

What were they like denise levertov pdf

Continue

1 What Were They Like? By Denise Levertov 2 Overview This poem is about the effects of war, and what happens when one culture enters into conflict with another culture. Specifically it is a poem that protests about the damage done by the American military to the people of Vietnam during the war between the two countries in the 1960's and 1970's. The structure of the poem is very unique. It is split into two verses: the first of which is a list of questions; the second verse represents the answers given to the questions. Reasons for structuring the poem in this way are given in the annotations that follow. 3 1) Did the people of Viet Nam use lanterns of stone? 1) Did the people of Viet Nam use lanterns of stone? 2) Did they hold ceremonies to reverence the opening of buds? 3) Were they inclined to quiet laughter? Poem begins with numbered questions: making it seem more like a school exam than a poem. Name of the country Vietnam split into two words, highlighting the ignorance of foreigners. Reverence means respect or worship. Question 3 is asking if the Vietnamese people were a cheerful people or not. Buds are the beginnings of flowers, which occur in Spring. 4 A precious, green coloured stone. 4) Did they use bone and ivory, jade and silver, for ornament? 5) Had they an epic poem? 6) Did they distinguish between speech and singing? Ornament means decoration. An epic poem is a traditional poem that everyone belonging to a culture knows about. All of the questions asked cover different aspects of culture: technology, religion, clothing, art and language. Distinguish = tell the difference. 5 Beginning with "sir" could indicate the person answering the question is being respectful (e.g. a soldier answering their commander.) but it could be false respect, (e.g. if the answers are from a student who is angry with the questions being asked...) 1) Sir, their light hearts turned to stone. It is not remembered whether in gardens stone lanterns illumined pleasant ways. This is a metaphor suggesting that all the happiness of the people has disappeared because of the war. "Stone" suggest the opposite of "light." "Illumined" means "lit up." 6 Deliberate use of punctuation to highlight the point that the children's lives ended: there is a closed bracket but not an open one. Continuing the link between flowers and children. 2) Perhaps they gathered once to delight in blossom. But after the children were killed there were no more buds.) 3) Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth. 4) A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy. All the bones were charred. Repetition again. Repeating the word "perhaps," (repetition,) emphasises the fact that no one is sure now the culture has been destroyed. Now the bones refer to dead bodies. These words remind the reader of the napalm bombs that the Americans dropped on Vietnamese villages. 7 These words suggest that their lives were simple, but calm and stable. This is the longest answer, describing what Vietnamese culture was like before the war. It is not remembered. Remember, most were peasants; their life was in rice and bamboo. When peaceful clouds were reflected in the paddies and the water buffalo stepped surely along the terraces, maybe fathers told their sons old tales. When bombs smashed those mirrors there was only time to scream. Paddies are waterlogged fields where rice is grown. Alliteration to emphasise simple, stable lifestyle. Words that suggest how long ago this way of life was. These verbs show the violent effects of war. 8 Another word suggesting that the culture is no longer as it was. The verb is in the past tense. Also, it might make us think of an army report made after a battle. 6) There is an echo yet of their speech which was like a song. It was reported that their singing resembled the flight of moths in moonlight. Who can say? It is silent now. The last sentence shifts into the present tense. It is a simple statement, but this adds to the power of the point: many people are dead, a culture has been destroyed. A strong image suggesting the beauty and delicateness of the Vietnamese people and the sound of their singing. Think about the tone of this question. Should it be read with bitterness? Regret? Anger? 9 About the poet Denise Levertov was born in England but lived for most of her life in America. She was a nurse in World War Two and protested against America's involvement in the Vietnam War. As the war continued and more people died, she made many speeches that showed how angry she was. 10 Facts about the Vietnam War: To avoid heavy casualties, the Americans sent in planes with napalm bombs (chemical weapons that produced lots of fire.) to destroy Vietnamese villages. However, when an American ship was bombed, troops were sent to fight in the jungles of Vietnam. America feared Vietnam would become a communist country so they supported the Southern Vietnamese, who wanted democracy, in their fight with the North. The North Vietnamese army proved difficult to fight as they used guerrilla tactics. 