

By the end of studying **“The Class Game” by Mary Casey** I need to know:

Plot: The poem is a strongly-voiced poem challenging the reader to consider discrimination based on class.

Ideas: In this poem, Casey is challenging the reader’s class stereotypes. The title “The Class Game” could refer to the way people play a ‘guessing game’ about people depending on things such as where they live or how they speak. At the end of the poem, Casey asserts that although people judge her and are prejudiced against her she is very proud to be working class.

Reading:

Read the poem in a Liverpoolian accent.

Read to the punctuation.

Vocabulary	<p>‘Oilly- can mean ‘marble’ in Liverpool slang Corpy- Liverpool slang term for a council house Semi- a semi-detached house Wirral- a borough in Merseyside that is considered ‘posh’ by some Toil- hard work, usually physical labour. Gullet- the part of the throat that food passes through to reach the stomach Docker- someone who works in a port loading and unloading boats ‘Tara- slang for goodbye Patio-a paved outdoor area Yard Crook- bend Wet Nelly Bread pudding- a rich, heavy cake or pudding made from pieces of bread soaked in milk and baked with eggs, sugar, dried fruit, and spices, Standard English Non-Standard English Accent Dialect Received Pronunciation</p>
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Links across the text:

Social conflict and identity are also explored in ‘No Problem’ and ‘Half Caste’. However, whereas both Zephaniah and Agard seek to change society’s opinions/ viewpoints, Casey is more aggressive and isn’t attempting to solve these issues. This could reflect the idea that, while work can be done to bridge the gaps of race, gender, religion and sexuality the class division is one that can never fully be healed.

The ignorance of society appears in ‘War Photographer’, as does the contrast between those with wealth and those without. In both, ‘The Class Game’ and ‘War Photographer’ imagery associated with childishness is afforded to those with wealth, perhaps suggesting that those who are born into privilege are not forced to mature or grow up at the same rate as those who were not.

‘Cousin Kate’: unlike the persona in ‘The Class Game’, the persona in ‘Cousin Kate’ is only able to speak in hypotheticals about confronting those who have belittled her. This reflects the differing attitudes of society- a more modern society is more willing to accept the freedom of speech and opinion that the strict Victorian society that Rosetti is writing in.

