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Analysis of a Written Document

“My Bird” by John Thomas

From *Floating Bear* #5, p. 4

* Meet the Document
  + Type
    - Other (Magazine page)
  + Describe it as if you were explaining it to someone who can’t see it
    - Typed with a typewriter
    - Left page of opened magazine
    - Title centered at top
    - Three stanzas left justified
    - Center stanza about half the length of first and last stanza
    - Author’s name right justified at bottom
    - The number 6 in square brackets left justified on the same line as the author’s name
    - All lowercase characters except in title and author’s name
    - Top left header with magazine edition number in square brackets
    - Bottom left footer has page number in square brackets
* Observe its parts
  + Who wrote it?
    - John Thomas
  + Who read/received it?
    - The subscribers to the mailing list of *Floating Bear* magazine and now anyone who accesses *Floating Bear* archives online
  + When is it from?
    - April 1961
  + Where is it from?
    - New York City, NY
* Try to make sense of it
  + What is it talking about?
    - A 14 year old boy is hiking through a forest and hears a loud noise. He sees that it’s a bird, one that he has never seen before and he feels special, as though he is the only one to see the bird. He doesn’t tell anyone for 5 years when his mother shows him a picture of the bird in a book, making the special bird a regular sight.
  + Write one sentence summarizing this document.
    - A 14 year old boy feels chosen by a special new bird but is disillusioned by his mother who tells him what kind of bird it is 5 years later.
  + Why did the author write it?
    - I think the author wrote it to discuss loss of child-like innocence and the realization that we are generally insignificant. I think it’s talking about how the United States was touted as the greatest country following World War II but paradoxes surrounding freedoms and race began feelings of unrest and protest within the country. No longer was the United States the greatest and most perfect beacon of hope and freedom. People were fighting for change and becoming more active in politics.
    - It could also possibly be about race alone. Birds typically symbolize freedom, so the young boy seeing a new type of bird could be referencing the fact that people of color were starting to see positive changes in society with the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. However, these small changes were met with a lot of backlash, which could be represented by the child’s disillusionment in discovering that the bird is not special.
  + Quote evidence from the document that tells you this.
    - “no bird i had ever seen before & i felt scared but chosen”
    - “she had my bird in her damned book she had bought at stewarts department store & if i had never hated her before i did then”
  + What was happening at the time in history this document was created?
    - The Cold War was in full swing. The United States emerged as a global superpower, but the Bay of Pigs failed attempt to overthrow the communist Cuban government occurred April 17. The Russian Space Program had just sent its first human up into space. The expansion of the Civil Rights’ Movement had begun.
* Use it as historical evidence
  + What did you learn from the document that you might not learn anywhere else?
    - While history books may teach the facts, it is pieces like this that teach me about the emotions that were running through marginal society which eventually started the protest movements of the 60’s and 70’s.
  + What other documents or historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand this event or topic?
    - I would like to see more works by this poet to determine his general point of view and gain context for his meaning in writing this poem.
    - Additionally, I think other pieces of art from this time period such as music and literature should be studied to see what other more emotional points of view can be drawn out.