**Once Upon A Time -**Literature Notes

**Please note that the information given on this poem is not meant to replace any material given in the classroom setting. It is a very BASIC giude to enable a literal understanding of the poem. Metaphorical interpretations should be sought in the classroom.**

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| **The physical structure of this poem has been altered from the original layout in the text.**  3.Once upon a time, son, they used to laugh with their hearts and laugh with their eyes; but now 4.they only laugh with their teeth, while 1.their ice-block eyes 5.search behind my shadow.  There was a time indeed they used to 6.shake hands with their hearts; but that's gone, son. Now they shake hands without hearts while their left 7.hands search  my empty pockets.  'Feel at home'! 'Come again' ; they say, and when I come again and feel at home, once, twice there will be no thrice -  for then I find doors shut on me.  So I have learnt many things, son. 2.I have learnt to wear many faces like dresses - homeface, officeface, streetface, hostface cocktail face, with all their 2.conforming smiles like a fixed portrait smile.  And I have learned, too. to laugh with only my teeth and shake hands without my heart I have also learnt to say, 'Goodbye', when I mean 'Good-riddance' ; to say 'Glad to meet you', without being glad; and to say 'It's been nice talking to you', after being bored.  But believe me, son. I want to be what I used to be when I was like you. I want 8.unlearn all these muting things. Most of all, I want to relearn how to laugh, for 2.my laugh in the mirror shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs!  So show me, son, how to laugh; show me how I used to laugh and smile 3.once upon a time when I was like you.  Okara, G. 'Once Upon A Time' in A World of Prose. Edited by Mark McWatt and Hazel Simmonds McDonald. Pearson Education Ltd, 2005. | **This is the OPINION of one individual, which might not coincide with the views of others.**  LITERAL MEANING A father is talking to his son and telling him how things used to be. The father tells his son that people used to be sincere, but are now superficial and seek only to take from people. The persona tells his son that he has learnt to be just like these people, but he does not want to be. He wants to be as sincere as his son.  Picture  LITERARY DEVICES 1. METAPHOR The people's eyes are as cold as ice. This means that there is no warmth or real feeling in the words that they say, or how they behave.This metaphor literally allows you to visualize a block of ice, cold and unwelcoming.  2. SIMILE   * Stanza 4, lines 20-21 emphasizes how constantly changing the persona's face is. If you think of how often a woman changes her dress, then that is how often the persona adjusts his personality to suit the people around him. The list of faces that follow this line emphasizes this point. * Stanza 4, lines 23-24 compares peoples faces to smiles in a portrait. If you think about a portrait, it is usually very formal and stiff, even uncomfortable. Therefore, the implication is that the smiles are actually fake and stiff. They are conforming, or trying to fit into, a preconceived mold that is set up by societal expectations. |

* Stanza 6, lines 38-40 compares the persona's laugh to a snakes. When you think of a snake, words such as sneaky and deceitful come to mind. Therefore, the implication is that the persona is fake, just like the people he despises.

3. REPETITION  
This phrase is repeated at the beginning and the end of the poem. This usually signals the beginning of a fairy tale. Therefore, it is implied that the persona is nostalgic about the past.  
  
IMPORTANT WORDS/ PHRASES  
 4.'they only laugh with their teeth'  
This emphasizes the insincerity of the people around the persona. To laugh with your teeth means that only the bottom half of your face is engaged, the laugh does not reach the eyes.  
 5. 'shake hands with their heart'  
To shake hands with your heart implies a strong handshake that is sincere, this is the opposite of what now occurs between people.  
6. 'search behind my shadow'  
This implies that the person cannot look the persona in the eye, they are looking everywhere but there. Looking someone in the eye during a conversation implies that one is sincerely interested in what you have to say. Not being able to do so implies shiftiness.  
7. 'hands search my empty pockets'  
People are only 'seemingly' nice to get something from you. So, they smile with you, but it is not sincere, they are seeking to get something from you.  
8. 'unlearn all these muting things'  
The word mute means silence, think of what happens when you press the mute button on the TV remote. Therefore, there is an implication that the insincere actions that the persona describes are muting, they block, or silence, good intentions. Hence, the persona wants to unlearn these habits.  
  
MOOD/ ATMOSPHERE  
The [mood](http://www.bulbsoup.com/ln-comprehension.html) of the poem is nostalgic. The persona is remembering how things used to be when he was young and innocent, like his son.  
  
TONE  
The [tone](http://www.bulbsoup.com/ln-comprehension.html) of the poem is sad. The poet's response to his nostalgia is sadness.  
  
THEMATIC CATEGORIZATION  
Death, childhood experiences, hypocrasy, loss of innocence, desire/dreams.