Context (To inform interpretation)	<p>The context of British politics and society at the time this poem was written is relevant. In 1979 Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister and implemented monetarist economic policies, leading to a recession with very high unemployment, especially in northern cities like Liverpool. She deliberately sought industrial confrontation with the unions —firstly, the National Union of Coalminers and the teaching unions. The rich received tax cuts, while the poor were often unemployed or saw their wages drop in real terms. From one point of view, it is not hard to see the Tory policies of the 1980s as a form of class war aimed at the working class.</p> <p>The graphs to the left highlight this issue. Due to Thatcher’s privatization of a lot of British industries there was a decline in the manufacturing industries- leading to an increase in unemployment, particularly affecting the working class. Coupled with this was the increase in cost of living, meaning life was hard for the working classes- many of whom were out of work. This increased animosity amongst the middle classes- many of whom would have assumed that the working class were idle, as opposed to unable to find employment due to government policy.</p> <p>The poem was published in 1980 ‘voices’- a magazine which strived to publish poems written by ordinary people insisted of professional writers. It s based on Casey’s own life in Liverpool. This poem is about class divisions and the ‘games’ we play when making judgments about others or when we try to present ourselves in a way that affects how others see us. The speaker complains that she is judged on her accent, her vocabulary, her father’s job and her social background. But she is defiant and quite able to challenge the negative assumptions some may make about her.</p> <p>In the 21st-century, class structures are different, more complex, based on ethnicity as well as traditional class divisions. With a larger proportion of the population educated to graduate level, qualifications are also no longer a determining factor. But class divisions, especially in terms of relative wealth, certainly still exist.</p> <p>Little is known of Mary Casey except that she was a housewife from Liverpool. She was not a professional poet.</p> <p>Four of her poems, including ‘The Class Game’, were published in a literary magazine called ‘Voices’, which was produced by Manchester Unity of Arts Society and was active between the years of 1972-1984.</p>
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	<p>The contributors to the magazine were all working-class writers whose work was written alongside their ordinary lives and jobs. Casey's poem was published with a small note that explained that she was from 'Scotland Road' and 'a housewife from Cantril Farm overspill estate, Liverpool'. Cantoril Farmw as one of the most impoverished areas of Liverpool.</p> <p>The first issue contained an introduction by Ben Ainsley, an academic who had started the magazine. His vision was to "offer this collection to the Labour movement at large, but especially of Manchester and district",</p>
<p>Themes</p>	<p>Social class and class stereotypes- the speaker feels judged by others because she is from a working class background but despite this the speaker takes pride in their social identity</p> <p>Identity- The persona is proud of her identity and questions why do people care about the class they are from.</p> <p>Ignorance of society- The persona highlights how their class should be celebrated not ridiculed or judged.</p>
<p>Deeper understanding</p>	<p>Structure</p> <p>The poem comprises one long stanza, suggesting an unimpeded outpouring of anger at being judged by her speech and her class. Lines are of uneven length. The poet uses rhyming couplets, but departs from the pattern. She doesn't want to be constrained by a strict template a reflection of how she feels about stereotyping people based upon class. The poem can be seen to have a one-sided question and answer structure-the speaker asks rhetorical questions and responds to them with even more questions. After each repetition of "How can you tell what class I'm from?" the persona asks about different elements of their identity. The final change to "I'm proud of the class that I come from" provides a clear conclusion to the poem. The poet organises the text using the rhetorical question 'How can you tell what class I'm from?' as a refrain and she then responds to these questions herself, referring to appearance, location and manner in her response.</p> <p>In the final section of the poem, her refrain changes to 'Why do you care what class I'm from?' and this sums up the crux of her argument: that none of the things she has explored in her poem are important.</p> <p>The rhyme scheme within the poem is simple to reflect the simple life of working class people. In addition, she sometimes uses only half-rhyme or no rhyme at all to reinforce the stereotype of working class people not using Standard English. However, this is not viewed as a negative but is deemed celebratory. The use of divisive pronouns 'I' and 'you' are used to emphasise the division between the classes. The poem has an imperfect form that is mostly written in rhyming couplets with some half rhymes. The use of informal language is important- they don't stick to traditional conventions because they are proud of their identity. The poem can also be seen as a one-sided question and answer format.</p> <p>Language and Imagery</p> <p>This is a dramatic monologue, written in the first person singular 'I', and the tone is confrontational. The speaker is clearly from the working class, as shown by expressions like 'we live in a corpy' meaning 'we live in a council flat', whereas she is addressing people from the middle classes who live in a 'pretty little semi' on the Wirral, not Liverpool itself.</p> <p>The idea of a 'game' is significant. On the surface she is flippant, clearly indifferent to what those of a different social class may think of her. The game of judgment is, however, serious, in that it led, during the Thatcher era, to a fragmented, selfish and uncaring culture that damaged society and undermined national cohesion.</p> <p>Subverting stereotypes- Casey is careful to challenge and subvert the typical stereotypes associated with the working class. For instance, the perceived view of the working class as unintelligent is challenged through the persona's manipulation of standard English and non-Standard English- which conveys that she is choosing to speak in her dialect, rather than because she is not intelligent enough to speak 'Standard English' in Received Pronunciation. Equally, she challenges the perception that the working class are idle through the juxtaposition between her 'hands [being] stained with toil' whereas the listener's are 'soft lily-white with perfume and oil'. The imagery surrounding the hands being 'stained' implies that the values of hard work are ingrained within working class culture- something she proudly asserts when she states 'a docker is me brother, a cleaner is me mother'- the Latinate syntax here asserting the pride she feels in these jobs, as she places these first. This is because she is proud of how hard her family, and by extension the working class work. This then serves to challenge the 'soft... lily-white' hands of the middle class, implying that the middle class do not work hard as their hands are pure and white. Here, she takes something that would be typically lauded over and wanted and makes it a symbol of laziness and weakness.</p> <p>Superficiality- Throughout the poem, Casey is mocking the superficiality of the middle classes. She lists physical appearances that could signify the difference between someone of her class and someone of the middle class. This, in turn, criticises the entire class debate- implying it is more about appearance than about quality of character.</p>
<p>Quotes and references</p>	<p>'So why do you always wince when you hear/Me say 'Tara' to me 'Ma' instead of 'Bye Mummy dear'?'- The sarcastic tone here makes the posh goodbye seem insincere. There is a mix of Standard English and colloquial dialect to make the distinctions between class clear. The verb 'wince' has connotations of both pain and embarrassment, emphasising the elitist attitudes of the upper classes.</p> <p>'How can you tell what class I'm from?'- The poem opens with a confident and challenging rhetorical question; 'How can you tell what class I'm from?' She asserts that she can 'talk posh' if she chooses to, but prefers not to. The implication is that she is proud of being working class. The line 'How can you tell what class I'm from?' is repeated in the ensuing stanzas, forming a refrain or anaphora, giving emphasis to the speaker's scorn.</p>

