

Outcome Four

I have already discussed Outcomes One, Two and Three. This post will focus on Outcome Four, which is the last outcome. Your study guide says the following about Outcome Four:

Outcome 4: students discuss the *creative choices* made in literary texts. We might enquire: ‘why does the writer use this particular word instead of another, or place the words in this specific order, not another?’

What does this mean?

This means that you should look at each text as something which has been put together very carefully. Just as a builder carefully places each brick to construct a building, a writer carefully chooses each word to create a poem, play or novel. If you are asked to analyse a poem, play or novel, you should look carefully at how it has been put together. Think about what the message or meaning of the text is, and then think about how the way that the text is put together helps to convey this message.

For example:

Look at the poem below. Then consider why each of its words has been chosen, and why it is structured in the way that it is.

The Shortest and Sweetest of Songs

By George MacDonald.

Come
Home.

As you can see, this is an extremely short poem, but there is still much that could be said about it. The first question you should ask yourself about any text is ‘What is it about?’ Then you can ask yourself how the chosen words and structure of the poem help to convey what the text is about. Let us try this with ‘The Shortest and Sweetest of Songs’.

1. What is the poem about?

The poem is about longing. The speaker wants someone to come home. The speaker could be a wife longing for her husband, or a husband longing for his wife. It could be a

child waiting for its mother, or a dog waiting for its owner. Whoever is speaking, it seems that the speaker yearns for someone whom they love to return to them.

2. How do the words ‘Come’ and ‘Home’ help to reinforce the poem’s message?

The poet could have used the words ‘Come Here’ or ‘Come Back’ and the meaning of the poem would have been similar. But the words ‘Come’ and ‘Home’ look and sound similar. This similarity binds the words together. Because the words are bound together by their similarity, they convey a desire for unity and togetherness. This is the desire felt by the speaker, who wants to reunite with a loved one.

3. Why is the poem split over two lines? How does this reinforce the poem’s message?

The poem may be split over two lines so that each word is isolated. This might emphasise the speaker’s isolation and loneliness during the wait for the loved one to return. The poem might also be split over two lines so that there is distance between the two words. This could emphasise the distance between the speaker and the loved one.

4. How does the poem’s full stop emphasise the poem’s message?

A full stop usually indicates the end of a sentence. Thus, the full stop here could symbolise the end of the journey that will come when the loved one comes home. The full stop could also indicate that home is the end of all journeys. The full stop might also indicate the sense of closure that the speaker will have when the loved one returns.

You could ask many other questions about the poem. Try asking yourself why the title is longer than the poem and what effect the title’s length creates. You could also ask yourself what effect the alliteration in the title creates. If you like, you can post your answers under this topic.

Remember that you will not have to look at every single word in every single text that you encounter. This post is just meant to help you to get into the habit of noticing and commenting on the way that texts are put together. This is a skill that you need to develop so that you can successfully analyse texts.