

The Rose That Grew from Concrete Study Guide

The Rose That Grew from Concrete by Tupac Shakur

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Section 1

Section 1 Summary

"The Rose That Grew from Concrete" by Tupac Shakur begins with an autobiographical poem of the same name. The poem speaks of a rose that grew in the crack of concrete and how it proved nature wrong because it learned to walk without feet. The lack of care and the surroundings were not a hindrance to the rose's growth because there was something stronger present that could urge it onward and upward. Shakur claims that because the rose kept its dreams, it was able to live a long life.

Shakur writes about solitude and how it might help him find his true calling and peace of mind, things which seem to elude the poet. The author speaks of yearning for acceptance and respect from others, presumably in his professional life. The poem refers to a dual personality, two people that live inside the poet and how he considers himself to be "a young heart with an old soul."

"Under the Skies Above" speaks of Shakur's feelings about a child that was lost to a miscarriage. Shakur believes that the baby is living somewhere, just waiting for the love of its parents, even though the poet doubts that he has the capacity to properly guide a child. Although there is a marked sense of sadness about the loss of the child, there is some hint of relief because Shakur doubts his own abilities and the sense of responsibility seems somewhat overwhelming.

Shakur claims that his life would "scare a square 2 death" because of its level of poverty and violence. Shakur has seen more than his share of murder and while the poet is used to living in such an atmosphere, it would certainly be shocking to someone from the outside.

Good times are treasured by Shakur because they tend to be few and far between. In the end the poet knows that he will have to return to the depths of poverty.

When a person's heart turns cold, there is little that can get through and the apathy spreads like a disease. One begins to build walls to protect against everything on the outside including love and hate, joy and pain. Things that were once stirring or important, such as a baby's cry or a mother neglecting her child, no longer seem to be of any consequence. Shakur addresses his friends who do not understand what it is like to have this happen, but the poet tells the friends that they will understand once it happens to them. Although Shakur laments this lack of feeling, part of the poet knows that it is necessary to hold onto the façade in order to survive.

Expression of the mind is extremely important to the poet and is addressed in an untitled poem. Shakur speaks of a dream where there is no war and where all people are equal. When Shakur wakes from the dream, reality seems like a nightmare.



Shakur speaks of the drive to achieve his goals, spending free time pondering goals that have not been met. Although the poet does not see himself as a perfectionist, he craves perfection and will continue to produce even after all goals have been met.

"Only 4 the Righteous" addresses the people who tell Shakur that he could easily retire because of his success in the music business. The poet wonders if these people might be on some form of medication because he never intends to give up his love of creativity and music.

Marilyn Monroe is the subject of "The Shining Star Within." The poem laments the treatment received by the famous actress, how she was exploited and treated poorly by those all around her. Shakur believes that there was no compassion for Monroe and that the ill treatment the star received caused a great deal of confusion and eventually brought forth the actress' untimely end.

Vincent van Gogh is another subject of Shakur's work. The poet sees van Gogh as someone who is obsessed over gaining acceptance and satisfying society. Regardless of how others treated van Gogh, he still sought to create masterpieces, such as Sunflowers. Shakur laments the fact that van Gogh was never truly appreciated, and therefore took his own life.

Achieving one's goals, despite all obstacles, is a subject near and dear to Shakur's heart. Although life is hard, particularly when there is poverty, no father, and no one to guide him, Shakur vows to follow his inner voice and to not make the same mistakes twice.

The poet is bold and claims that he can stand against any attacker and show no fear. However, when it comes to vulnerability and love Shakur will run away, because a deeply feeling heart is fragile and while there is a chance to receive a great deal of joy, there is also the possibility of one's heart being broken.

In times of great darkness, Shakur claims that there was no one to help him except God. Whenever the poet was surrounded by sadness and confusion, God was there to guide him. Because Shakur learned to walk with God, the poet claims that the only name that receives unconditional love is God.

Section 1 Analysis

Much of Shakur's work is devoted to rising above one's circumstances in order to achieve dreams and goals. It is obvious by the work that Shakur grew up in extreme poverty, without a father, and no one to guide him into a productive and positive way of life. Despite these difficulties, or perhaps because of them, Shakur sought to use his talents to rise above and once the poet began to establish himself, he vowed to never give up. The work notes a tremendous number of ups and downs. There were times when Shakur was doing well and there were many good times to be had. Other times show where the poet's life returned to its previous state and it was those times that created the author's many nightmares.



