

Olivia Tan
AP Q1 Rewrite
“Plants”

The presence of nature and its relationship to humans has long been a topic often dwelled on. While the relationship between plants and humans are commonly seen as one that is peaceful and symbiotic, Olive Senior holds a unique, alternative perspective. In her poem, “Plants,” Senior uses inclusive and exclusive language, personification, and diction to portray plants as hostile and invasive in relation to humans.

To begin with, Senior uses exclusive and inclusive language to articulate a divided relationship between plants and humans. To convey the plants as things that are invasive and aggressive towards humans, Senior uses exclusive language. Phrases such as “you see them,” “they’ll outlast us,” and “they were always there” paint plants as a species that are dangerous towards the human race. To emphasise this divide between plants and humans, Senior then goes on to use inclusive language when addressing the audience. Phrases such as “like us” and “we must” indicate a sense of togetherness between her and the audience, giving the idea that they are united as humans. By using inclusive language when speaking to the audience and exclusive language when describing plants, Senior portrays the relationship between humans and plants as one that is not harmonious, but divided. As a result, the audience is given the impression that they and the poet are humans united together against a threatening species - plants.

Next, Senior uses personification to convey a clearer image to the audience about how plants are invasive and dangerous. She describes their prolific nature as an “imperialistic grand design,” likening plants to militants eager to conquer other humans. To further this image, Senior uses negatively connoted phrases and words such as “conquest,” “armies of mangrove,” “parachuting seeds,” “special agents,” and “colonizing.” These phrases appeal to the audience’s pathos and enhance their fear of being invaded and conquered. As a result, by personifying plants as an army or militant groups, Senior strengthens a negative, fearful attitude towards plants and emphasises their image as an invasive species.

Last, Senior employs suspicious diction to create distrust between plants and humans. Senior first describes plants as “deceptive,” “sinister,” and in to “seduce.” This warns the audience that plants should not be so quickly trusted and that people should be skeptical of them. Senior extends this warning when she says “they’ll outlast us, they were always there / one step ahead of us.” This implies that, in the end, plants will win over humans as, when humans die, “we become plant food.” As such, the audience comes to see plants as dangerous forces that intend to dominate humans for their own benefit.

Ultimately, through the use of literary devices, Senior sets forth the complex relationship from plants to humans as one that is hostile and invasive. Through diction, inclusive and exclusive language, as well as personification, Senior successfully compels the audience to reevaluate the common perspective that plants are peaceful and friendly and instills in them a cautious and fearful view towards them.