

Day 2 Reading Focus: Sensory details

Poem Title: Looking for The Gulf Motel

Poet: Richard Blanco

Annotation Key:

Sight

Taste

Sound

Touch

Smell
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Emphasis
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Marco Island, Florida

1 *There should be nothing here I don't remember . . .*

The Gulf Motel with mermaid lampposts
and ship's wheel in the lobby should still be
rising out of the sand like a cake decoration.

5 My brother and I should still be pretending
we don't know our parents, embarrassing us
as they roll the luggage cart past the front desk
loaded with our scruffy suitcases, two-dozen
loaves of Cuban bread, brown bags bulging
10 with enough mangos to last the entire week,
our espresso pot, the pressure cooker—and
a pork roast reeking garlic through the lobby.
All because we can't afford to eat out, not even
on vacation, only two hours from our home
15 in Miami, but far enough away to be thrilled
by whiter sands on the west coast of Florida,
where I should still be for the first time watching
the sun set instead of rise over the ocean.

There should be nothing here I don't remember . . .

20 My mother should still be in the kitchenette
of The Gulf Motel, her daisy sandals from Kmart
squeaking across the linoleum, still gorgeous
in her teal swimsuit and amber earrings
stirring a pot of arroz-con-pollo, adding sprinkles
25 of onion powder and dollops of tomato sauce.
My father should still be in a terrycloth jacket
smoking, clinking a glass of amber whiskey

How can the senses work together in a single image?

- Is a cake a visual image, or an image with taste?
- Is whisky a taste, a smell, a visual, or a sound?
- Are dollops of tomato sauce taste, or sound, or smell?
- Are K-Mart sandals sight or sound?

The senses blend into each other—notice, for example, how the visual of the loaves of Cuban bread leads to a taste and scent memory

Note that students may correctly experience and express a sense more strongly for the same sensory detail (the smell or the taste of “reeking garlic”).

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30 in the sunset at the Gulf Motel, watching us
dive into the pool, two boys he'll never see
grow into men who will be proud of him.

There should be nothing here I don't remember . . .

35 My brother and I should still be playing *Parcheesi*,
my father should still be alive, slow dancing
with my mother on the sliding-glass balcony
of The Gulf Motel. No music, only the waves
keeping time, a song only their minds hear
ten-thousand nights back to their life in Cuba.
My mother's face should still be resting against
his bare chest like the moon resting on the sea,
40 the stars should still be turning around them.

There should be nothing here I don't remember . . .

My brother should still be thirteen, sneaking
rum in the bathroom, sculpting naked women
from sand. I should still be eight years old
45 dazzled by seashells and how many seconds
I hold my breath underwater—but I'm not.
I am thirty-eight, driving up Collier Boulevard,
looking for The Gulf Motel, for everything
that should still be, but isn't. I want to blame
50 the condos, their shadows for ruining the beach
and my past, I want to chase the snowbirds away
with their tacky mansions and yachts, I want
to turn the golf courses back into mangroves,
I want to find The Gulf Motel exactly as it was
55 and pretend for a moment, nothing lost is lost.

Note the *shift* from the rich tapestry of the senses to the monotonous insistence on pure sight in this final stanza

Line 46 signals a change in tense and degree of sensory detail.

"Driving..." He doesn't get out of his car—there's just sight, because he's just watching from his car and fantasizing. The images are really flat and the speaker relies pretty much purely on sight, rather than blending senses.

"Tacky" is one of the very few adjectives, but it doesn't give a specific picture—it's just flatness (compared to the richness of the previous sense memories).

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Terms for Conversation: sight, sound, scent, taste, touch, sensory details, refrain, stanza

***Additional Terms:** sensory details, synesthesia (experiencing a sense that is different than the sense being perceived, for example seeing a color instead or in addition to "reeking garlic"), refrain, stanza, modal verb tense.