

Hide and seek by Vernon Scannel

Call out. Call loud: 'I'm ready! Come and find me!'
The sacks in the toolshed smell like the seaside.
They'll never find you in this salty dark,
But be careful that your feet aren't sticking out.
Wiser not to risk another shout.
The floor is cold. They'll probably be searching
The bushes near the swing. Whatever happens
You mustn't sneeze when they come prowling in.
And here they are, whispering at the door;
You've never heard them sound so hushed before.
Don't breathe. Don't move. Stay dumb. Hide in your blindness. They're moving closer, someone
stumbles, mutters;
Their words and laughter scuffle, and they're gone.
But don't come out just yet; they'll try the lane
And then the greenhouse and back here again.
They must be thinking that you're very clever,
Getting more puzzled as they search all over.
It seems a long time since they went away.
Your legs are stiff, the cold bites through your coat;
The dark damp smell of sand moves in your throat.
It's time to let them know that you're the winner.
Push off the sacks. Uncurl and stretch. That's better!
Out of the shed and call to them: 'I've won!
Here I am! Come and own up I've caught you!'
The darkening garden watches. Nothing stirs.
The bushes hold their breath; the sun is gone.
Yes, here you are. But where are they who sought you?

'Hide and Seek' concerns a boy hiding cautiously whilst playing hide and seek with his peers. Gradually, he realises he has been abandoned, and fear overcomes him due to being isolated in the dark surroundings. The tone is incredibly certain and positive at the beginning. However, his confidence gradually fades away as the realisation of his abandonment occurs. The mood is analogous to the tone. At first, we can sense the excitement. This modifies to anxiety and nervousness towards the end. The poet uses language features to portray the tone. On the first line, exclamation marks are used to show the enthusiasm of the boy. Scannel uses personification and the senses to describe the surrounding atmosphere in a vivid way. Therefore, the reader gets a clearer image. Occasional rhyme is used to add a sense of rhythm to the poem. The poem is one continuous stanza. It is like dramatic monologue in that it creates character, but it is actually second person.

The structure emphasises the unbearable length of waiting time. The adult speaks to his childhood self in second person, explaining feeling and thoughts. There are short sentences to build up tension and create stillness. The themes explored in 'Hide and Seek' are childhood experiences, reflection, isolation and abandonment.

Hide and Seek Analysis

In the poem Hide and Seek, Vernon Scannell makes excellent use of all the sense to bring out the great excitement children usually experience whenever they play this ever-green game. The fact that short sentences are used in rapid succession and that the poem seems to have been written in one short stanza also contribute to this feeling.

The persona is the one being sought, so he hides himself in the toolshed at the bottom of the garden making sure that his feet "aren't sticking out".

The place smells salty because of the sacks of sand and both the floor and air feel damp and cold. As the seekers draw stealthily close, the poet is almost afraid to breathe and automatically closes his eyes as if by doing so, it would be difficult for his friends to find him.

Time passes, the poet feels stiff, cold and uncomfortable so he decides to come out of his hiding place only to find that the other children have long abandoned the search and left him alone in the dark shed.

"The bushes hold their breath: the sun is gone
Yes here you are. But where are they who sought you?"

Although this poem is basically a poem about childhood recollections, a moral can still be learnt from it: namely that in life, when success seems to be within easy reach, we should not allow ourselves to feel too over-confident as we might end up losing all and feeling bitterly disappointed.

Diction (The writer's choice of words)

The poem starts with the imperative verb 'call'. Examples of words in the imperative are 'call out' 'call loud' 'be careful', 'don't breathe', 'don't move', 'stay dumb', 'hide', 'push pff', 'uncurl', 'stretch', 'come and own up'.

In the poem, these words/verbs in the imperative form are very important because they are showing the expertise of this boy at play in this well-loved game. It is almost as if the boy is instructing the reader as to how we should play the game as well as we possible can, in order not to be caught. In "be careful that your feet aren't sticking out" the young persona/the young child is giving us readers a good piece of advice – he wants to make sure that he makes the search for him a very difficult one. This shows that he wanted to be the winner at all costs. This shows that he wants to be the winner at all costs. In fact, in the next line, "Wiser not to risk another shout." The boy is again giving advice, showing that the risk of being caught is very much possible since his friends might be close by. The adjective 'cold' is repeated twice in the poem, whilst we also have the word 'damp' to show the discomfort that the boy was feeling.

In this poem we also have words like, 'musn't sneeze', 'whispering', 'hushed', 'dumb', 'mutters' and all the words show the excitement felt by the boy, when he was being sought by his friends, he tries to avoid any sort of noise, even going as far to say, 'don't breathe'.

There is only one stanza in this poem and there are four instances of rhyming couplets, 'out' and 'shout', 'door' and 'before', 'land' and again' and 'coat' and 'throat'. The fact that there is little rhyme in this poem is indicative of the excitement being felt by the boy as he lies in hiding.

The poem is very rich in figures of speech. From the very first line we find alliteration of the letter/consonant 'c'. This alliteration almost makes the call of the boy even more audible in our minds and it also gives the poem a certain vibrant feeling from the very start.

