

TOPIC: Comparing Metaphors of Hope in Literature

SUBJECT/GRADE LEVEL: Language Arts, Grade level, 10-12; Supplemental - Social Studies Grade 10

TITLE: Comparing Metaphors of Hope in the Literature of India and Ireland

AIM QUESTION: Why is the idea of “hope” important in the literature of different cultures?

NEW YORK STATE LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS: Students will read independently and fluently across many genres of literature from many cultures and historical periods.

NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS: Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments and turning points in world history and examine the broad sweep of history from a variety of perspectives.

TEACHER BACKGROUND: During hard times like the Great Irish Famine, hope for the future becomes crucial for survival. In Liam O'Flaherty's short story "Poor People," the author examines Patrick and Brigid Derrane's struggle to maintain hope after the loss of their four-year-old son to a poverty-related illness. The problem of maintaining hope is not unique to Ireland. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, a novel about life in India by Kamala Markandaya, Rukmani and Nathan are tested by the death, after considerable suffering, of their youngest and most beloved child Kuti. Hope is also a theme in the poems “Work with Hope” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and “Hope is a thing with feathers” by Emily Dickinson. In discussion of these works, classes should examine different metaphors used for expressing hope and students should create their own metaphors. Prior to this lesson, students should have read chapter 16 (pages 97-105) of *Nectar in a Sieve*.

AIM: Why is the idea of “hope” important in the literature of different cultures?

ASSESSMENT:

- Students will demonstrate understanding of major ideas in reading by answering questions in writing and during class and group discussions.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of metaphors of hope by writing poetry that presents their personal ideas about hope.

DO NOW ACTIVITY: Read passage A from *Nectar in a Sieve*. Answer questions 1-4.

- 1- Why is Rukmani worried about the future?
- 2- Why is Nathan hopeful about the future?
- 3- Of these two characters, who do you agree with most? Why?
- 4- In your opinion, why does the author say they watched the rice crop, “most of all with fear”?

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY: Is hope important in our lives today? Why? What are the sources of hope? Describe a literary work, historical event, or contemporary movie, television show or musical piece where hope plays an important role? Why is the idea of hope central to this work?

TRANSITIONAL ACTIVITY: Examine passage A from *Nectar in a Sieve*. Who are the characters in this passage? What is happening to them? Why is Rukmani worried about the future? Why is Nathan hopeful about the future? Why is hope so important to his life? In your opinion, why does the author say they watched the rice crop, “most of all with fear”? Of these two characters, who do you agree with most? Why? In your opinion, how is the role of hope similar to or different from its role in our lives today?

ACTIVITY: In groups (or individually), read and discuss the passage from Liam O'Flaherty's short story "Poor People" about life during the Great Irish Famine. Each group should answer the following questions.

- 1- What activity occupies Patrick Derrane at the beginning of this passage?
- 2- Why is this such an important activity?
- 3- In your opinion, what gives Patrick Derrane the courage to go on while his family has so many problems?
- 4- If you were Patrick Derrane, what would you have done on at the end of the passage? Why?

ACTIVITY: Class discussion of links between *Nectar in a Sieve* and "Poor People. Outline similarities and idfference on the board.

SUMMARY QUESTION: Why does the idea of hope play an important role in the literature of different groups of people?

HOMEWORK: Write a poem that explains your ideas about hope.

APPLICATION 1: The title of *Nectar in a Sieve* comes from a line in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Work with Hope" (1825): “Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, And hope without an object cannot live.” Why do you think Kamala Markandaya chose this title? How does this title explain what is happening in chapter 16?

APPLICATION 2: Read the excerpt from Emily Dickinson's poem, "Hope is a thing with feathers", to the class. Do you agree with this image of hope? Why or why not?
“Hope is a thing with feathers-that perches in the soul - And sings the tune without the words - And never stops - at all.”

PROJECT IDEA: Design a poster expressing the importance of hope in experience.

Activity Sheet: Why is the idea of “hope” important in the literature of different cultures?

A) Adapted from Kamala Markandaya, *Nector in a Sieve* (1954).

“There is the reaping,’ Rukmani said, ‘and the threshing and winnowing. How shall we manage when the time comes?’

‘When the time comes,’ Nathan said with a gleam in his eye, ‘the strength will be forthcoming, never fear.’

Rukmani looked at him doubtfully: thin and drawn, with thighs and arms so puny that no muscle showed even when he flexed them. The rice would have to be lifted plant by plant, and the grain separated from the husk, and the husk beaten for the last grains . . . it meant working long hours in the flooded fields with bent back, and much laboring thereafter converting the paddy into rice. It was no task for weakened bodies.

‘You will see,’ he said with confidence. ‘We will find our strength. One look at the swelling grain will be enough to renew our vigour.’

Indeed, it did our hearts good to see the paddy ripen. We watched it as a dog watches a bone, jealously, lest it be snatched away; or as a mother her child, with pride and affection. And most of all with fear.”

Questions

- 1- Why is Rukmani worried about the future?
- 2- Why is Nathan hopeful about the future?
- 3- Of these two characters, who do you agree with most? Why?
- 4- In your opinion, why does the author say they watched the rice crop, “most of all with fear”?

B) From Liam O’Flaherty, “Poor People” in *The Short Stories of Liam O’Flaherty* (1948).

“Patrick Derrane came running down the road with a pitchfork on his shoulder, his rawhide shoes squelching with the wetness of the road, a white frieze smock tucked into his waistbelt, his slim thin body shivering with the cold. He reached the sandbank and saw the seaweed in the tide through the darkness, being sucked in and out by the might slow movement of the sea. He uttered a low joyous cry and ran down, running ankle deep in the soft white sand.

‘Praise be to God!’

It was the fifteenth of February and he had not yet gathered any seaweed to manure his potatoes. He had been six weeks lying on his back with influenza, his wife was weak after the hardship of winter, his four-year-old son was lying on his death-bed, the supply of peat had been all burned for the past month, there was neither flour nor milk in the house and they had to depend on the charity of their neighbours . . . but . . . work must be done”

“Derrane had gathered a great heap of seaweed, ten loads for a horse. He went home. Weak after his sickness, he was hardly able to walk the road. His thighs were scalded by the brine. And now that he was going home, he remembered the sadness that awaited him there, lamentation and a grave being opened”

“About midday he had brought all the seaweed to the field. He came home He was afraid coming near his house and as he ascended the hill in front of the village and saw several neighbour women approaching his door, his heart stopped beating.

He jumped off his horse in the yard and ran to the door crying: ‘What’s this? What’s this?’

On the threshold he heard his wife’s voice mingled with the many voices of the death-cry rising from the lips of the village women seated round the house; a long broken sound, wallowing with the sorrow of souls.

He ran to the little room and found her there, kneeling by the bed.

Side by side they wept.”

Questions

- 1- What activity occupies Patrick Derrane at the beginning of this passage?
- 2- Why is this such an important activity?
- 3- In your opinion, what gives Patrick Derrane the courage to go on while his family has so many problems?
- 4- If you were Patrick Derrane, what would you have done on at the end of the passage? Why?