

Carefully read Olive Senior's 2005 poem "Plants." Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. You may wish to consider the author's use of such literary techniques as syntax, diction, and figurative language.

Plants have often gone overlooked by humans, ignored because of their passive and disregardable nature. At most, they might be considered an aid to human survival because of the food and resources they provide. However, in her poem "Plants" (2005), Olive Senior provides an alternative view of plants. She characterizes plants as sinister, portraying the audience as victims of the plants' imperialism and creating enemy relationships between the plants and humans.

Senior's choice of diction and vivid imagery when describing the plants' actions establishes the plants as imperialists and casts them in an evil light. Senior's very first statement, "plants are deceptive", jolts the reader into her poem and sets the tone for the rest of the poem. Her hostile attitude towards plants is further solidified by her choice of diction for describing them, which includes other negatively-connotated words like "invasive" and "sinister". Furthermore, Senior uses vivid descriptions to portray plant activity – the spreading of seeds, nuts, and the like – as violent, war-like activities. By describing "armies of mangrove on the march" and "shoots bent on conquest", Senior relates the seemingly-innocent actions of plants to the ill-intentioned acts of human imperialists and depicts these activities as part of the plants' plan to expand and conquer. The use of hostile diction combined with violent descriptions evokes the sense of danger and evil that Senior wishes the audience to associate with plants.

In stark contrast, the speaker casts herself and the audience as victims of the plants' deception. Describing flowers and fruit as "instrument[s] to seduce" with the pure intention of "scattering plant progeny", she pops the audience's bubble of the simple beauty and sweetness of plants and instead exposes them the plants' manipulative nature and foul intentions. The speaker uses the name "Innocent" when directly referring to the audience, underscoring their naivete as the plants' victims. She asks the audience, "don't deny it, my dear, I've seen you sniff and exclaim", presenting proof that the audience has fallen for the plants' charade and urging them to heed her words.

Throughout the poem, the speaker acts as a mentor for the audience, offering advice, warnings, and sympathy. The poem acts as a public service announcement, the speaker exposing all of the plants' evilness and deception for her audience to see. Through the phrases "perhaps you have regarded" and "maybe you haven't quite taken in", the speaker implies that the audience is mostly ignorant of the imperialistic nature of plants that she is preaching about. The use of phrases such as "don't deny it" and "believe me", as well as the use of "my dear" and "Innocent" to address the audience, reflects her condescending tone towards the audience throughout the piece and further establishes her place as an experienced authority figure.

In "Plants", Olive Senior presents an unexpected hostile dynamic between plants and humans, depicting humans as the victims of the plants' imperialism. The speaker acts as a mentor for the audience, conveying this generally unknown information about plants through advice and warnings.