11 The effects of a napalm bomb: With this passage, the author wants to show the readers how the series of disasters that can happen in war are able to degrade a person's character and make them succumb under pressure. In addition, this story is important to notice the fact that even though the character Rat Kiley acted in a way that could be considered as cowardly by shooting himself to get dismissed from war, the other soldiers understand that as an act of courage. By presenting this situation, the author shows how soldiers are connected as one unit when fighting together because they can relate to the situation, once they have lived through similar events. With this in mind, this passage also helps the perceiving of the platoon as a common entity, so it... In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. Thank you very much for your cooperation. This piece by Denise Levertov is about the Vietnam War which occurred between 1955 till 1975. This political poetry explores the aftermath of the effects of the war in a compelling and thought provoking manner. Title and Structure The title which is "What were they like?" simply implies a sense of curiosity and eagerness to understand what they Vietnam people were like. This curiosity is displayed in the structure of the poem. It is written as two stanza. The first stanza is a series of questions and the second stanza's are the bitter answers to those questions. It can be said that this piece is almost like a conversation between two people. This could be interpreted as a conversation between a tourist and a tour guide or even a dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. However, it is imperative to know that both sides are knowledgeable about Vietnam. It is just that the person asking questions holds a naive and oblivious view. Therefore, the questions gravitates towards the culture and customs of Vietnam such as "ceremonies to reverence the opening of buds". This question is about what they celebrate. This cultural knowledge exudes further through asking about their 'speech and language' and their 'epic poem' as well as 'what they used for 'ornament'. It is a curiosity to their culture without the acknowledgement of the impact of the war on the culture of Vietnam. This, therefore, leads to the second part of the poem which answers all those questions and highlights the impact of war on the Vietnam people culture and customs. Poetic Devices Repetition: In the first stanza, the word 'Did' is used in every sentence. This reinforces the theme of curiosity. However, if we analyse the word further, did is the past tense of do. This suggests that there is an ambiguous connotation here. The ambiguous connotation is that the person asking the question may have an idea that these customs were done in the past but may not be aware of whether it is done now. Therefore, he/she is curious to find out the answer. Juxtaposition: In the second stanza, there is a series of contrast and juxtaposition. For instance, the opening line of the person answering the question begins with 'Sir, their light hearts turned to stone'. This shows how the war turned people with a light hearted nature to stone. This imagery is one of softness and hardness in the same sentence. Imagery: It offers bleak imagery through lines such as 'after the children were killed, there were no more buds'. This powerful imagery helps us imagine that children should be growing like flowers but after the impact of the war, children didn't grow. Like flowers they didn't bud. Conclusion To conclude, I believe the message of this poem is to raise awareness and insight into what life was like before, during and after the Vietnam War. It offers a cultural and political understanding of the impact of war on people. "What Were They Like?" was published in British-American poet Denise Levertov's 1967 collection *The Sorrow Dance*. It is an anti-war poem. Levertov had been active in the movement against the Vietnam War (1955-1975). The war gave rise to massive opposition in the United States, particularly in the 1960s. She wrote the poem after hearing a talk given by the Vietnamese Zen master Thích Nhất Hạnh. As she mentioned in a letter to fellow poet Robert Duncan at the time, she thought Vietnamese was a "melodious, most caressive language." This inspired her to describe various beautiful aspects of Vietnamese culture in the poem. The poem takes place in a hypothetical future in which the Vietnamese people and their ways of life (their tools, ceremonies, stories, speaking, and songs) have all been destroyed by war. It attempts to humanize the Vietnamese and make the reader aware of how much could be lost if the war continues. The poem's main themes are the costs of war, the common humanity of all people, and the importance of preserving cultures. Levertov touched on these themes in many of her anti-war poems from the 1960s and 1970s, most famously "Life at War." In the same period, many other American poets like Allen Ginsberg and W.S. Merwin also wrote poems against the war and tried to raise public awareness about the issue. The poem is written in free verse without a consistent meter or rhyme scheme. Levertov called her style of free verse "organic verse." In her poetic writings, she argued against using conventional forms like sonnets and asserted that each poem's topic has a unique form that can be discovered through careful attention and imagination. She makes frequent use of enjambment (the breaking off a poetic line mid-sentence) to stress certain words in the poem and give it a musical quality.



