

Barbie Doll Poem Analysis

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Read and annotate the poem "Barbie Doll."

"Barbie Doll"

by Marge Piercy



This girlchild was born as usual
and presented dolls that did pee-pee
and miniature GH-ows and irons
and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.
Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said
You have a great big nose and fat legs.

She was healthy, tested intelligent,
possessed strong arms and back,
abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.
She went to and fro apologizing.
Everyone saw a fat nose and thick legs.

She was advised to play ooy,
exhorted to come on hearty,
exercise, diet, smile, and wheedle.
Her good nature wore out like a fan belt.
So she cut off her nose and legs
and offered them up.

In the casket displayed on satin she lay
with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,
a turned-up patty nose,
dressed in a pink and white nightie.
Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said.
Consummation at last.
To every woman a happy ending.

Barbie doll poem analysis delves into the intricate layers of Marge Piercy's renowned poem "Barbie Doll," which critiques the societal expectations placed upon women. The poem uses the iconic Barbie doll as a metaphor for the idealized female figure, exploring themes of identity, body image, and societal pressures. This analysis will break down the poem's structure, themes, and the implications of its imagery, providing a comprehensive understanding of Piercy's message.

Understanding the Poem's Structure

Marge Piercy's "Barbie Doll" is structured in distinct stanzas that evoke a narrative arc. The poem begins with the introduction of a girl, who is initially depicted in a lively and unencumbered manner. However, as the poem progresses, it shifts dramatically in tone and imagery.

Stanza Breakdown

1. Introduction of the Protagonist: The opening lines introduce a girl who is vibrant and full of life, showing her innocence and playfulness.
2. Societal Expectations: The second part of the poem highlights the societal pressures that begin to affect the girl as she matures. This marks a significant shift in tone, illustrating the harsh realities faced by women.
3. The Transformation: The climax of the poem portrays the girl's transformation due to societal judgment and expectations regarding beauty and femininity.
4. Conclusion and Irony: The poem concludes with a stark irony, showcasing how the girl's ultimate fate is intertwined with the very ideals that society imposes on women.

Thematic Exploration

The poem encapsulates several key themes that resonate with readers, particularly in the context of feminism and body image.

1. Societal Pressure and Beauty Standards

The societal expectations surrounding beauty are central to the poem. The girl is bombarded with messages about how she should look and behave, exemplifying:

- Idealized Beauty: The influence of media and toys, specifically the Barbie doll, which represents an unattainable standard of beauty.
- Conformity: The pressure to conform to societal norms leads to the girl's eventual downfall, symbolizing the destructive nature of these expectations.

2. Gender Identity and Role Expectations

Piercy's poem also explores the issue of gender identity, particularly how societal norms dictate the roles women must play.

- Loss of Individuality: The girl's journey reflects a loss of self as she tries to fit into the mold created by society.
- Feminine Ideals: The poem critiques the narrow definitions of femininity that are often perpetuated through cultural icons like Barbie.

3. The Consequences of Objectification

The poem poignantly addresses the objectification of women, illustrating the dire consequences of viewing women as mere objects to be molded.

- Psychological Impact: The narrative suggests that the relentless pursuit of an idealized image can lead to severe psychological distress.
- Tragic End: The final lines emphasize the tragic outcome of the girl's struggle against societal pressures, serving as a cautionary tale.

Imagery and Symbolism

Imagery plays a crucial role in "Barbie Doll," with the Barbie doll itself serving as a powerful symbol.

1. The Barbie Doll as a Symbol

- Idealized Femininity: The doll represents the epitome of beauty and femininity, setting unrealistic standards for young girls.
- Cultural Commentary: By using Barbie as a central figure, Piercy critiques the culture that promotes such ideals, urging readers to reconsider their perceptions of beauty.

2. Contrasting Imagery

Piercy employs contrasting imagery throughout the poem to highlight the juxtaposition between the girl's initial innocence and her later struggles.

- Childhood vs. Adulthood: The transition from a carefree girl to a self-conscious woman underscores the loss of innocence brought on by societal expectations.
- Life and Death: The poem culminates in a stark contrast between the vibrancy of life and the finality of death, emphasizing the tragic consequences of conforming to societal ideals.

Social Commentary and Impact

"Barbie Doll" serves as a profound social commentary that resonates with both contemporary and historical issues related to gender and body image.

1. Reflection of Societal Attitudes

The poem reflects societal attitudes towards women and beauty that continue to persist.

- Cultural Norms: It challenges readers to confront the damaging cultural norms that dictate how women should look and behave.
- Empowerment: By highlighting these issues, Piercy empowers readers to question and resist these societal pressures.

2. Relevance Today

The themes explored in "Barbie Doll" remain relevant in today's society, where body image issues and societal pressures continue to affect individuals.

- Media Influence: The advent of social media has intensified the scrutiny of body image, making the poem's message even more poignant.
- Feminist Discourse: The poem is frequently cited in feminist discourse as a critical examination of how societal expectations can lead to detrimental outcomes for women.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a thorough **Barbie doll poem analysis** reveals Marge Piercy's powerful critique of societal standards imposed on women. Through its structured stanzas, rich imagery, and poignant themes, the poem serves as a timeless reminder of the dangers of conforming to unrealistic ideals of beauty and femininity. By examining the societal pressures faced by women, Piercy encourages readers to challenge these norms and embrace individuality. The poem's lasting impact continues to resonate, urging a critical reflection on the role of cultural icons in shaping our understanding of identity and self-worth.

Frequently Asked Questions

What themes are prominent in the Barbie doll poem?

The prominent themes in the Barbie doll poem include gender roles, societal expectations, and the pressures of femininity. The poem critiques the unrealistic standards imposed on women and the impact of consumer culture.

How does the author use imagery in the Barbie doll poem?

The author employs vivid imagery to highlight the contrast between the idealized Barbie doll and the harsh realities of womanhood. This imagery serves to emphasize the superficiality of beauty standards and the emotional toll they take on individuals.

What is the significance of the Barbie doll as a symbol?

The Barbie doll symbolizes the idealized feminine figure that society often promotes. It represents both empowerment and entrapment, illustrating the conflict between personal identity and societal expectations for women.

How does the structure of the poem contribute to its meaning?

The poem's structure, often featuring short stanzas and sharp contrasts, reflects the fragmentation of identity experienced by the speaker. This structure reinforces the idea of a divided self, caught between societal ideals and personal reality.

In what ways does the tone of the poem affect its interpretation?

The tone of the poem is often a mix of irony and sadness, which invites readers to critically examine the absurdity of beauty standards. This tone creates a sense of empathy for the speaker while simultaneously challenging the reader to reflect on their own beliefs.

What role does nostalgia play in the Barbie doll poem?

Nostalgia plays a significant role in the poem, as it evokes memories of childhood and the innocence

associated with playing with dolls. This longing for a simpler time contrasts with the adult realities of gender expectations, highlighting the loss of that innocence.

How does the poem address the concept of body image?

The poem addresses body image by critiquing the unrealistic portrayals of beauty and femininity associated with the Barbie doll. It highlights the detrimental effects of these ideals on self-esteem and personal identity among women.

What literary devices are used in the Barbie doll poem?

The poem utilizes various literary devices, including metaphors, similes, and alliteration. These devices enhance the emotional depth of the poem and underscore the contrast between the allure of the doll and the reality of womanhood.

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