**St. Catherine High School**

**English B**

**Grade 10**

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Poetry: ‘Orchids’ by Hazel Simmons-McDonald

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I leave this house  
box pieces of the five-week life I’ve gathered.  
I’ll send them on  
to fill spaces in my future life.  
One thing is left  
a spray of orchids someone gave  
from a bouquet one who makes a ritual of flower-giving sent.  
The orchids have no fragrance  
but purple petals draw you  
to look at the purple heart.  
I watered them once  
when the blossoms were full blown  
like polished poems.  
I was sure they’d wilt  
and I would toss them out with the five-week litter.  
They were stubborn.  
I starved them.  
They would not die.  
This morning the bud at the stalk’s tip unfurled.  
I think I’ll pluck the full-blown blooms  
press them between pages of memory.  
Perhaps in their thin dried transparency  
I’ll discover their peculiar poetry.

Overview of poem

The persona is moving from a house that she has occupied for five weeks. She has sent her belongings to her future home, but one item remains in her old space, an orchid. The persona clarifies that she was given the orchid as a gift, but implies that it holds no value because the gifting of orchids is habitual for the person who gave her. She describes the flower as odourless, but attractive. She watered the orchid once, expecting it to die, but it survived. It not only survived, but bloomed. The persona contemplates plucking the bloom and pressing it between the pages of a book. The purpose of this is to allow her to appreciate the flower. The persona remembers how little care was given to the plan yet now it blooms. The persona thinks about the lessons that can be drawn from it and preserves the flower.

Devices:

Metaphor: The persona compares her experiences over a five week period with the boxes that she uses to pack her belongings in.

Symbol: The ‘bud’ is a symbol of new growth and development. This mirrors the fact that the persona is about to embark on a new ‘future life’. The ‘purple heart’ of the orchids could be a symbol of the persona’s innermost being. By looking at the flowers she begins to look more deeply at herself. The orchids could symbolize her poetry writing which refuses to die, in spite of how hard she tries to starve it. It that is so, then the ‘unfurled bud’ could actually symbolize this poem.

Another way in which this may be viewed is that the persona thinks the orchid would die but yet it survives. This shows that the plant refuses to die in spite of the adverse situation and instead grows and matures. No matter the neglect it endured, the plant not only survives but it grows. It is at this time that the persona preserves the bloom by pressing it in a book to keep the memory and lessons that could be learn from the orchid. It is ironic that only with the orchid’s death that the reader sees value in it and wants to keep it. The poet uses a metaphor to compare the persona’s memory to a book in “press them between pages of memory.” Just as the orchid’s blossoms will be preserved in the book, so will the person’s memories of the place she lived and the lessons learn from the orchid. There are several life lessons from the orchid in this poem. Firstly, things that may seem to be unpleasant have inside of it the ability to build strength. The orchid has no fragrance yet it is strong and survived in an environment not many other plants could. Secondly, adverse conditions force the best in us. It is in the harsh environment that the orchid blooms. Thirdly, never give up. The orchid is described as stubborn and refuses to die. Lastly, only through hard work can we truly grow. After all the struggle of the orchid it still shoots a tip.

Simile: ‘blossoms were full blown like polished poems’: when something is beautiful, it is often associated or compared with a poem.  The word polished in this comparison implies perfection, shiny and pleasant to read.

Pun:   
The purple heart literally refers to the splash of color in the center of the orchid’s bloom, but it could also refer to the bravery of the flower. This is so because a purple heart, in the army, is a medal that a soldier receives for bravery.

Mood/ atmosphere  
The mood of the poem is pensive, or thoughtful. The persona is thinking about the lack of value that she places in the orchid.

Themes: nature, people and desires

Activity: Respond to the following questions.

1. What does the persona’s initial attitude towards the orchids suggest about her?
2. What lessons do you think the persona have learned from this experience?
3. Comment on one theme from the poem.