

Hero Tree

Kit Fan

From the classroom window,
the summer's aorta revives in the dark
hero tree. Bark ideogram,
ember-tinted, no trace of leaves.

5 A family of four cicadas homes in
on its tall ebony nakedness:
something for a long summer song.

The white chalk stub U-turns
on the wide blackboard, hissing out
10 a map of Confucian morphemes:
stone-classics that were chiselled
for *the eye looking straight into the heart*.

Fans spin overhead, ripe dozy hours.
Our heads bow, fishing for cancelled
15 valleys lost to the Yangtze River Dam.

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Suggested Questions and Answers

1. What is the setting of the poem?
2. Comment on the imagery used in Stanza 1? What effect does it create?
3. What lesson do you think the speaker is having? Give supporting evidence.
4. What has happened to the speaker in Stanza 3?
5. How does the title relate to the poem?

Suggested Questions and Answers

1. What is the setting of the poem?

The poem is set on a school campus in early summer.

2. Comment on the imagery used in Stanza 1? What effect does it create?

- Rich visual imagery is used to present the leafless hero tree with budding red flowers. While the tree is described with dull-colour adjectives such as “dark”, “ember-tinted” and “ebony”, which creates a lifeless picture and dull mood, the red flowers, described in lines 2-3 as “the summer’s aorta revives in the dark hero tree” enlivens the hero tree. Aorta is the main artery or arterial trunk that carries blood from the heart to the body. The metaphor is used to suggest new life being injected into the plant.
- The imagery in Stanza 1 provides a contrast, suggesting both a sense of emptiness with words like “no trace of leaves” and “nakedness” as well as a sense of life with words like “revives” and four cicadas ready for a long summer song.

3. What lesson do you think the speaker is having? Give supporting evidence.

The poet is probably having a lesson related to Chinese language, history or culture.

Related names and terms can be found all over the poem:

- In Stanza 1, the word “ideogram”, which is related to the early Chinese writing system, is used.
- In Stanza 2, the word “Confucian”, which is related to the great Chinese philosopher, Confucius and the word “stone-classics”, which may refer to the classical Chinese works carved on stones, are used.
- In Stanza 3, “Yangtze River Dam”, which is a well-known dam in China, is mentioned.

4. What has happened to the speaker in Stanza 3?

- The speaker has probably fallen asleep and started dreaming because of the hot weather, as suggested by the words “ripe dozy hours”. The spinning fans overhead create an air of dizziness and drowsiness.

5. How does the title relate to the poem?

The “Hero Tree” is commonly known as the “cotton tree”. The former is often used by the Chinese because of a Chinese legend. The title is aptly related to the poem as the lesson the speaker is having is probably related to Chinese language, history or literature.