	<p><i>Cos we live in a corpy, not like some/ In a pretty little semi, our Wirral way'</i>- The segregated lines of the 'corpy' (council house) and 'semi' (semi-detached house) emphasise the division in the classes; however, the placement on the lines is ironic- the corpy is placed directly above the semi. The caesura in these lines also separates the different ideals, emphasising the differences between classes further. 'Pretty little' seems sarcastic and implies that the speaker finds the semi unimpressive and only superficially beautiful.</p> <p><i>'Or did I drop my unemployment card'</i>- Connotations of the lower classes are shown here and have a stigma attached. This is a jibe from the speaker at the stereotypes that are placed on the lower class.</p> <p><i>'...hands are stained with toil?/ Instead of soft lily-white with perfume and oil?'</i>- Contrasting dark and light imagery here provides a visual comparison of how differently society sees the two classes. The 'hands stained with toil' could be a metaphor for the more difficult life of the lower classes, with 'toil' having connotations of hard work and pain. 'Lily-white' in contrast presents the upper classes as fragile.</p> <p><i>'Why do you care what class I'm from?'</i>- The speaker has been building towards this question and reasserts her point through different wording. The 'how' is an easily answered question but the 'why' is much harder – there is not a single reason the speaker's class should matter to anyone. This shows the speaker's frustration with the classist attitudes in the U.K.</p> <p><i>'And I'm proud of the class that I come from'</i>- The speaker lists the last of her working class credentials. Finally, she asserts her pride in who she is. She is, in effect, indifferent to the 'game'. The assumptions about the class from which people come is a game that shouldn't be played at all; it should be irrelevant. The end stop of the last line gives a definitive and proud ending to the poem.</p>
<p>Terminology</p>	<p>Repetition – Repetition of the opening question emphasises the speaker's point and reinforces the argument</p> <p>Long Vowel sound- The short vowel sound on line 4 " an' at" contrasts with...</p> <p>Short Vowel Sound- the long vowel sound in "scarf" this emphasises the difference in class,</p> <p>Rhetorical question- The repetition of the opening question builds towards the final question " Why do you care what class I am from?" The 'how can be answered easily but the why cannot-there is no reason why the persona's class should matter to anyone.</p> <p>Pronouns- The pronouns "I" and "you" are used to emphasise the division between the working and middle classes.</p> <p>Imperfect form- The poem has an imperfect form. It is mainly written in rhyming couplets (a traditional form) but some are half rhymes</p> <p>Half rhyme- Half rhymes are used to reflect the idea that their informal language is important; they don't stick to formal conventions because they are proud of their own identity.</p> <p>Rhyming couplets- is a pair of successive lines in a poem, where the final words of each line rhyme with one another</p> <p>Dialect- a particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group. The poem contains Liverpoolian dialect which gives the persona authenticity and establishes character.</p> <p>Colloquial language- language used in ordinary or familiar conversation; not formal or literary. Working-class slang makes the poem sound like it would be spoken. This reinforces the persona's pride in their class; they won't change their language to suit others. The language also creates a sense of familiarity which encourages the reader to sympathise with the persona.</p> <p>Simile- The use of the simile "Does sit stick in gullet like a sour plum?" is comical and it mocks how people, who look down on the working classes, might feel when reading the poem.</p> <p>Adjectives- the adjectives "pretty little semi" are sarcastic and imply that the persona finds the semi unimpressive and only superficially beautiful</p>