

52. Do you Speak English?

Plot:

Simon Collins describes a dying fish, and a young boy who is barefoot. Manuel is walking through a poor neighborhood. The death of the fish gives the piece a gloomy atmosphere. Collins goes on to describe Manuel's financial situation. Manuel, who lives with his wife and six-year old son, is looking for a new apartment but is afraid he will not be able to afford the rent. They are living in a poor region. The description of the dying fish, the poor boy and Manuel's financial troubles shows the dramatic situation of despair and poverty.

Characters:

A boy of nine or ten years, Manuel, two American tourists (male and female both in their early thirties)

The language spoken by the boy and Manuel is Portuguese. The story takes place in a poor area along the coast. Manuel mentions that the boy is from a fishing community which was being evicted in order to make room for a hotel.

The recurring image of the dead fish enhances the gloomy atmosphere. The fish is first described as having "silvery scales covered with dirt" and "gill flaps opened like two wounds". These images of a fish remind the reader of despair. This image of the dying fish develops some tension in the story. The female tourist is more preoccupied with a dying fish than she is with the boy.

Collings also uses very interesting diction to describe the fish. As the fish is dying on the pavement, it makes "one convulsive leap" and that it lands with a "thud". This diction allows us to visualize the fish physically struggling so that we can understand the female tourist's motivations in trying to save it.

This story reminds us of the ignorance often present in tourists who visit foreign culture. As the tourists visit this poor area, they are shocked. The man wishes he was not in the neighborhood while the woman is preoccupied with a fish rather than attempt to understand or observe the neighborhood. The story tells us that society is ignorant of crucial aspects of life and more concerned with superficial things. The woman is more concerned with the struggling dead fish than she is with the little boy because she is unable to look into the new culture.

