

e. e. cummings

(1894-1962)

Text 1

(from *50 poems*, poem 1)!blac
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Attitudes, Interests, Influences

one of the most influential personalities of the 20th century

deeply interested in experimentation and avant-garde movements

greatly admired classical tradition and ancient cultures (Anglo-Saxon, Provencal, Dante, Italian Renaissance)

1910 *Romanos*

in London: T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, T. Hulme

in Paris: J. Joyce, G. Stein, P. Picasso and other important personalities of the word of culture

1917 *Portraits of a Woman*

influenced by Vorticism, Chinese and Japanese poetry

1920 *Hughes*

exceptional ability to discover talent encouraged and helped Frost, Yeats, Eliot

Joyce intended to gather and order the Cantos (order and method) and intellectual tradition of intellect and intellect

considered poetry a craft which requires active intelligence

1950 *Letters*1954 *Literary Essays*

Translations

1912 *Seafarer* (from Anglo-Saxon Poems by Guido Cavalcanti)1915 *Cathay* (from Chinese)

1947/50 Confucian books

1954 *Classic Anthology*

1. Look at the lay-out of the poem. List the features which make it different from a traditional poem.

2. Here is a possible prose version of the poem. 'Black against the white sky (stand) the trees from which a dropped leaf goes whirling'. Try reading the poem aloud. What suggestion is there in the arrangement of the words to show the reader how to read the poem?

3. The image portrayed in the poem is that of

sunset

thunderstorm when a flash of light reveals the scene

landscape darkening at sunset

(tick)

4. In this poem e.e. cummings extends the possibility of poetry by adopting unorthodox typographic and linguistic techniques. Here is a list of some devices cummings generally uses in his poetry.

words stretched out horizontally and vertically

misplaced capital letters

gaps between lines

non-standardized vocabulary

incomplete lines

digressions

disjointed words

scattered punctuation

unconventional use of prefixes and suffixes

misuse of parentheses

nouns used as adjectives

redundant comparatives

(Tick the devices used in this poem).

5. Focus on the use of parentheses in '(whi)' and guess what it might suggest.

momentary broken vision

doubt

contemporaneity of events

other: ...

(tick)

The aim of the exclamation mark at the beginning of the poem might suggest an effect of

surprise

immediacy

shock

other: ...

(tick)

Tasks

1. Look at the lay-out of the poem. List the features which make it different from a traditional poem.
2. Here is a possible prose version of the poem. 'Black against the white sky (stand) the trees from which a dropped leaf goes whirling'. Try reading the poem aloud. What suggestion is there in the arrangement of the words to show the reader how to read the poem?
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3. The image portrayed in the poem is that of

sunset
 thunderstorm when a flash of light reveals the scene (tick)
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words stretched out horizontally and vertically
 misplaced capital letters
 gaps between lines
 non-standardized vocabulary
 incomplete lines
 digressions
 disjointed words
 scattered punctuation
 unconventional use of prefixes and suffixes
 misuse of parentheses
 nouns used as adjectives
 redundant comparatives

(Tick the devices used in this poem).

5. Focus on the use of parentheses in '(whi)' and guess what it might suggest.

momentary broken vision
 doubt
 contemporaneity of events (tick)
 other: ...

6. The aim of the exclamation mark at the beginning of the poem might suggest an effect of

surprise
 immediacy (tick)
 shock
 other: ...

7. Which device conveys the idea of doubt?

And which devices suggest the falling motion of a leaf?

8. Write down the verbs used and what they refer to.

verbs	what
.	

What do these verbs suggest?

9. Which of the five senses is involved in this poem?

10. Look at the information you have gathered. What is the impression e. e. cummings wants to convey?

a momentary perception
 a sequence of events
 a static picture of nature
 other: ...

(tick)