Analysis Of Related Themes In Poetry: Hanging Fire, We Real Cool, Behind Grandma’s House

In the poems “Hanging Fire” by Audre Lorde, “We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks, and “Behind Grandma’s House” by Gary Soto, the speakers portray life issues that teenagers struggle with, that often lead them to engage in self-destructive behaviors. Teenagers grapple with life issues, which includes the desire for independence as they usher in adulthood. Craving attention, freedom, and independence are the leading causes of rebellious lifestyles among teenagers. For this essay, I will focus on the themes of thirst for attention and rebellion in teenagers as they dominate the three poems while considering the setting and the use of figurative language across the three poems.

Themes

Lorde, Brooks, and Soto's poems have the same concerns about the challenging life issues that confront teenagers. The narrators insinuate that the adolescent stage is an awkward stage where the youths are exposed to hostile life situations. Audre Lorde’s speaker in 'Hanging Fire' is a 14-year old girl who expresses her thoughts, fears, and worries about life issues that she has to deal with, including her insecurities. Gwendolyn Brooks, in her poem 'We Real Cool,' speaks about a group of teenagers who skip school to hang out in the streets. These teenagers defy authority and do whatever pleases them. They term their rebellious behaviors as being 'cool,' and they are proud of it. Gary Soto's poem “Behind Grandma’s House” portrays a young boy who yearns for attention and would do anything to gain it. He uses his own experience as a 10-year-old nerdy boy who sought attention by doing bad things that would portray him as fierce.

Thirst for attention

Craving attention is a natural feeling in humans, and one would do anything to gain it when necessary. Youngsters express their need for attention by displaying emotions and behaviors that will make them get noticed. Attention seeking is an emotional need that teenagers yearn to satisfy, especially when their parents do not nurture them.

The theme of teenagers’ thirst for attention is evident from the teenage characters in the three poems. In the “Hanging Fire”, a fourteen-year-old grapples with thoughts and fears about her life, including the worrisome idea of death. The speaker expresses her worries about life and ends with a critical line “and momma's in the bedroom / with the door closed.' The repetition of this line shows that the young girl associates her life insecurities with the absence of her mother. Her mother is not present to help her deal with these challenges that make her scared about her life. In the first stanza, she agonizes about the thought of dying before morning when her mother is still in the bedroom. This statement reveals how much the girl yearns for her mother's attention, and probably if her mother were close to her, she would help her fight her insecurities. The narrator blames all her fears and insecurities on her mother, who is behind closed doors, probably too busy to be concerned about the wellness of her daughter. The need for attention appears in every line of the poem to the extent that she wants her mother to know

that she has nothing to wear for the next day. Her worries and desire for attention are illustrated in lines:

I have nothing to wear tomorrow

` will I live long enough

to grow up

and momma's in the bedroom

with the door closed.

The young girl craves her mother's attention, who would be in a position to understand her life issues.

Brook’s poem, 'we real cool,' portrays an attention-seeking group of African-American teenagers who are rebellious and brags about their ill behavior. The use and repetition of the word “we” demonstrate possession of an identity that the teenage dropouts want people to notice them. The use of the voice 'we' implies the deep need that the youngsters want to be recognized. “We real cool. We / Left school. We' (lines 1-2). The repetition of the word 'we' signifies the desire for attention that the youngsters have. They attempt to justify a sense of self-worth by claiming that they are cool. The youngsters recognize that their behavior is self-destructive, as illustrated in the lines 'Jazz June. We / Die soon' (lines 7-8). This remorseful statement shows that teenagers are aware of the consequences of their rebellious ways, and they are seeking help and attention from the streets. The statement that they will die soon is a sign that the youngsters want the society to notice the risky life situation they are in and help them resolve them.

Similarly, Gary Soto’s poem “Behind Grandma’s House” depicts a troublesome boy who yearns for attention from friends, family, and anyone who can accord it to him. The need for attention makes the little boy do things that will turn him into a bad boy, which can easily be noticed. The desire for recognition is illustrated in the poem lines that:

At ten I wanted fame. I had a comb

And two coke bottles, a tube of Bryl-creem.

I borrowed a dog, one with

Mismatched eyes and a happy tongue,

And wanted to prove I was tough

At the age of ten, the little boy wants to look like a typical Spanish bad boy who can be easily noticed and accepted by the people around him.

Rebellion

Rebellion is a primary characteristic of the youthful stage. The adolescent stage is full of self-interest activities that the teenagers want to engage in to feel a sense of 'no longer a child.' It's a stage where teenagers crave for independence in making their life decisions and do whatever pleases them. The aspect of rebellion is present in the three poems as a challenge that the youths face when growing up.

In the hanging fire, Lorde presents a young girl who yearns for independence so that she can escape from the teenage problems she is currently facing. Grappling with insecurities about her life, the young girl wonders whether she will ever grow up, as illustrated in the statement, 'will I live long enough / to grow up' (lines 9-10). This statement indicates that the teenager feels fed up with this stage, and she desires to mature up and be independent to be able to handle her life issues. Her current situation makes her fret about life, and she is anxious about the life ahead as a grown-up, probably hoping that she will be able to control her insecurity issues.

Similarly, the theme of rebellion dominates in Brook's poem, "we real cool". In this poem, the narrator identifies a group of rebellious youths who skip school to hang out at the pool. The teenagers defy the school rules and opt to do what pleases them, hanging out on the streets. They fantasize about late alcoholic nights in the streets and still find their way of life cool. The statement, "We Real Cool" illustrates the determination of the teenagers to normalize their rebellious behaviors. They are aware that their deeds have dire consequences, but they still try to justify it in the name of being cool. The aftermath of their defiant acts is death as shown in the last line, "die soon".

In "Behind Grandma's House", the theme of rebellion is visibly reflected in the 10-year-old boy who is performing rebellious acts behind his grandmother's house so that the people around him can recognize him. Throughout the poem, the little boy does terrible things that he thinks will make him a tough boy.

And wanted to prove I was tough

In the alley, kicking over trash cans,

A dull chime of tuna cans falling.

I hurled light bulbs like grenades

And men teachers held their heads,

Fingers of blood lengthening.'

Lines 6-10 illustrates the rebellious acts that the little boy had to do to be acknowledged. The first line, 'At ten I wanted fame,' justifies the violent actions that the little boy had to do to attract attention.

Setting

The settings of the three poems are similar. They all refer to the stories of teenagers and the issues of life that they have to deal with. The speakers use youngsters who crave for attention

and independence. In the quest for freedom, they become rebellious since they have to defy the rules to do whatever pleases them. In all poems, the youngsters are in a setting of authority that they have to defy rules and regulations. Brook uses a school in the hanging fire to symbolize the power that the teenagers defied. Similarly, Gary Soto uses a grandmother's house to represent a place where rules are not so strict, and one can get away without being caught. The little boy in this poem thinks that his grandmother is oblivious of his actions until the time she steps in and disciplines him.

Figurative language

The speakers have narrated from the first-person point of view, where the speakers tell about their life situations. Additionally, the repetition of keywords is frequent in the poems to emphasize the feelings and emotions of teenagers.