

Investigate! The poetry of Christina

Rossetti: A Royal Princess

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Investigating *A Royal Princess*

- ❖ Why do you think that the princess declares that she would 'rather be a peasant with a baby at her breast' than a member of the royal family?
 - List the things that are making her unhappy
 - List the contrasts between the rich and the poor that can you find in the poem
- ❖ Why do you think that the princess describes the truth as 'naked' and 'vulgar' (line 59)?
 - What associations do you have with the word 'truth'?
 - Why is the truth hidden from the princess?
- ❖ What comes to mind when you think of the life of a princess?
 - How does the poem answer these associations and expectations?
- ❖ What social injustices make you angry?
 - Are these similar to those injustices that the princess describes?
 - Is there a political situation that is happening at the moment to which this poem could be related?

Investigating language and tone

- ❖ How far can you identify with the princess?
 - Make notes on the various poetic techniques that are used to create empathy for her plight
- ❖ To what extent does the dialogue create a sense of drama?
- ❖ How does the princess' voice change throughout the poem?
 - Compare the first and the last line.

Investigating structure and versification

- ❖ What other examples can you identify where the rhyme is used to convey a certain meaning and emphasise a particular movement?
- ❖ Which rhymes occur in more than one stanza?
 - What is the effect of this?

Investigating imagery and symbolism

- ❖ How effective do you find the bird imagery in the poem?

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- What further allusions can you find to birds throughout the poem?
- ❖ Think especially of the notion of 'cooping' (l. 60) or of being contained
- ❖ What do you think that the princess means when she claims that all her walls are 'lost in mirrors'?
- What effect does this have on her understanding of her own identity?
- What does it prevent her from seeing?

Investigating themes

- ❖ How do you interpret the penultimate line?
- ❖ What comments about society do you think that the poem is making?
- ❖ What comments do you think that the poem is making about the value and significance of human life?
 - In what way are these comments relevant for the twenty-first century citizen?