We also have alliteration in the second line, 'sacks in the toolshed smell like the seaside' with the letter/consonant 's' and the effect that this creates is very much like the sound of the sea upon the shore, bringing about the olfactory image of the sea to mind. The soothing sound effect created by the

alliteration of the letter 's' brings to mind a feeling of calmness and serenity; a feeling that is extended in the following line when the persona says, 'they'll never find you in this salty dark' meaning that he is calm because he knows that he is safe.

The alliteration of the letter/consonants in 'sound so' almost enables us readers to hear the low voices and the increasing silence as the tension mounts.

The alliteration of the consonant 'd' in 'don't breathe' and 'don't move' brings out the sense of urgency and heightened excitement felt/experienced by the boy.

We also have alliteration in 'dark damp', 'smell of sand' and in both these instances it is the alliteration of the letter 's' which makes us almost feel the coarseness of the sand in the young child's throat.

The poem is also rich in personification where inanimate objects are being human qualities. For example: 'cold bites' this figure of speech makes us realize just how cold and uncomfortable this boy was feeling as he lay on the cold floor.

The personification 'darkening garden watches' shows that the only thing greeting our winner in a dark garden, whilst in the next line, 'the bushes hold their breath' this personification not only reminds us of the effort done by the boy in order to avoid those who sought him, but also portrays the silence that surrounds the boy once he emerged from his hiding place.

The very last in the poem sums up the disappointment felt by the persons, as soon as he realizes that all his friends had abandoned the search long before.

Indeed the feeling is one of bitter disappointment and although this is basically a poem about childhood recollections, a moral can still be learnt from it, namely that in life, when success seems to be within easy reach, we should not allow ourselves to feel over-confident as we might end up losing everything and feeling completely empty, and disillusioned losers.

2nd analysis

Hide and Seek is a deep and important message hidden in the detailed description of a familiar childhood game. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and availing the opportunities which life presents one with.

The poem starts with the confident and bold challenge of a child who has chosen a clever place to hide and is sure no one will be able to find him. One discovers that it is a group of people who are playing Hide and Seek and the boy who had called out is hiding in the shed which is dark and has a salty smell permeating him which reminds him of the seaside. Still in spite of the fact that he could be uncomfortable or afraid, he takes comfort in the fact that no one will be able to best him. The poet talks to the boy, giving him advice that he should curl himself so that his feet aren't visible from behind the sacks of sand he is hiding between; and also cautions him that if he shouts again he will risk drawing attention to his hiding spot. Another difficulty presents itself in the form of the cold floor but it is immediately over-ridden by the thought that the children who are seeking the boy will be searching near the bushes, the poet again advises the boy that he must be careful not to sneeze when and if they come searching for him in the tool shed. The seekers do come and the boy hears them mutter and stumble, awing at the fact that the thought of victory has made the usually loud boys quiet and subdued. Listening to the series of rapid commands which follow the boy freezes, holds his breathe and shuts his eyes close hoping that they won't find him. Sure enough, the voices fade as they move away not believing the boy would dare hide in the tool shed, as it was probably considered off limits to children.

Even when the boys move away from the shed, the boy doesn't come out, reveling in the fact that they will keep searching and wondering where he was, all the while marveling at his cleverness. A long time passes since they had departed and the boy grows uncomfortable, cold, stiff and suffocated. He then finally decides that it is time to reveal that he has won. He comes out of his hiding place and departs the shed, calling out to his friends to proclaim him the winner. But to his dismay he finds the garden empty and quiet. All the children have given up and gone home. The same voice of the poet who was advising him throughout now turns on him and asks where his so-called friends are

who were supposed to be looking for him.

A few literary devices highlight and add color to the poem: Alliteration is used in the second line: 'smell like the seaside' of the letters L and S. Going on blindness is personified as a safe house where the boy seeks sanctuary. Also in the end, a series of personified phrases: 'The darkening garden watches.' 'The bushes hold their breathe' describe the quite of the scene.

The poem not just about a childhood game but it is about life. The difficulties which the boy faces after deciding to hide in the shed are metaphorically used for the obstructions one has to deal with while walking down the road one chooses in life. But the boy's determination to win and succeed enables him to be strong enough to overcome all these difficulties. Also the other boys are the competitors which one has to deal with in life. They are described as 'prowling' like as if they were predatory animals waiting to strike on their prey when it is unaware. Such are the problems life throws one's way, but if, like the little boy, one has an predetermined aim in mind, it is not difficult to pull through despite them.

Then another message; that of making the maximum use of any and all opportunities that life and luck bless one with is conveyed in the last few lines. The boy could have enjoyed the thrill of a glamorous victory which would have been ample compensation for enduring through all the frightening aspects of the toolshed; had he came out and declared his presence when the seekers turned away from its doorstep. But he procrastinated; hoping that his delay would put the other children in awe of his brilliant hiding spot and earn him more glory as the victor, only to find out that his continued absence had made them lose interest and move on leaving him alone and disappointed.

Thus is a very important message conveyed in a light and interesting manner, through a detailed description of a generally popular childhood game.