

PV Log: (circle one) **Poem** / Movie / Picture / LyricDate 2/11/14Title "The Witnesses"Author / Director / Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Context (Where Found / Viewed / Read?)

Class assignment, given to me by Mr. Shakely in association with Middle Passage

Content / CD / Summary / Precis (Say? "Plot? Setting/Situation? Key lines/phrases scenes, etc?)

This poem describes slaves and slave ships. It particularly tells about the skeletons of dead slaves at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, the skeletons of those who were tossed overboard due to lack of food or due to corrupt captains trying to make money off of insurance. The poem imagines these skeletons saying "We are the witnesses!" This refers to witnessing all the crimes against humanity related to slavery and the mistreatment of humans.

Content / CM / Meaning? / Theme(s)?

The theme of this poem is conscience. God is always watching our actions, just as these skeletons watched as greedy, selfish, white Europeans kidnapped and sold humans for profit. These men probably did not feel bad for what they were doing, and that is what made slavery so evil. Slave ships and the crew of slave ships had to deal with the guilt of tearing apart families and mistreating fellow humans for their entire lives.

Form (Diction? Construction Terms? Symbolism?)

The overwhelming symbol in this poem is that of the skeletons of the dead slaves. They watch over everyone who travels across the Atlantic, even today, and they remind us of what happened and tell us to make sure nothing like it ever happens again.

Commentary (What do you want to say? Why like? Questions? Synthesis / Allusions-Connections / Relevance to personal experience, to literature, 20Q's? etc.)? "Poetic" Traits?

Usually rhyming poems tend to be more fun or bright, but this poem is dark and ominous because it tells a tale of a dark and ominous time. Longfellow wonderfully puts together an interesting set of stanzas that have rhyme and rhythm, which gives a good feel to reading the poem and makes it easier to follow. This poem is an example of what every poem should do. It is a quick read, and assisted by its rhyme and meter, it keeps the reader interested and engaged in discovering the meaning behind the words of the poem.

over (do not mix logs; e.g., no poem log in front, and movie log on back)

The Witnesses

In Ocean's wide domains,
Half buried in the sands,
Lie skeletons in chains,
With shackled feet and hands.

Beyond the fall of dews,
Deeper than plummet lies,
Float ships, with all their crews,
No more to sink nor rise.

There the black Slave-ship swims,
Freighted with human forms,
Whose fettered, fleshless limbs
Are not the sport of storms.

These are the bones of Slaves;
They gleam from the abyss;
They cry, from yawning waves,
"We are the Witnesses!"

Within Earth's wide domains
Are markets for men's lives;
Their necks are galled with chains,
Their wrists are cramped with gyves.

Dead bodies, that the kite
In deserts makes its prey;
Murders, that with affright
Scare school-boys from their play!

All evil thoughts and deeds;
Anger, and lust, and pride;
The foulest, rankest weeds,
That choke Life's groaning tide!

These are the woes of Slaves;
They glare from the abyss;
They cry, from unknown graves,
"We are the Witnesses!"