

Date 9 / 24 PV Log: (circle one) Poem / Movie / Picture / LyricTitle "You Begin"Author / Director / Margaret Atwood

Context (Where Found / Viewed / Read?)

"You Begin" was required for the entire English 2XL class to read by Mr. Shakely, which we accessed on Edline and reviewed and discussed during class.

Content / CD / Summary / Precis (Say? "Plot? Setting/Situation? Key lines/phrases scenes, etc?)

"You Begin" embodies the maturation and expansion of a person's perception throughout the course of his or her life. It emphasizes the fact that life begins quite simple and basic then expands and becomes infinitely complex until it returns to a way that is similar yet not completely the same as it began. The poem especially focuses on how a person understands the world at different stages of his or her life, and this is evident when the speaker suggests, "The word hand floats over your hand / like a small cloud over a lake. / The word hand anchors your hand to this table, / your hand is a small stone / I hold between two words" (1). This important line displays how confusing and complex life becomes as one matures, especially stressing how subjective and seemingly arbitrary the use of language eventually becomes.

Content / CM / Meaning? / Theme(s)?

Innocence and beginnings and endings are key themes in "You Begin." The poem basically takes the reader on a trip through an average person's life, beginning with the outlook of an innocent child and ending with the simple and seemingly similar outlook of an elderly person approaching death. A child begins with a concrete understanding of the world, learning to know and grow used to itself, until it begins to look and become interested in things outside of his or her physical body. Once the focus is carried beyond oneself then the child loses his or her innocence, faced with the realities of the world. The world becomes hazy, vague, and grows in so much depth that the person no longer sees life in simple, objective terms, like drawings or pictures; rather, he or she loses his or her faith in humanity and enters the subjective complex world that is "more difficult to learn than I have said" (1). Finally, a person's life ends in a simple and concrete way like he or she began; however, a reversion to the innocent life of a child isn't even plausible. The complexity will forever remain with that person.

Form (Diction? Construction Terms? Symbolism?)

At the beginning of the poem, Atwood uses end-topped lines to indicate the simple thoughts of a child. As that child develops, the lines become longer and the ideas and thoughts become more complex. However, as the person grows old, the lines again become short and simple, though not end-stopped like the beginning of the poem. Atwood also uses colors to symbolize the growing perceptions of a human being. At first, a child only sees and experiences distinct primary colors. More colors are eventually added to the person's life through experience; however, the colors become less and less clear (smudged) as he or she faces reality. Finally, in the fourth stanza, Atwood replaces hands with the word "words," suggesting the complexity and subjectiveness of language.

Commentary (What do you want to say? Why like? Questions? Synthesis / Allusions-Connections / Relevance to personal experience, to literature, 20Q's? etc.)? "Poetic" Traits?

I very much enjoyed "You Begin" because it generally summed up the mindset of a human being throughout life in a very creative and concise way. Although humans may not consciously think of existence in this way, life indeed does go through all three of these distinct stages. That is why the poem was so attention grabbing, because it was so true to human nature. The poem relates to Arthur's developing perception and understanding of the world in *The Once and Future King* by T.H. White as he progresses from the young and inquisitive Wart to the powerful and transforming King Arthur. Arthur grows up in such a sheltered and innocent environment under the teaching of Merlin, and when he becomes king, he is shocked by the reality of the world. Only after much trial and error does Arthur finally come to the conclusion that humans are evil and imperfectable; however, it is much too late, as Mordred ultimately destroys everything that Arthur worked for in his life. "You Begin" is quite poetic because it presents life as it really is, reflecting an increasing and realistic understanding of the world. It does not try to hide the impurities of human existence; rather, it blatantly expresses the difficulties and challenges that come along with it. "You Begin" reveals truthfully the complexity of life, and it does not hold anything back in terms of the way life actually plays out for individual persons.

over (do not mix logs; e.g., no poem log in front, and movie log on back)