

Personification in Poetry

UNZIP THIS POEM AND FIND OUT WHY A POET
WOULD GIVE HUMAN QUALITIES TO A TOAD

To unzip poetry:

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

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

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

The Death of a Toad **BY RICHARD WILBUR**

A toad the power mower caught,
Chewed and clipped of a leg, with a hobbling hop has got
To the garden verge, and sanctuaried him
Under the cineraria leaves, in the shade
Of the ashen heartshaped leaves, in a dim,
Low, and a final glade.

The rare original heartsblood goes,
Spends on the earthen hide, in the folds and wizenings, flows
In the gutters of the banked and staring eyes. He lies
As still as if he would return to stone,
And soundlessly attending, dies
Toward some deep monotone,

Toward misted and ebullient seas
And cooling shores, toward lost Amphibia's emperies.
Day dwindles, drowning, and at length is gone
In the wide and antique eyes, which still appear
To watch, across the castrate lawn,
The haggard daylight steer.



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JODI-ANN FRANCIS UNZIPS A VEILED CRITICISM OF HUMANS IN NATURE

This poem seems very ceremonious, as if to make a tribute to a toad. This feeling can be attributed to the rhyme scheme and the frequent commas and periods that slow down the pace of the poem, as if to show reverence. Words like “sanctuaried” and “cineraria” also evoke a funeral or an elegy. These formal words elevate the significance

of the toad’s death. Although the speaker in the first stanza starts off with a plain description of the “toad the power mower caught,” the second and third stanzas gradually change the reader’s perception of

the toad. The last stanza describes a peaceful death through words such as “soundlessly,” “monotone,” and “cooling shores.” The poem describes stages of the toad’s death, giving equal importance to each stage through equal stanzas: three stanzas of six lines each.

By personifying the toad and by alluding to a time when amphibians were the dominant life form on this planet, the speaker is also making a social commentary. The poem suggests that humans are in a period where we are the “rulers” of our surroundings, but like the toad, humans will eventually lose their power and could even become so insignificant as to get caught in a power mower.



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Unzipped: Your Turn

- >> WILBUR MAKES UP WORDS LIKE HEARTSBLOOD, HEARTSHAPED, AND WIZENINGS IN THIS POEM. WHY DO YOU THINK HE DOES THIS? WHAT IS THE EFFECT?
- >> WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THE PHRASE “DEEP MONOTONE”?
- >> HOW DOES THE RHYME SCHEME AFFECT THE SOUND AND MEANING OF THE POEM?
- >> HOW DO YOU INTERPRET WILBUR’S PERSONIFICATION OF THE TOAD?

ABOUT RICHARD WILBUR

BORN

March 1, 1921
New York, New York

EDUCATION

B.A., Amherst College

M.A., Harvard

INFLUENCE

Wallace Stevens

AWARDS

Wilbur won the Pulitzer Prize for his book *Things of This World* and the Bollingen Prize for *Walking to Sleep*.

Walking to Sleep.

BIG JOB

Richard Wilbur was named the second Poet Laureate of the United States in 1987.

■■■
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.

