It Is Raining on the House of Anne Frank
By Linda Pastan
1998

Linda Pastan (born May 27, 1932) is an American poet of Jewish background that is best known for her short poems. In this poem, Pastan analyzes the experience of tourists visiting two iconic buildings in the city of Amsterdam: the Anne Frank House and the Van Gogh Museum. Anne Frank was a young girl when her entire family lived in a hidden compartment of a house to hide from the Nazis during the Holocaust. Vincent Van Gogh was a painter famous for using art to express his own personal struggles in life. As you read, take notes on the ways in which the experiences of the tourists compare and contrast to those of Anne Frank.

It is raining on the house of Anne Frank
and on the tourists
herded together under the shadow
of their umbrellas,
on the perfectly silent tourists who would rather be somewhere else but who wait here on stairs
so steep they must rise to some occasion high in the empty loft, in the quaint toilet, in the skeleton
of a kitchen or on the map—each of its arrows a barb of wire—with all the dates, the expulsions,
the forbidding shapes of continents.
And across Amsterdam it is raining on the Van Gogh Museum where we will hurry next
to see how someone else could find the pure center of light within the dark circle of his demons.

1. Quaint (adjective): old fashioned and attractive
2. Expulsion (noun): the act of forcing someone to leave a place (such as a country)
3. Forbidding (adjective): unfriendly or threatening in appearance
4. Vincent van Gogh is one of the most famous artists in history. He suffered from mental illness and committed suicide when he was 37 years old. The Van Gogh Museum opened in Amsterdam in 1973.
Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. How do the phrases “herded together,” “barb of wire,” and “forbidding shapes” contribute to the meaning of the poem?
   A. They draw attention to the narrator’s strong distaste for museums in Amsterdam.
   B. They emphasize the narrator’s recognition of the grim history the tourists are observing.
   C. They reflect the narrator’s increasing hopelessness as she travels through the house.
   D. They highlight the tourists’ melancholy reactions to their own personal struggles.

2. PART A: Which of the following best identifies the theme of the poem?
   A. Heroes can inspire others through the suffering they endure.
   B. Paying respect to the suffering of others is important, even if it is difficult.
   C. The tourists think Van Gogh endured more suffering than Anne Frank.
   D. We should honor people who suffered during the Holocaust.

3. PART B: Which lines from the poem best support the answers to Part A?
   A. “tourists who would rather be/ somewhere else/ but who wait here on stairs/ so steep they must rise/ to some occasion.” (Lines 7-11)
   B. “high in the empty loft,/ in the quaint toilet,/ in the skeleton/ of a kitchen/or on the map-“ (Lines 12-16)
   C. “And across Amsterdam it is raining/ on the Van Gogh Museum/ where we will hurry next” (Lines 22-24)
   D. “to see how someone else/ could find the pure/ center of light/within the dark circle/ of his demons” (Lines 25-29)

4. How does the poet use the rain to develop the idea of suffering in the poem?
5. What is the speaker's point of view of the tourists? Cite evidence from the text in your response.
Discussion Questions

*Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Both Anne Frank and Vincent van Gogh are considered heroes by many, but they did not physically save anyone’s life. Do you consider them heroes? In the context of the poem, what is a hero?

2. The Holocaust is taught in history classes today so that people will never forget. Although it is not pleasant to hear about the murder of millions of people because of their religion, race, or beliefs, educators believe it is important to study. What are some other historical tragedies that we can learn from? Why is it important to study tragic history?

3. The poet contrasts the suffering of the tourists in the poem with the suffering of Anne Frank and Van Gogh. Is it fair to compare one person’s suffering to another? Why or why not?