Admiration of successful, creative people is one of the themes in the book. There is a great deal of empathy and sorrow in the work for both Marilyn Monroe and Vincent van Gogh. Both stars were exploited and under appreciated for their talents. In some ways, it saddens Shakur that Monroe could not see past her own image and career and into her own heart. The poet admires van Gogh for continuing to paint even when others doubted his ability. Even though there were times when people did support and appreciate van Gogh's work, the artist himself was by and large ignored and shunned. The result is almost a self-fulfilling prophecy. Although people came to appreciate van Gogh's work, they never appreciated the man who eventually ended his own life. The same could be said of Shakur's art and legacy.

Darkness is a common thread throughout the work. There are obviously many times when Shakur was faced with violence, poverty, and difficult decisions. As a self-contained person, Shakur found it difficult to turn to other people for help, although the poet managed to find serenity in God.



Section 2

Section 2 Summary

"Nothing Can Come Between Us" is a poem dedicated to Shakur's close friend, John. The poem talks about two friends who have been together for a long time and have formed an unconditional relationship. Regardless of all the things that happen in the world, there is always an eternal camaraderie between the two men. No matter how high or low Shakur's life is at any given moment, John is always there for him. The poet recognizes this unconditional friendship and promises that nothing will ever come between them, despite the fact that their paths may go in opposite directions.

"If There be Pain..." is a poem written to a friend that is the recipient of Shakur's compassion and friendship. The poet promises the friend that no matter what happens, if something goes wrong, the friend can always call and will no longer be alone. There was obviously an incident where the friend was suffering and felt all alone in the world. Shakur seeks to comfort the friend and to let that person know that suffering in silence does not have to be a given, that a simple phone call can ease the pain.

Shakur claims that without this particular friend his life will no longer contain joy.

There are many things that can cause a heart to break from the joyful to the sad. According to Shakur these things include lonely children, souls that have given up, pretty smiles, fairy tales that never came true, and selfish liars. The poem was written to a person who had exhibited selfish tendencies and who lied to Shakur for some undisclosed reason.

Shakur pays tribute to a woman named Marquita, a strong black woman with a great spirit. In Shakur's eyes Marquita is "pure woman" and one that should never have to embrace sorrow. Because it was strength that caused the attraction between Shakur and Marquita, the poet claims that it will take the same strength in order to make the relationship work.

The poet speaks of heartache shared with a person he just met. Although Shakur had not been searching for anyone, this woman seems to be "the one." Yet the two cannot seem to express or explore love because of the mutual heartache from which neither may ever recover. It is intimated that if only one of the two people had been suffering from a longstanding heartache, the obstacle may have been overcome. With two people suffering from heartache, each is wrapped up in his or her own misery and pain. When two people are suffering simultaneously, there is no one to offer comfort.

If love is unspoken, does the silence weaken the sentiment? Shakur wonders if not professing love makes him cold. However, by not sharing this particular love it is able to grow and be sustained. This poem marries fear with silence. While loving something or someone may be a joyous thing, to admit it out loud is another thing entirely, particularly



if one has a fear of being rejected. Shakur is also one to keep his own counsel unless it is with someone he knows on an intimate level, either lover or friend. Either way, the refusal to allow this love to be known has caused pain to the poet.

The poet reflects upon meeting various women throughout the work. Shakur demonstrates a great deal of shyness when it comes to opening up to another person and, perhaps, allows what might have been to slip away. It is obvious that Shakur has a great love for women and wants to partake of their intelligence, strength, and beauty. The reader can only surmise if it is self-doubt or fear that keeps Shakur from acting on several instances of attraction.

Shakur remembers a woman named Carmen, who had once been the object of the poet's adoration. Although this is no longer true, there are times when Shakur is guided through the day by the woman's beautiful smile. Carmen has become involved with another and is pregnant. Shakur is happy for her, wishes the woman well and promises to see her in heaven.

