

**Student's Name & Junior Year Teacher****Reflective Statement**

**Question:** How was your understanding of cultural and contextual considerations of the work developed through the interactive oral?

**Work Used:** *The Essential Neruda, Selected Poems* by Pablo Neruda

Our in-class presentations connected background influences and events from Pablo Neruda's life to his poetry. They helped me to understand the multiple meanings within Neruda's works, something not immediately apparent. The presentations gave weight to Neruda's love of his homeland and the people there, along with the intertwining of politics and women in his poetry.

Multiple presentations explained Neruda's teenage life and motivations behind joining certain political movements. It changed how I viewed Neruda. In much of his poetry, there was an underlying theme that hinted at government and the different classes of people. Afterwards, I could connect his politics with the beliefs he expressed in his work. When I learned that Neruda joined the communist movement later in his life, their explanation of his teenage years gave a more complete picture of him, especially considering my knowledge of him only spanned his childhood years.

Along with his politics, Neruda's countrymen and people were very important to him in a way I did not immediately understand. The people of his country and their movements influenced him enough to fight for their rights many times. It is apparent to me in the poem "Walking Around" that Neruda connected much of his life to the people he valued, and when political movements came along to benefit the people, he felt urged to stand behind them. This helped me understand the revolutionary themes in Neruda's work, and to see the progression of

his beliefs in his poetry. While we started out with “Body of a Woman,” which declared his love of his homeland, it is plain to see how Neruda’s travels changed him. His poetry was highly influenced by those around him, his friends and the war. Neruda’s connection to the lower classes of the countries he visited showed me that he cared so much about how his poetry affected people he never even met.

Throughout his memoirs, Neruda held a constant love for his roots, even over the course of many embittered years. It is more apparent how Neruda’s poetry reflected what he saw around him, like the ocean of his childhood. There is an abundance of meaning in Neruda’s work, all due to the people and culture around him. The presentations gave background to an unfamiliar figure, and helped the class as a whole sympathize with the values of Neruda.

Word count: 389

### **Written Assignment**

**Title:** Neruda's Usage of Ocean Imagery to Represent His Changing Relationship with Poetry

In classes across the world, students spend hours prying meaning out of great works of literature. Many have determined prose to hold only one meaning, detrimental to total understanding of the text. The work of Pablo Neruda, famous for its intentionally blurred lines and meaning, remains to this day multi-faceted and unique. The Chilean poet endured many hardships, romances and political conflicts in his life, but the multiple interpretations of his work such as those in *The Essential Neruda, Selected Poems* are what allow it to connect to so many people. Through his usage of ocean imagery in "Leaning into the Evenings," "Ode with a Lament," "The Great Ocean," and "Poet's Obligation," Neruda demonstrates his connection with poetry and how it develops over the course of his life.

Neruda is perhaps most famous for his predilection towards romantic poetry and the female form, though many of his works have double meanings. In "Leaning into the Evenings," Neruda positions specific ocean imagery to describe a distant female lover. Neruda says mournfully, "Leaning into the evenings I throw my sad nets/to your ocean eyes" (Neruda, 1-2). Through his usage of nets and the ocean as images, the reader receives the impression that the chase is fruitless and inevitable. "Leaning" into evenings also implies the idea of a slow but nevertheless vain call for this distant lover, waiting at the shoreline in hopes of her return. Looking at this poem through another lens, the reader can see Neruda's connection and its depth with this force. Her form is viewed only through the "oceanic" eyes he repeatedly references, and her presence causes him to long after this source of inspiration, a far-off, mysterious figure. Neruda describes his arms "twisting like a drowning man's" in the loneliness of her stare. Through these blurred meanings, we can interpret the ocean as some sort of muse; mysterious

and alluring, or perhaps even a siren, deigning to drown Neruda in his own passion and art. The reader's emotions are naively stirred by the ocean, and their solitude is reinforced by the image of a man casting empty nets to catch water by rope — an impossible task, but one the narrator tries hard to complete. An artist is faced with a similar burden, when their talent or skill laps at them with a terrible beauty at the beginning of their life. The reader can see Neruda at the embarkment of his own art, longing for inspiration and completion. Through this evocative usage of ocean imagery, Neruda paints the portrait of a man at the innocent edge of realization of his poetry; unsure of what to come, but wanting it desperately.

