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“Mirror” by Sylvia Plath

Pre-Reading

1. Brainstorm five things you know about mirrors, associate with mirrors, or use mirrors for. Go beyond the obvious.

2. Always know your author. Who was Sylvia Plath? Any other important works? Find at least three interesting facts.

During reading

3. After your first read-through, you should be able to sum up in a sentence the general plot or subject of the poem. Who is the speaker? Are there any other characters? Is there a conflict and a resolution?

4. Annotate the poem – identify on the poem any sound techniques or comparisons.

5. For this poem, we are looking at the creation of meaning through comparisons. One comparison used is personification, in which an inanimate object is given human characteristics – and in so doing, we are given a sense of the nature of the item or the author’s attitude toward the item. What is personified, and what sort of personality is it given? Use examples from the poem to support your answer.

6. a. This poem contains comparisons within comparisons – the personified item compares itself to other items. What are those items?

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b. What additional meaning do these items bring to the poem – why, for example, doesn't Plath use "a pond" or "the back of a spoon" or "the eyes of my beloved"?

7. What figures of speech do we find in the last two lines? How are we meant to feel about the process of aging?

8. In a paragraph, sum up what you believe the theme of this poem is, and use at least three examples from the poem to illustrate that theme. (You might reflect on life itself, or you might see this poem as Plath's criticism of a human trait.)

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“Mirror”

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
What ever you see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful---
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.