Journey to a poem

Year 7 reading task

Pupil reading booklet

Assessing pupils’ progress in English at Key Stage 3
I am a Parrot

I'm a parrot
I live in a cage
I'm nearly always
in a vex-up rage

I used to fly
all light and free
in the luscious
green forest canopy

I'm a parrot
I live in a cage
I'm nearly always
in a vex-up rage

I miss the wind
against my wing
I miss the nut
and the fruit picking

I'm a parrot
I live in a cage
I'm nearly always
In a vex-up rage

I squawk I talk
I curse I swear
I repeat the things
I shouldn't hear

So don't come near me
Or put out your hand
because I'll pick you
if I can
     pickyou
     pickyou
     if I can
I want to be free

CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND
Grace Nichols: *Journey to a Poem*

Whenever I remember the country village along the Guyana coast, where I spent my small-girl days, I can’t help seeing water water everywhere. Brown silky water when it rained heavily. Fish swimming into people’s yards and children catching them in old baskets. One of the best memories I have of myself is standing up to my calves in the sunlit water, watching the shapes of fish go by and every now and then cupping my own hands underneath and feeling the slippery fish slip through my fingers. My favourite fish was the sunfish. It was a little longer than some of the other fishes, with a fine grey scale on top and a reddish orange glow of a belly below.

But the nice thing about Highdam, that was the name of the village, was that the water in the yards and pastures never stayed on the land for too long because there were these two kokers with big wheels on either side of the village bridge. Workmen would go and turn the wheels, which always made me think of windmills, until bit by bit the water drained away into a canal at the back of the village. Then the hot sun would soon make everything dry and children could run around again playing their cricket and rounders and hopscotch.

Another Highdam thing I remember is sneaking down to the seashore with my sisters and brother to catch crab in the early mornings, just before the last bit of darkness disappeared from the skies.

But you must be wondering what all this has to do with poetry.

Well, my childhood life in that country village plays a big part in my poetry because a lot of my poems are about creatures and back-home happenings. Just as how your own imagination might be stirred by thoughts of winter for example – of crunching through thick powdery snow, tobogganning, making a snow man, maybe curling up in front of fires with a hot drink – so my own imagination is stirred by my childhood. I was awakened by tropical things.
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