Shakur responds to a request to communicate about his deepest feelings. The poet admits that he often does not know what he's feeling and that thoughts in his head easily become mixed up. Just when Shakur thinks he knows his own desires, suddenly something else is presented, and the poet no longer knows what he wants or needs. As an explanation for these confusing feelings Shakur explains that "Love is Just Complicated."

Shakur felt a different kind of love with a woman named Elizabeth. Elizabeth's soul was lost at the time when she met Shakur. The two became friends and the relationship evolved into a new phase when Elizabeth found her soul and celebrated celibacy. Elizabeth and Shakur took different paths and their relationship was eventually severed. The pair was reunited and Shakur realizes that the friendship was as important to Elizabeth as it was to him, a concept that hadn't seemed possible. The poet prays that their relationship will last forever.

Shakur writes of the first meeting with April, the woman who would become his wife. The poet claims that from the first time he met April; his cold heart opened and was able to feel joy. The thread of the relationship continues in the following poem titled, "Wife 4 Life." In this poem, Shakur throws himself at April's feet and proposes marriage. Although Shakur has faults, he professes great love for April and asks her to be his wife for life.

Eventually the relationship with April turns sour and the couple divorces. Shakur claims that it is because there is so much love for April he must leave her.

Shakur speaks to men who listen to their own hearts. The poet claims that men shouldn't listen to their hearts because they are selfish and heart does not possess a brain. Men find it easy to fall in love quickly and break the woman's heart. On the other hand, women are not perfect. Still, the man should not be unfaithful.



Although there are many powerful things in this world, it is the power of a smile that can thaw a frozen heart.

Renée Ross is the subject of "Genesis (The Rebirth of my Heart)." Shakur claims that there was nothing in his life but loneliness until he met Renée. Renée was the one person who could reach inside Shakur's heart and find friendship. Because of the effort of this friend, Shakur realizes that he will eventually be able to love again.

It is common for one to dream of meeting the perfect someone. Shakur talks about his dream of meeting an "immense beauty" and how he would be able to woo her so that she would belong to him for after. However, when Shakur found this woman that he has always dreamed of, she is not interested. The poet asks himself what he can possibly offer to this woman. While the woman is beautiful, Shakur withdraws and mimics the woman's disinterest.

Shakur relates love and loss to the smiles and tears of Cupid.

Fear of being hurt is something that Shakur fights to get through. While the poet most often talks about his own hesitation to explore love, the work titled "What I See!" addresses the same issue in a potential lover. Although the woman has previously been hurt Shakur asks her to allow the "infant emotion" to breathe and grow. Although it is impossible to know what will lie ahead, Shakur tells the woman that together they can soar beyond the sky, if only she is willing to take the chance.

Adultery is another topic that Shakur addresses. While in the throes of passion, a person may not have the capacity to think beyond the moment. Words are no longer important and the rest of the world is shut out. Even after the passion is over it is easy to long for the touch of the other.

Shakur speaks of loss in regards to a couple who desired nothing more than a life of love. Although the couple managed to have their desire fulfilled, an act of violence took the life of the woman. Shakur can only hope that the two will meet once again in the hereafter.

Section 2 Analysis

Shakur speaks a lot of love in this section. There is the love of friends who stand by the poet regardless of what happens in his life and the love of various women. One woman in particular, April, captures Shakur's heart from the moment the couple meets. Shakur is convinced that April is the love of his life and eventually, the couple marries. It is unclear how long Shakur and April were married or exactly what happened to cause the divorce although there is a veiled implication of adultery.

Underneath Shakur's ruthless exterior there is a deep well of emotion longing to escape. Because of the nature of the poet's existence, the intense feelings are not permitted to escape except in the most intimate of circumstances, with close friends and lovers.



The work shows that while many things change in the poet's life, Shakur struggles with letting go. There are references to meeting up again some day with certain friends, yet the loss of a love relationship seems to take a great toll on the author.

Shakur's friends, particularly those who have stood by him regardless of what is going on in the poet's life, have a special place in the man's heart. Shakur's devotion is touching and the works leads one to wonder if the devotion is returned or unrequited.



Section 3

Section 3 Summary

The section titled "Just a Breath of Freedom" begins with the poem of the same name. The work is dedicated to Nelson Mandela, the South African leader that was imprisoned for 27 years due to his political views and stance against apartheid. Mandela was later released and went on to serve as the president of South Africa, a major coup in the country's government. Mandela went on to solidify his status as an icon through political and humanitarian works.

