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| **Literature Paper 2 Section B: Anthology Poetry****Learning compendium****‘Kamikaze’ Garland** |
| Key ideasThe poem is about choice and decisions during conflict.The speaker’s father had a choice to live or die and in undertaking the kamikaze mission during the conflict of the Second World War he had chosen death.On the way, he changes his mind. However, the poem makes it clear that the choice he made was between honourable suicide and living with dishonour, ostracised by society.There is both a parallel and a contrast between the pilot’s mission with its elaborate ceremonial preparations and his father’s life as a fisherman who was also engaged in dangerous missions, but returned safe. The speaker speculates that her father (the pilot) may have recalled how his brothers would wait for his father’s return, which may have prompted him to think about his own children, who would not have seen him return from this mission if he had not turned back.The speaker is careful not to judge her father’s decisions, or to offer excuses. She speculates about his reasons for turning back and not completing his mission, but leaves the readers to make up their own mind about his decision. Contextual details: During WW2 about 3862 kamikaze pilots died and about 19% of kamikaze attacks managed to hit a ship (They were expected to crash their warplanes into enemy warships). The word ‘kamikaze’ means/ translates as ‘divine wind’. |
| Form and structurePoem structure and use of tone7 stanzas which each have 6 lines.The poem employs a range of tones:Stanza one- factual e.g. use of lists which reflect the preparation and rituals performedStanzas two- five- serene, recountingStanza six and seven – father’s daughter’s words/ memory, ending in a reflective, speculative tone (lines 41-42)Narrative VoiceThe poem is narrated in 3rd person.The poem is narrated by someone who knows the daughter’s story- perhaps her own children.Line one “Her father embarked at sunrise…”Lines seven and eight “but half way there, she thought recounting it later to her children,”The way the poem is told creates distance between the truth and increases the mystery which surrounds the father’s decision.Comments said by the mother (the father’s daughter) are in italics. Therefore stanza six is the mother/father’s daughter recollection/memory of what happened after her father returned.One notable feature of the poem’s structure is that it is composed of only three sentences and contains three full stops. This could perhaps be reflecting the idea of a story being told orally. The absence of the pilot’s voice could represent how he was cut off from society and no longer has a voice.Use of tensePast tense narrative recountLine 37 *“…we too learned”*Could imply that the behaviour is not natural and was forced upon her and the other children.Line 39-40 “…*that this* *was no longer the father we* ***loved”***Possibly suggesting that the narrator/ father’s daughter found it difficult to accept the change. She saw her father as a parent, a loved one not as a warrior to a cause. NB: Use of italics shows these are the father’s daughter’s words and by using a direct quotation adds strength/emphasis to the daughter’s feelings.Use of contrastThe poet contrasts the language of stanza one( which links closely to the Japanese culture) with the next four stanzas. At the start of the poem (S1) the narrator remembers her father as an embodiment of the Japanese beliefs system. He is well respected and an officer (he takes his sword) and has “powerful incantations” in his mind (suggestive of the narrator’s father knowing by heart his duty and beliefs of the culture). The connotations of the noun “history” suggest the narrator’s father is set in place to become another part of the Japanese tradition (like so many before).EnjambmentUse of enjambment is used to symbolise the conflict between the father and his duty. Although he tries to break or go against tradition, the poem seems to suggest that he can’t escape his fate. Either choice he made would have resulted in him being ‘dead’ to his family. ‘And sometimes, she said, he must have wondered/ which had been the better way to die.’ (s7)The use of enjambment between stanza one and stanza two represent the inner conflict felt by the father.‘journey into historybut halfway there, she thought,’Enjambment also adds to the story-telling quality of the narrative and the passing on of stories, traditions from one generation to another. It also adds to the sense of mystery as lines run into each other and thoughts overlap. ( such as lines 19-20)RepetitionRepetition of the conjunctions ‘and’ and ‘but’ gives a quality of a spoken narrative. This reinforces the sense of mystery surrounding her father’s actions.  |
| LanguageUse of verbsThe narrator uses verbs which show *how* things changed when her father returned. Her father was ‘physically’ there but was treated by the family as if he did not exist.Lines 32+ 33 “my mother never spoke again/ in his presence”Lines 34 + 35 “and the neighbours too, they treated him as though he no longer existed”The children were also taught to ignore him:Lines 36- 38 “only we children still chattered and laughed  till **gradually** we too learned to be silent…”Adverb- could be suggestive that the children don’t understand the cultural beliefs and that it takes them a long time to learn and make sense of the values.Verbs also add to the narrative quality of the poem e.g. Lines 7-8 “…she thought, recounting it later to her children”And the mystery surrounding the father’s decision:Line 9 “he must have looked far down”Line 19 “and remembered how he and…”Colour imageryUsed to describe nature and the vibrancy of life that the pilot/father did not want to lose. The ocean could be symbolic of freedom.Line 12 “on a green-blue translucent sea” - could be representative of the pilot’s memory of his childhood – the idea of a ghost-like quality.Other colours also suggest the mystery and beauty of ocean life.Line 16-17 “…dark shoals of fishes flashing silver as their bellies swivelled towards the sun.”However this image could also link to a Samurai sword: it conveys the conflict between his love for nature/ life and his sense of duty.Use of simileLines 9-11 “he must have looked far down at the little fishing boasts strung out like bunting”Creates an idyll image of a life the father hopes for and/or remembering his childhood when he wasn’t weighed down by responsibility. The use of the adverb “far” combined with enjambment emphasise the great distance between the father’s individual needs and the duty his culture demands of him.Use of MetaphorLine 30 “a tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous”The extended metaphor of fish is used throughout the poem to represent how people like the father are trapped by the traditions of their culture. The ocean represents how the father will always be brought back to his fate and his decision is futile. The father’s life choices have been predetermined by his culture. This creates a sense of distance between the father and his culture. The use of the adjective “dark” creates a sense of foreboding of the ending of the poem. |
| Feelings and attitudesPatriotism- The opening stanza is full of suggestions of patriotic pride and duty- the pilot has the chance to fly ‘into history’. The patriotism of his family and neighbours is shown in their reaction to his return- they treat him as if he’s dead because he has failed in his duty to his nation.Shame- The pilot’s wife feels deep shame and she never speaks to him again. |
| ThemesConflict- the poem depicts the individual conflict of the narrator’s father between rules of society “honour” in Japanese culture and the will to survive and return to family.Decisions- the poem explores the decision the narrator’s father made- to die through an honourable suicide or to live for the rest of his life in dishonour, ostracised by his family, culture and society.Fate/destiny- the poem explores the futility of trying to avoid your own fate/destiny. |
| Compare with…‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ (representation of a group of soldiers/ representation of war/battles)‘Poppies’ (two different viewpoints of war)‘Bayonet Charge’ |
| Key quotations '...a shaven head full of powerful incantations and enough fuel for a one-way journey into history'‘…he must have looked far down/ at the little fishing boats/ strung out like bunting/ on a green-blue translucent sea’ ‘dark shoals of fish flashing silver’‘we too learned to be silent’‘…was no longer the father we loved’ |
| GlossaryKamikaze – airborne suicide mission Samurai sword – Japanese warrior’s ceremonial sword Incantations – spells |