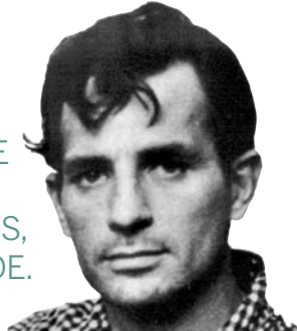


Writing the Ocean

JACK KEROUAC IS ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST FAMOUS WRITERS. HIS STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS NOVELS DEFINED A WHOLE MOVEMENT IN LITERATURE IN THE 1960s, BUT HE WAS ALSO A POET. HERE'S AN EXCERPT OF ONE OF HIS GREAT POEMS, UNZIPPED SO YOU CAN SEE WHAT'S INSIDE.



To unzip poetry:

>> **TO REVEAL** THE TRUTH OF A POEM

>> **TO ANALYZE** A POEM'S MEANING

>> **TO CLARIFY** THE FORM BEHIND THE WORDS

"Sea" by Jack Kerouac

No human words bespeak
the token sorrow older
than old this wave
becrashing smarts the
sand with plosh
of twirléd sandy
thought—Ah change
the world? Ah set
the free? Are rope the
angels in all the sea?
Ah ropey otter
barnacle'd be—
Ah cave, Ah crosh!
A feathery sea

...
Reach, reach, some leaves
haven't hastened near
enuf—Roll, roll, purl
the sand shark floor
a greeny pali andrava
—Ah back—Ah forth—
Ah shish—Boom, away,
doom, a day—Vein we
firm—The sea is We—
Parle, parle, boom the
earth—Arree—Shaw,
Sho, Shoosh, flut,
ravad, tapavada pow,
coof, loof, roof,—
No,no,no,no,no,no—
Oh ya, ya, ya, yo, yair—

Shhh—
...
A troublesome spirit
hanging here cant make it
in the void—The sea'll
only drown me—These words
are affectations
of sick mortality—
We try to make our way
in self reliance, aid
not ever comes too quick
from wherever & whatever
heaven dear may have
suggested to promise us—

But these waves scare me—
I am going to die
in full despair—
Wake up where?
On second breath in life
the atmosphere is dearer
maybe closer to Heaven
—————O Paradise—————
Is the sea really so bad?
Have you sent men
here for this cold clown
& monstrous eater at the
world? whose sound
I mock?

God I've got to believe in you
or live in death!
Will you save us—all?

Soon or now?
Send illumination
to our drowning brains
—We're pitiful, Lord,
we need yr help!
Save us, Dear—
(Save yourself, God man,
ha ha!)
If you were God man
you'd command these waves
to very well Tennyson stop
& even Tennyson
is dear
now dead
Leave it to the light
Concern yourself with supper,
& an eye

somebody's eye—a wife,
a girl, a friend, an animal
—a blood let drop—
he for his sea
he for his fire,
thee for thy desire

"The sea drove me away
& yelled 'Go to your desire!'
—As I hurried up the valley
It added one last yell:-
'And laugh!'"

ERIN CREWS UNZIPS “SEA”

“Sea” is harrowingly beautiful because Kerouac destroyed himself to create it. *Big Sur* describes his plunge into intoxicated depression following the wild success of *On the Road*. Here, he returns to a traditional, Western sense of God and cries for help: “God I’ve got to believe in you/Will you save us—all?/Send illumination/to our drowning brains.” Kerouac majestically expresses the decaying delusion of his life, but in the same breath conveys an urge to live, really live, the illusion: “The sea drove me away/& yelled ‘Go to your desire!’/—As I hurried up the valley/It added one last yell:—/‘And laugh!’”

The form of the writing, like most of Kerouac’s work, is spontaneous: a train-of-thought interpretation of his surroundings. All imagery returns to the original topic: the sounds of the Pacific Ocean. In

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AGE: 16

some cases, he goes so far as to use what appears to be gibberish; interestingly, this lends additional emotion to the passionate yet contemplative piece. Kerouac is a writer, of course, but in this piece he’s also a

painter and a musician; he transforms nature into words that are seen, heard, and felt, by millions of absent readers. Kerouac stands after the long, strange journey, after *On the Road* and the road after, and, writing through his misery, gives us the exquisite gift of “Sea”.



Unzipped: Your Turn

>>HOW DOES KEROUAC “MOCK” THE SOUND OF THE SEA?

>>WHAT DOES KEROUAC MEAN WHEN HE WRITES “THESE WORDS / ARE AFFECTATIONS / OF SICK MORTALITY”?

>>WHY DO YOU THINK THE SPEAKER IS AFRAID OF THE SEA?

>>WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF THE DASHES IN THE POEM? HOW DO THEY AFFECT THE RHYTHM OF YOUR READING?

>>KEROUAC MAKES UP A LOT OF WORDS IN THIS POEM. CAN YOU FIND SOME? WHY DO YOU THINK HE DOES THIS?

“SEA” FROM
BIG SUR
BY JACK KEROUAC.
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JACK KEROUAC.
FIRST PUBLISHED
BY FARRAR,
STRAUS AND
GIROUX.

ABOUT JACK KEROUAC

BORN

March 12, 1922,
Lowell,
Massachusetts

DIED

October 21, 1969,
St. Petersburg,
Florida

EDUCATION

Kerouac attended
Columbia
University on a
football
scholarship, but
dropped out after
his sophomore
year and joined
the Merchant
Marine Academy.

KNOWN AS

the poster child
for the Beat
Generation (a
phrase he
coined).

>>SEND US the title and author of your favorite poem, and tell us why you love it. What is it about the poem that speaks to you? What’s your favorite image? How does it relate to you and your life? Send your response to LC@Scholastic.com.