

'In the shadow of Signal Hill' by Essop Patel

1. *in the howling wind*
 2. *by the murky waters*
 3. *of the sea*
 4. *children of colour*
 5. *gather shells*
 6. *and hold them to their ears*
 7. *and listen to the lamentations of slaves*
 8. *in the dungeon of death*
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9. *in the howling wind*
 10. *by the murky waters*
 11. *of the sea*
 12. *sons of langa*
 13. *gather at the ruins of district six*
 14. *and sharpen the spears of the night*
 15. *and the heroes from the island urge*
 16. *go towards the fiery dawn ...*
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Read through 'In the Shadow of Signal Hill' on page 208 of *Seasons Come to Pass*. Also read the brief biography of Essop Patel given above the poem and the explanatory note underneath. Work through the guidelines given below.

1. The explanatory note below the poem gives you a clue as to the title's significance. Imagine that you are standing below Signal Hill. Write a paragraph in which you explain what you see.

When looking up you will see the "white authority" or "white government" of the apartheid area looking down upon the different races living in district 6. You will look out onto a "murky" (dark and gloomy) sea. "Gather shells" might be a reference to the slaves that crossed the sea to imprisonment on the other side of the globe. The seashells represent the children covering their ears from the cries and weeping of the slaves. Since the children listen to the cries of the slaves in the dungeon of death while holding shells to their ears, it is possible that the shells can be a metaphor for the dungeon of death, which, in turn, is a metaphor for the situation the slaves or coloured and black people are in. This symbolises the helplessness of black people. Sons of langa – almost biblical in emphasis – and it implies that these people have a common ancestry. Who is the township named after and it is named after someone. This person fought the government and was imprisoned on Robben island. To reclaim places like the ruins of district 6 – to make these ruins the cause of rebellion – the foundations of a wave of rebellion." fiery dawn" also suggest that an "angry break of day", meaning that the coloured people wake up angry in the mornings. They are angry and frustrated with their circumstances. – it destroys and it cleanses. It implies movement, but it is the one word of colour in the poem – the red of Marxism perhaps. It also means to burn brightly and strongly – a maintaining of the moral force that will overcome.

2. Read the definition of 'connotation' and 'denotation' on page 32 of Tutorial Letter 501. Explain the denotation and connotations of the word 'Shadow' in the title of this poem.

Denotation- "a dark area or shape produced by a body coming between rays of light and a surface"
District 6 is the direct shadow of Signal Hill.

Connotation- The part "in the shadow" of Signal Hill represents the black people who suffered under the Apartheid regime. They were the people who had to live in the shadows of the white government. The government overshadowed their whole lives and basically made their choices for them. The word "shadow" also bears a connotation of fear in general. When one looks at children's books, one will notice that the antagonist in the stories would be a "shadowy figure". Therefore the "Shadow of Signal Hill" suggests the white government is the antagonist in terms of them being wrong in what they are doing – which is initiating Apartheid in South Africa.

3. Look up the word 'lamentations' (line 7) in a dictionary. When the speaker instructs the reader to listen to 'the lamentations of slaves' (line 7), does he or she expect the reader to hear real slaves in the present time of the poem? Why or why not? Write a paragraph in which you describe what it is that the 'children of colour' (line 4) hear.

"lamentations" connects with "howling wind" which emphasises the suffering of the black and coloured people. Yes, the speaker wants us to hear and know the pain that they're suffering at the exact moment. Since the children listen to the cries of the slaves in the dungeon of death while holding shells to their ears, it is possible that the shells can be a metaphor for the dungeon of death, which, in turn, is a metaphor for the situation the slaves or coloured and black people are in. This symbolises the helplessness of black people. When I read the poem, I almost feel sorry for the slaves and children. Maybe this is also what the poet wants - to create an emotional atmosphere so the reader can empathise with the black people.

4. The first three lines of each stanza are the same. What does this tell you about the setting of the poem? Why is this important?

A cold, unpleasant atmosphere is created. Metaphor: howling wind might refer to the cries of the black people, then pleads for freedom and equality. Furthermore, I think the tone is a sad, depressed tone when I read words like "murky" "shadow" "howling wind" "dungeon of death" "lamentation". This is to represent them pleads for freedom. May also represent the never ending plead of the people who are suffering from the apartheid area.

5. What image is created in line 14? Write a paragraph in which you describe what this line means.

The spears of the night are a metaphor for the black people fighting back. "night" and "spears" usually have negative, dark connotations, but in this instance, it is the opposite: the black people represent freedom and light because they want to fight for what is fair and right. Although one reads it as "night", it can represent the homophone "knight". this will make absolute sense in the context of the poem and the explanation just given. (it is like "Bustle in the House" where "morning" can be heard as "mourning".) "Knight" also has a positive connotation. In medieval times the knight represented the good. A princess was saved by a knight in shining armour. Therefore, the sentence "sharpen the spears of the night" can be reread as "sharpen the spears of the knight", meaning that the people will fight for justice and that which is right.