While it may be impossible to accurately measure the change of a person over time, Neruda's poetry is more often than not a reflection of his own life and experiences. As the translators note, Neruda wrote "Ode With a Lament" for his terminally ill daughter. At the prospect of his dying child, Neruda says, "Only with waves at my back can I love you/between dull explosions of brimstone and reflective waters" (Neruda 13-14). Neruda's love and fear are one in the ocean's waves, and only with the ocean at his back can he love and face his daughter. The crash of the waves represent all the emotion and fear he holds back for her. The "reflective waters" embody unwanted reflection, despair, and, above all, his refusal to acknowledge the impending loss. From the "black damned waters" to other harsh descriptions of thundering waves, Neruda's language clearly indicates that the ocean, and therefore his poetry, is the last thing he wants to face at this point. The tossing of the age-old waters he mentions in the poem are reminders of all he and readers have lost and stand to lose in the future. Neruda cannot look into the ocean or the depths of his creativity because his daughter's memory is too strong, and will bring nothing but grief. In contrast with "Leaning into the Evenings", Neruda uses the depth and complexity of the ocean to represent pain and memory. His poetry is the one thing he cannot

bear in this situation, regardless of his love for words. Before, Neruda was almost enchanted by the ocean's beauty and gloom, eager to churn out its tales of sadness. Now that sadness is so gut-wrenching he cannot look within himself at all, made clear by his sharp, bitter language. The only way he can bear his grief for the daughter he would soon lose is through forgetting what he has written at all.

It is clear, through his evocative use of poetry, that Neruda admires many different facets of the ocean. In "The Great Ocean," Neruda describes his need to embody the characteristics of the ocean, saying "If of your gifts and destructions, Ocean into my/hands/you could deliver one part, one fruit, one ferment/I would choose your remote repose, your lines of steel" (Neruda 1-4). Neruda's choice of imagery and especially the language "steel" and "demolition" serve as visual reminders of the power of the ocean. In contrast with other depictions, the ocean is a symbol of power that Neruda wishes to demonstrate in his poetry. It is no longer a metaphor for sadness or grief, but for a transition from past sadness to future strength. Neruda longs to be strong and resolute like his poetry, something he makes clear he is not. Through lines such as "the energy of your white language" Neruda's desire for the endurance of the ocean is almost audible as the crash of waves. The ocean is no longer sad or swirling, but powerful and indifferent. The reader can detect the difference between this poem and "Leaning into the Evenings" in the tone of the lines. Neruda is no longer a desperate lover or a mourning father. Now he wishes to be and write like the wild ocean, fearless as only nature can be. This denotes Neruda's emotional development over time, and his belief that his own work must change as well. While he is far from finished with his journey, the difference is significant.

Neruda, demonstrating a resolution to growth, aptly captures a poet's duties in "Poet's Obligation," using the ocean again as a point of reference. The image the reader receives of

saltwater as something he must gather and share in a cup is a reminder that the ocean holds many meanings for Neruda, especially later in life. “So, drawn on by my destiny/I endlessly must listen to and keep/the sea’s lamenting in my awareness/I must feel the crash of the hard water/and gather it up in a perpetual cup” (Neruda 13-17). Neruda acknowledges that he has to endure the ocean’s harsher parts for the sake of others, evident of emotional development. This poem contrasts sharply with his earlier, younger works as Neruda states firmly his obligation to hold up the burden of loss and desire for the sake of his readers. It is Neruda’s role to connect with his audience, but that connection can only be achieved through mutual emotion or loss. “Poet’s Obligation” describes the ocean, or poetry, as something he can gather and share with others, sweet and sorrowful or hard and punishing. It can be sweet epithets, or a mournful tribute to a loved one. This is all worthwhile, however, because he brings a connection to those who have not felt one before. Neruda can reach those “in prison” or suffering with his cup of thoughts and memories, and that gift is something he alone must bear. This is explicit evidence that Neruda views his connection to the ocean as having multiple meanings and representations, just as he views his poetry.

Pablo Neruda’s close relationship with poetry is demonstrated by his changing descriptions of the ocean in his work. His employment of various oceanic images and themes imply a major connection with poetry and the ocean. Over the course of his life, Neruda’s descriptions of the ocean vary wildly, capturing the kind of emotional development only visible over time. From innocent love poems to dark, grieving pieces, the reader can see Neruda discover the trials and tribulations of life, all the while placing his emotion into the most fluid of all objects; the ocean. When the reader finally reaches the solemn conclusion of “Poet’s Obligation”, a life has gone by. Through his suffering and joys, Neruda’s multiple relationships

with poetry have allowed him to touch the hearts of many; an impact that will not soon be forgotten.

Word Count: 1437

### Work Cited

Neruda, Pablo. *The Essential Neruda, Selected Poems*. Trans. Mark Eisner, John Felstiner, Forrest Gander, Robert Hass, and Stephen Kessler. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2004. Print.