

Rap sheet 2 for Rap Point 1

The journey and human experience

One reason for studying English is to consider how we, as human beings, have made and continue to make sense of the world and our lives through the way we use language and the stories we tell. In this way, English is often seen as a way of passing down through time universal truths about human experience. We study English, it has been said, because it helps us to come to a deeper understanding of who we are and our own lives.

Each of the quotations comes from a different time, a different place and a different culture from our own. Yet each, in some sense, still has something to say to us about how we live today. This is not necessarily something new - a particular quotation might confirm for us an existing idea. Whatever we might take from them, what can be said is that each quotation puts the concept of journey at the heart of the human experience and asks us to think about how we can best live our own lives.

What each quotation also highlights is the way that figurative language is important when we are communicating with others about human experience. How you think or feel about something can be so personal that it is often impossible to express it without making a comparison with something else with which others will be very familiar.

For example, Christina Rossetti's description of a road winding up a hill might be said to symbolise her belief that the journey that is life is a constant struggle, and we cannot expect it to be easy. Through her language she allows the reader to understand what she means in a very physical way because we all have a memory of struggling on foot up a big hill.

1. What examples of figurative language (symbols / metaphors / similes) can you find in the quotations? How does each relate to the concept of journey?
2. What other common uses of figurative language (symbols / metaphors / similes) do you associate with journeys? Create a list of your own.
3. Think of a statement about journeys and the role they play in life, which you hold to be true for other people as well. Write this in a sentence. Then use your sentence to set the theme for a haiku you will write about journeys.

Note: you might first want to consider the following example of haiku. A haiku is a poem of 17 syllables, organised in three lines (five syllables, seven syllables, five syllables).

What does this haiku by Japanese master Matsuo Basho convey to you about journeys?

*All along this road
not a single soul - only.
autumn evening comes*