The Road by Cormac McCarthy

| **Ideas** | **Conventions/Examples** | **Reader’s response** |
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| Hope despite desolation | 1. Bleak setting shown through figurative language 2. the planet is like a ‘cold glaucoma’; 3. ‘days more grey than what had gone before’ where the distinction between night and day is getting lesser and lesser; 4. paints a very desolate setting which appears to be hopeless 5. the colours used to describe the setting/environment are white, dark and grey with some red which symbolizes destruction & has the effect of reminding the reader of the bleak, hopeless setting 6. Love of the father & son which shows some hope 7. mutually dependent on each other; the boy depends on the father for emotional & physical well-being & the boy is everything to the father 8. Eg: “Hi papa’, “I’m here’ – both father & son reassuring each other that they are there for each other 9. Eg: ‘each the other world’s entire’ – the boy gives the father hope & the will to survive & the boy needs the father for security in a chaotic world | Reader is positioned to have insights into the human will to survive & attempt to overcome odds in the most difficult settings. The father & son are in a terrible situation yet they have a strong paternal bond which appeals to the reader’s values of family bonds/connections. It gives the reader faith that family relationships will survive the worst natural disasters. |
| Destruction of morality and justice as no rules exist in the chaotic, uncivilised world of The Road; societal degeneration | 1. Third person omniscient POV which enables the reader to view & observe the world of the protagonist through his eyes & experience his confusion; use of figurative language & dialogue 2. “ribs of fishes in their millions stretching along the shore as far as eye could see like an isocline of death. One vast salt sepulchre. Senseless. Senseless.” – simile explains the senselessness of the apocalyptic destruction where the fish are all dead too so very few living things have been spared. In this environment where there is no food, cannibalism develops as the man says “murder was everywhere upon the land” 3. men in the story are referred to as ‘roadrat’ – lack of humanity; shows depravation of humanity 4. Cannibals described as “Eyes collared in cups of grime and deeply sunk. Like an animal inside a skull looking out the eyeholes’ – simile shows moral depravation 5. In this world where civilised rules do not exist, only the boy and man have a moral compass. 6. McCarthy uses very interesting figurative language throughout the text but the dialogue between the man and the boy is minimalist & sparse. Yet, it makes a very clear point. Eg, the dialogue between the man & boy about cannibalism 7. The subsequent conversation between the father and son verifies they will never eat anyone, no matter what: “We wouldn’t ever eat anybody, would we?” the boy asks. The man responds by saying “No. Of Course not” 8. The man & boy are the good guys | In a world where no rules control civilization, man’s baser instincts take over. The reader begins to question the true nature of humans – are we inherently good or evil? The good guys and their code of rules provides some hope that man will reestablish societal norms & subscribe to a code of conduct which respects humans. On the other hand, there are others who will become morally depraved & do anything just for the sake of survival including eating babies and other humans. The reader is positioned to understand and reflect on both the good and evil in mankind. We are encouraged to think about our own moral compass. |
| Protection, survival & perseverance | 1. The man does not condone violence but has no hesitation engaging in violence to protect his son who he loves dearly 2. He says the boy is my ‘warrant’ & he ‘was appointed by God’ to protect him & “My job is to take care of you’ 3. When a stranger grabs the boy, the father has no hesitation shooting him with a bullet in the brain. 4. Contrast the father’s love & protection with the mother’s attitude of wanting to kill the son when she committed suicide as she thought survival was more painful than death in the dire, bleak setting. 5. She sees the world as hopeless one in which the only things that can be guaranteed for her and her family are both terrifying and inescapable. The mother decides to kill herself, despite the man’s frantic pleading. Her justifications are clear: ‘I’m speaking the truth. Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They’ll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won’t face it. You’d rather wait for it to happen. But I can’t. I can’t.’ 6. She wants to end the boy’s life too, alongside her own, but the man will not allow it. ‘I’d take him with me if it weren’t for you…it’s the right thing to do,’ she exclaims. | Reader understands the father’s love & the human instinct to protect those we love especially when they are vulnerable. It makes us question what we would do to protect those we love. Would we do what the father or mother did as they both only wanted what is best for their son. This shows us the confusions people face when their lives become so hopeless and makes us question or own attitudes towards love & protection & what we would do to survive. |