TEACHER MENTOR ESSAY: “All Summer in a Day”

This final thematic essay includes all of the work of Bend I. Only portions of the essay are used for demonstration purposes. While your students may not have seen the transition of every part of the essay, we do feel it is important for you to have a true before-and-after essay as a resource. Feel free to use the completed essay, in its entirety, as a mentor text throughout the unit as you see fit.

Ray Bradbury’s dystopian story, “All Summer in a Day,” takes place on Venus—a planet where it rains all of the time. Margot, a recent arrival on Venus, remembers what the other children cannot. She remembers the warmth of the sun and how beautiful sunshine can be. Margot is grieving the loss of the sun. The other children are jealous that she even remembers. One lesson the story suggests is that when people can’t get over their own pain, they sometimes wind up hurting others.

From the very beginning, the description and details in the story show the children’s pain. They are painfully jealous because Margot has seen the sun and they have not. Bradbury describes how “Margot stood apart from them, from these children who could never remember a time when there wasn’t rain and rain and rain. They were all nine years old, and if there had been a day, seven years ago, when the sun came out for an hour and showed its face to the stunned world, they could not recall.” This line shows that Margot, it turns out, lived on Earth once—she has seen the sun. The other children have not, and this makes their world of dreary rain even more painful to them. Another detail that shows the children’s pain is that while they have never seen the sun, they dream of it every night. They dream of gold and yellow and warmth—“but then they always awoke to the tatting drum, the endless shaking down of clear bead necklaces upon the roof, the walk, the gardens, the forests, and their dreams were gone.” This shows that clearly the children long for the sun but all they experience is the endless rain. It’s not some kind of life-giving rain in this story. It’s an awful, heavy rain. It seems as if the rain is making the children desperate, which might be why, later, they want to hurt Margot.

Because Margot is so caught up in her own pain, she hurts others. Margot is even partly to blame for the jealousy the children feel. For example, Margot keeps mentioning her experience with the sun in front of the other children. She writes poems about the sun; she keeps telling stories of what it feels like. Also, Margot does not look at the other children or talk to them during recess. She actually refuses to speak to another kid when he talks to her. And she won’t play any of their games. “If they tagged her and ran, she stood blinking after them and did not follow. When the class sang songs about happiness and life and games her lips barely moved.” Margot keeps herself apart from the other children and she keeps talking about the sun—something the other children have never seen. Therefore, she is partly to blame for their jealousy, because she almost flaunts in their face what they want most, while never getting to know them.

By the middle of the story the reader begins to see the children, out of their painful jealousy, hurt Margot back with words and with force. First they mock her poetry and her memories, claiming she never did see the sun. Then they shove her. Finally, they lock her in a closet so she won’t see the sun. Swept up in their jealousy, they lock her in the closet at the moment that the sun is coming out for the first and last time in
seven years. The long sentence, “They surged about her, caught her up and bore her, protesting, and then pleading, and then crying, back into a tunnel, a room, a closet, where they slammed and locked the door,” shows them almost not knowing what they were doing, rushing through their actions. They are caught up in their jealousy and cannot see how their actions are hurting Margot. Bradbury uses this long sentence to show how out of control the children’s jealousy has become, as they take away the one thing that Margot craves.

The children are jealous that Margot has ever seen the sun and Margot is grieving the loss of it. Certainly it could be said that the children are more mean than they are jealous. While this is a good point, because the children are definitely mean, it fails to account for how much pain the children are in. They are not born mean; their pain—their jealousy—has made them mean. This shows that everyone in this story is hurting in their own way—Margot because she has lost the sun and the children who have never seen it.

After the sun leaves for another seven years and the rain begins again, the children know what they have done. They have experienced what Margot already knew—the warmth, the brightness, the colors. They have also lost the sun when the rain starts and felt the despair of remembering something that is gone—just like Margot. Because they can relate to her grief, they feel compassion. “Then one of them gave a little cry,” it says in the text, and they all stand there, not being able to meet each other’s eyes. They are ashamed of what they have done. Margot hurt them with her grief, and then their jealousy turned them into something they didn’t want to become, and now they all have to live with those consequences. When you can’t get over your pain—whether it is grief or jealousy—you wind up hurting others.