

Sample LL

In “The Century Quilt”, the speaker describes her attachment to a quilt. After years of admiring a blanket belonging to Meema, she is excited to finally find one of her own. She compares the time she and her sister spent dreaming under Meema’s blanket to her predicted experiences with her own quilt. The author, Marilyn Nelson Waniek, creates the speaker’s emotional attachments to her quilt through her use of structure, color imagery, and a hopeful tone.

The structure of this poem consists of three distinct stanzas, each pertaining to a different topic. The first two stanzas are short and lead up to the final, larger stanza. In the first stanza the speaker describes her past experiences with Meema’s blanket. She looks back on this time fondly, describing how she loved to “play in its folds” and imagine she and her sister were “chieftains and princesses.” In the second stanza, the speaker describes finding a quilt of her own. This stanza acts as a connection between her past experience’s with Meema’s blanket and her expected future ones with her new quilt. She talks about how she plans to spend “a hundred years” with her quilt in the third stanza and talks about everything she will dream about. She talks about meeting her “son or my other child, as yet unconcieved” under this quilt, showing the almost mystic qualities she sees in it.

Another prevalent literary technique in the poem is the use of color imagery, especially as used to show heritage. She remembers falling asleep as a child under the “army green” blanket representing her father during his time as a soldier. Later she describes the color of her quilt saying it contained “six Van Dyke browns squares, two white ones, and one square the yellowbrown of Mama’s cheeks.” These colors are symbolic because they represent Meema and her sisters, who are called “yellow”, her father, who is described as having “burnt umber pride”, and Meema’s grandfather’s “white family”. These colors are used to show the diverse heritage of the speaker.

Finally, the author uses a hopeful and at times nostalgic, tone to show the speaker’s positive feelings towards her quilt. In the very first line of the poem, the speaker reveals that she was “in love” with Meema’s blanket, so much so that she had, “planned to inherit it.” When talking about her quilt, she says she would like to “die under” it and goes on to talk about all of the “good dreams” about her future and past that she would have under it. She talks about dreaming not only of the children she planned to have at some point, but also of herself as a child, during her “childhood of miracles.”

In her poem, Waniek reveals the speaker’s feelings towards her quilt to the reader through the use of structure relating to time periods, color imagery relating to heritage, and a positive, hopeful tone. The colors of the quilt sow the reader’s pride toward her heritage, while the structure shows that she is hopeful for her future.

Sample RR

“The Century Quilt” by Marilyn Nelson Waniek is a poem which contains fond memories of the speaker’s past and dreams of the future. These thoughts were triggered by a beautiful quilt. Waniek employs structure, symbolism, and tone to develop the meaning of The Century Quilt.

The Century Quilt is a family treasure, passed down from the speaker’s grandmother. Waniek uses a structure of 3 free-verse stanzas. The first stanza describes the love the speaker had of her grandmother’s blanket, and the childhood memories she made with it: “I remembered how I’d planned to inherit/that blanket, how we used to wrap ourselves/at play in its folds and be chieftains/and princesses. The second stanza describes the quilt which the speaker now owns and cherishes. “Now I’ve found a quilt/I’d like to die under.” In the third stanza, Waniek describes the memories the grandmother must have dreamed of, and of which the speaker would also dream.

Symbolism is a vital attribute of this poem. The colors of the quilt represent characteristics of the speaker’s loved ones: “Six VanDyke brown squares,/two white ones, and one square/the yellow brown of Mama’s cheeks.” Part of the charm the quilt holds for the speaker is the reminders of her familial childhood. She remembers her “father’s burnt umber pride,” and her “mother’s ochre gentleness” as she dreams beneath the peaceful comfort of The Century Quilt.

The tone of the poem holds significance as well. Nostalgia dominates “The Century Quilt.” The speaker treasures the quilt not for the warmth and coziness it provides, but for fond memories it brings her to recall. The speaker is happy as she remembers her fortunate childhood, and remains hopeful as she dreams of the bright future to which she eagerly looks forward.

Sample LLL

In the poem The Century Quilt, by Marilyn Nelson Waniek, the speaker finds a quilt that, in her mind, connects her life to the diverse backgrounds of her family. Waniek uses both imagery and narrative viewpoint to develop the Century Quilt’s meanings as a connection to her family history and to her own past.

The Century Quilt, so called because the speaker would “have good dreams for a hundred years under this quilt”, is described in ways that connect the speaker to her childhood and to the lives of her relatives (21-22). It seems as if the speaker is partly of Native American heritage. Her grandmother, Meema, would bring an Indian blanket to her house, and she and her sister “used to wrap ourselves at play in its fold and be chieftains and princesses” (10-12). This quilt played an integral part in the speaker’s childhood, and so the speaker now desires another quilt, a keepsake that will remind her of her childhood and of Meema. The imagery of the speaker wrapping herself in the quilt and playing dress-up demonstrates the happy memories that quilts invoke for her and partly explain her love for The Century Quilt. However, the Quilt also connects the speaker to lives before her own. The speaker describes the Quilt as having “six Van Dyke brown squares, two white ones, and one square the yellowbrown of Mama’s cheeks” (15-17). Connecting the color of the square to the color of her mother’s cheeks implies that all of the squares connect to some part of the speaker’s family. This suggestion is enforced when the speaker talks about Meema’s “yellow sister’s” and her “grandfather’s white family” (25-26). The speaker identifies each color in the quilt with part of her family; the quilt as a whole represents her family tree. Imagery again enforces the quilt’s relationship to the family when the speaker describes her “father’s burnt umber pride” and her “mother’s ochre gentleness” (39-40). The images of her childhood relationship with quilts mixed with the imagery comparing the parts of the quilt to different members of her family emphasize the quilt’s meaning as a link from the speaker to both her childhood and her ancestors.

The speaker’s narrative viewpoints also connect the speaker directly with her childhood and her family’s past, using the quilt as a reference point. When discussing Meema’s Indian quilt, the speaker uses a first person point of view to talk about Meema and her activities with the quilt. She states, “I remember how I’d planned to inherit that blanket” and “we used to wrap ourselves at play in its folds” (9-11). The use of first person illustrates the speaker’s direct and immediate connection to the blanket in her past, explaining the intense attachment she has to The Century Quilt. Her statement that she would “like to die under” the Century Quilt shows just how desperate the speaker is to maintain a physical and mental connection to her childhood (14). The switch from first person to third person later in the poem, however, demonstrates how the quilt connects the speaker to her family’s past as well. The speaker, thinking about dreaming under The Century Quilt, describes Meema’s childhood in great detail. She notes that “when their father came home from the store they cranked up the pianola” and that her own mother used to be “a lanky girl trailing her father through his Oklahoma field” (28-35). The narrator’s seamless transition from first person to third person while remembering her ancestor’s lives shows that she feels The Century Quilt will link her more strongly to her family’s past as well as her own.

The speaker makes use of both imagery and changing narrative viewpoints to illustrate that her desire for the Century Quilt stems from its ability to recall memories from not only her own childhood but also the childhoods of her mother and grandmother. When the speaker states, “I’d call it The Century Quilt, after its patterns of leaves,” she chooses this name because the patchwork of colors that make up the quilt represent a century of her family’s history.