake? What is he/she trying to focus on?

6. Find the various instances of personification used in this poem.

7. Read the given lines and answer the questions that follow by ticking the correct choice:

A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.

a. What is the woman bending over?

i. the mirror

ii. the lake

iii. the opposite wall

iv. the moon and the candles

b. Why have the candles and the moon been called *'liars'*?

i. because they make people beautiful

ii. they hide the blemishes of people with their soft light

iii. they hide the blemishes and make people look beautiful in their soft glow

iv. they can't talk

c. Why does she turn to them in spite of calling them 'liars'?

i. the reality is too harsh for her to bear

ii. she is desperately looking for someone to comfort her

iii. she wants to be **told** that she is still beautiful

iv. she can hide her signs of graying in their light

8. Imagine you are the mirror. Write a speech that you would like to deliver to the humans who come to see their reflection in you. You could begin like this….

Good Morning dear humans.

I feel honoured to have been given the opportunity to express my feelings and share my thoughts with you. As you know, all my life is spent in faithfully reflecting all that comes before my eyes…..

9. Here is another poem on mirror. The narrator calls the mirror a 'fibber'. How is this poem different from the poem by Sylvia Plath? Have a class discussion on the comparison in terms of the theme, the tone and the language used.

MIRROR

Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Can't you show me tall and slim?
Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Must I look so bloody grim?

Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
You're distorting my poor waist!
Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
And why the heck am I defaced?

Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Why have I a double chin?
Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
And what's the stupid, goofy grin?

Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Pointless asking 'Who's the fairest-?
More bloody likely, 'Who's the queerest? '
Now look, I paid a big bucks for thee,
So why can't you be nice to me?

Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who's the fairest of them all?
Me, you say? Ah, that's better -
Mirror, mirror, bloody fibber!

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