Contemporary Poetry

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Expect
Nothing
(NOTHING)
1. Born February 9, 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia

2. Most known for her work, *The Color Purple*

3. Won the Pulitzer Prize Award in 1983 for fiction and the National Book Award in the same year.

4. Accidentally wounded in the right eye by a shot from a BB gun fired by one of her brothers.

5. Became permanently blinded in the right eye after waiting a week to go to the hospital.

6. Attended Spelman College

7. Met MLK Jr. and was inspired to become a Civil Rights Activist.

8. Walker and Melvyn Roseman Leventhal, moved to Mississippi and became the first inter-racial married couple in MS.

**Gallery 1.1 Alice Walker Gallery**
About the Poem

Expect Nothing

1. Alice Walker is explaining that expecting nothing leads to a more fulfilled life. It cuts out disappointment.

2. "Homily" style, meaning it is like a sermon

3. Walker expects the reader to agree so she uses few techniques to persuade the reader.

4. She wants the reader to easily relate to her

5. Diatyposis, recommending useful advice to others, in the first lines: "expect nothing."

6. Repetition of "live frugally on surprise" helps to emphasize the meaning of the poem.
Poem 2

Small Town
With One Road
About the Poet

Gary Soto

1. Mexican American born April 12, 1952
2. Second Child of Manuel and Angie Soto born in Fresno California
3. When he was 5 his father died in an accident while working at Sunmaid
4. His family struggles not only emotionally but financially for years afterward (Gary did poorly in high school)
5. Married to Carolyn Oda and has one daughter named Markio

Gallery 2.1 Gary Soto Gallery
About the Poem

Small Town With One Road

1. Free verse poem with 38 lines
2. 1st person speaker is a father who grew up in this small town
3. Possibly a narrative about his life in the town
4. Line six is the personification of laughter "red stain of laughter."
5. Entire poem is a catalog of descriptive diction about the past leading to a parallel in the present (lines 1-6 comparable to lines 33-38) ties in the kids in the beginning of the poem to the speaker with the comparison in line 34 "'he's like me"
6. Contrasts a life of hard work with taking joy in the simple things in life
7. Shift from objective description to using pronouns such as my and I in line 21
8. Simile in line 24 "wavered like a mirage" describes the serene look of the farm life
9. Yearning for past "we could be here" line 1 "we could go back" line 25 in the present "worry is my daughter's story" line 29
10. Commentary on how life was simpler back in the 1950's and how the children of today, the rich urban children that is, are not afforded the carefree childhood that the speaker enjoyed as a boy.
Poem 3

Song
About the Poet

Adrienne Rich

1. Born May 16, 1929 in Baltimore, Maryland.
3. Father was a renowned pathologist who taught at John Hopkins University.
4. Poetic influence stemmed from her father's encouragement to write.
5. Raised as a Christian.
7. Divorced her husband in 1970 because she couldn't handle the institution of marriage.
8. Husband committed suicide shortly after the divorce.
9. Rich became an open lesbian after the divorce.
1. “Song” was written one year after Rich was divorced from her husband.

2. The poem was spurred by her isolation and the transition to divorced life.

3. The repetition of the word “lonely” creates a sense of detachment when reading the poem.

   3.1. Images of “needle in a haystack,” “plane on an air field,” “woman driving across country,” rowboat on a frozen lake.

4. The places that the woman drives by in the poem represent choices and decisions that she could have made and experiences that she could have had, but now those opportunities are gone.

5. Juxtaposition of the typical woman (being awake compared to being asleep)

6. In the final stanza, the speaker sounds metaphorically trapped (rowboat ice-fast on the shore, last red light of the year, neither ice nor mud nor winter light)

7. The tone of “Song” is very self-aware. Rich knows what is going on in her life and what she is struggling with. She realizes her problems but doesn’t have a solution to her loneliness.

8. The second to last stanza touches more on personal isolation with the comparison of being the first person awake or breathing the first cold breath on the city.

9. Evokes a cold, and empty mood through Rich’s use of diction and syntax.

   9.1. In the last stanza, the comparison of winter, ice, and mud creates this mood.
Poem 4

The Fish


3. Father died when she was eight months old and her mother was institutionalized soon after.

4. She was orphaned and taken in by her grandparents in Nova Scotia.

5. Elizabeth traveled frequently abroad to Europe and South America with the inheritance money her father left her.

6. She lived in Brazil for 15 years where she met Lota de Macedo Soares, architect.


8. Didn’t like to incorporate her personal life into her poems.
IMAGERY:

1. Throughout the poem, Bishop uses imagery to describe the setting, “the little rented boat, from the pool of the bilge”

2. Vivid imagery is used to describe the appearance of the fish, “I looked in to his eyes, which were far larger than mine but shallower, and yellowed, the irises backed and packed”, “—if you could call it a lip—grim, wet, and weaponlike”, “He was speckled with barnacles, fine rosettes of lime, and infested with tiny white sea-lice”

SIMILES:

1. The narrator uses similes to create imagery, “his brown skin hung in strips like ancient wallpaper”, “like medals with their ribbons frayed and wavering”, “white flesh packed in like feathers”, “and the pink swim-bladder like a big peony”, “its pattern of darker brown was like wallpaper”

TONE:

1. The beginning of the poem is very matter-of-fact, “I caught a tremendous fish…he didn’t fight.”

2. The tone later shifts from matter-of-fact to admiration the fisherman has for the fish, “He hung a grunting weight, battered and venerable and homely”.

3. Later in the poem, there is another tone shift, from admiration to respect, “I admired his sullen face… and then I saw that from his lower lip….hung five old pieces of fish-line.”

4. The hooks that hang from his lip symbolize strength and victory. The fish has obviously led a long life, and had managed to escape many times from various fishermen; the hooks are like medals of Honor. Towards the end of the poem, the narrator comes to respect the fish, though she feels victorious at being the one to catch the fish (“victory filled up the little rented boat”). Finally, the narrator observes the beauty around her, even the “oil [that] had spread a rainbow around the rusted engine…until everything was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!”