



| Gary Soto

Oranges is a poem about the thoughts and feelings an adolescent boy about to meet up with a girl for a first date.

Gary Soto uses a range of poetic devices to deliver his message. Similes, metaphors, figurative language, and vivid imagery help to develop the plot and appeal to the senses.

Summary: The speaker is thinking back on his first date. This date takes place during the cold of winter, but the oranges that he has brought with him are full of warmth and color. They are symbols of hope and confidence.

Oranges

The first time I walked
With a girl, I was twelve,
Cold, and weighted down
With two oranges in my jacket.
December. Frost cracking
Beneath my steps, my breath
Before me, then gone,
As I walked toward
Her house, the one whose
Porchlight burned yellow
Night and day, in any weather.
A dog barked at me, until
She came out pulling
At her gloves, face bright
With rouge. I smiled,
Touched her shoulder, and led
Her down the street, across
A used car lot and a line
Of newly planted trees,

Until we were breathing
Before a drugstore. We
Entered, the tiny bell
Bringing a saleslady
Down a narrow aisle of goods.
I turned to the candies
Tiered like bleachers,
And asked what she wanted -
Light in her eyes, a smile
Starting at the corners
Of her mouth. I fingered
A nickel in my pocket,
And when she lifted a chocolate
That cost a dime,
I didn't say anything.
I took the nickel from
My pocket, then an orange,
And set them quietly on
The counter. When I looked up,

The lady's eyes met mine,
And held them, knowing
Very well what it was all
About.
Outside,
A few cars hissing past,
Fog hanging like old
Coats between the trees.
I took my girl's hand

In mine for two blocks,
Then released it to let
Her unwrap the chocolate.
I peeled my orange
That was so bright against
The gray of December
That, from some distance,
Someone might have thought
I was making a fire in my hands

Analysis of Oranges

Oranges is a free verse poem, that is, it has no end rhymes or rhyme scheme, and the meter is mixed.

Tone

This poem uses a conversation tone. The speaker wants the reader to experience the date much as he had. It was a nervous time for the speaker, but also an exciting one.

Imagery

This poem paints a bleak picture of a cold winter day, but offsets it with the bright oranges. These images also contrast the boy's emotions ... nervous but hopeful.

Symbolism

Oranges take on a lot of symbolic meaning in this poem. They represent the brightness of hope, the warmth of a new relationship, and they contrast against the darkness of the day.

Questions

Answer each question on a separate sheet of paper. All answers must be written in complete sentences.

1. Why does the speaker try to pay for the candy with a nickel and an orange? What does this tell us about him?
2. How does the speaker feel about the girl? Give one piece of evidence from the poem to support your answer.
3. What does the speaker mean when he says the sales lady knew “very well what it was all about”?
4. What does the orange represent in this poem? Explain your answer.
5. What does the speaker mean when he describes the orange as “so bright against the gray of December”?

Short Essay (Four or Five sentences)

6. Why is a first date such an important event in a person’s lifetime?



| Bruce Tracy

The Hand of an Angel is a short essay inspired by the poem "Oranges" by Gary Soto. This essay takes on many characteristics of a poem, such as the use of figurative language and imagery. In the essay, the speaker recounts his first walking date in junior high school.

The Hand of an Angel

I remember the first time that I held the hand of an angel. I think she was an angel, she was out of my life so fast that she might as well have been. Clouds floating overhead, dark hair blowing just past her shoulders, and the smile that let me know I was allowed to make mistakes. She had missed her bus on purpose, and I promised I would wait with her until the next one came. Every word and thought that day was new to a naïve thirteen year old who was just starting to realize that girls were every bit as cool as baseball.

The school was fairly empty, and I didn't have the comfort of my friends to help me when the conversation got awkward. Again the smile told me it was ok, and she looked hard into my eyes like she was looking for something that I was certain she wouldn't find. I was outmatched, but was young enough to not realize it. She talked about things that suddenly became interesting to me, and I was amazed at how little I really knew about the world that I was so sure I was in control of. I looked over her shoulders but there weren't any wings.

Brushing her hair away from her cheek, she let me know that she had to start walking to the bus stop, but didn't start moving in that direction until I stood up and she was sure that I was going to walk with her. My heart was starting to race as I thought about reaching out for her hand. A brave move, but she gave me confidence I never thought I had.

Reaching out, I held her hand like a child clinging to the hand of a parent afraid of being left behind. She quickly readjusted so that our fingers were intertwined, and I gave in to the knowledge that I truly knew nothing. Soft, confident, her hands had everything that I wanted to understand, and I never wanted to let go for fear that I would go back to being the same person that I had been before.

The bus arrived on time and it hurt a little when I let go, but then again the smile which let me know there would be another day. I stood on the corner watching the bus leave and then sat on the bench not wanting to move; not wanting anything to change, but knowing it would and that I would once again get left behind.

Questions

Answer each question on a separate sheet of paper. All answers must be written in complete sentences.

1. What are some of the similarities between this essay and the poem “Oranges”?
2. In both the poem and the essay, the speaker feels a little uneasy. Give one piece of evidence from the essay that demonstrates this, and elaborate on what that evidence is showing us.
3. Does the poem or the essay do a better job of painting a picture in your head about the scene taking place? Offer a piece of evidence to support your answer, and elaborate on what this evidence is showing us.
4. Is the speaker confident at the end of the essay? Offer a piece of evidence from the essay that shows this.

Genre Comparison

5. What are some differences between the format of the poem and the format of the essay?
6. What are some of the benefits of telling a story through a poem? What are some of the benefits of telling a story through prose?