Shakur comments that putting Mandela in prison was worse than killing him as the man's spirit began to die. On the day Mandela was released from prison Shakur notes that the man raised his "regal brow in pride." Although Mandela spent nearly 3 decades in prison, there was always hope that the powers that be would be forced to pay for the crimes they had committed. In this way, Mandela serves as a source of hope for the poet and all those who may feel oppressed by the system.

"For Mrs. Hawkins: In Memory of Yusef Hawkins" is dedicated to the mother of a son who was killed in a hate crime. Shakur makes it clear that he is not out to offend or persecute those he refers to as "positive souls," only those racists who are responsible for ongoing racial violence. The poet points out that there is less to be said about a white man killing a black man; but if the act was reversed then the killer would be referred to as a savage.

"Fallen Star" is a poem written for Huey P. Newton, civil rights activist and co-founder of the Black Panthers, a California based organization dedicated to promoting Black Power and self defense. The radical organization, originally known as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, was at its peak in the 1960s and 1970s. Shakur makes several references to the Panthers and their philosophies.

Shakur claims that "they" did not understand what Huey P. Newton set out to do with his work. Instead of appreciating the things that Newton managed to accomplish, many only took notice when Newton stumbled. Although the man could not change the level of ignorance regarding African Americans and their place in society, Newton's work would set a valuable precedent, and his memory is deeply revered by the poet.

Shakur addresses government assistance. The poet claims that asking for government assistance would equate the hunted asking the hunter for meat and to effectively giving up his soul. Shakur wants people to understand that high school dropouts are not stupid and all unemployed people are not lazy. Regardless of Shakur's needs, the poet states that he would rather go hungry and become homeless than give up his soul.

Shakur devotes the poem, "Family Tree" to his mother. The main thrust of the poem is Shakur's question on whether true beauty lies in the tree or in the forest. Like the rose



that grew from concrete, Shakur claims that he was not supposed to be, yet is proud of his family tree.

"When Ure Hero Falls" is a poem detailing confusion about unhappiness and acceptance of defeat surrounding Shakur's mother, Afeni Shakur. Mrs. Shakur had always taught her son to persevere and never give up. Shakur benefited greatly from his mother's wisdom and credits her with giving him the drive to succeed and to believe in himself. When the poet sees his mother welcoming defeat, he is confronted with confusion and sorrow.

Shakur considers himself to be a panther and takes great pride in the mother that nurtures the cub, all alone. The thinly veiled metaphor between the animal and the activist shows Shakur's level of belief in the party's doctrine and what it means to present a unified front to fight for what one believes in. There is great pride in the Panthers as they come together and bloom with a radiant brilliance.

Shakur addresses the plight of an unwed teen mother. While the mother is at home with the child, the absentee father is too busy indulging himself and a new girlfriend rather than paying attention to the baby that is in need of milk, diapers, and medicine. The mother seems to accept this behavior and is destined to live out the role.

The poet quotes the proverb, "Where there is a will; There is a way!" Regardless of the situations Shakur has faced, there is always the hope that goals and dreams are attainable. Despite all of the frustrations and obstacles Shakur faces, determination to prevail will always win.

Section 3 Analysis

"Just a Breath of Freedom" is an intimate look at the emotion involved in seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Shakur makes it clear that even though there are some that have persevered and prevailed, there is much to overcome. There is obvious admiration for a number of African-American heroes, such as Nelson Mandela and Huey P. Newton. Shakur celebrates these men, not only for their beliefs but for the actions they put behind the words. Mandela and Newton showed the world that it is possible to make change and that there is hope.

Racism is a topic that Shakur refers to in several poems, but especially in "For Mrs. Hawkins." The poet assures Mrs. Hawkins that America will not rest until racial violence is conquered. Shakur does not take the stand that all whites are racist. In fact, the poet refers to the separation of the unprejudiced and racists, only laying blame on those that support and commit hate crimes.

Government assistance would have been of great help to Shakur at several points in his life. Shakur and his family struggled with extreme poverty and yet the poet is too proud to accept charity as it would mean giving up his soul.



Section 4

Section 4 Summary

"Liberty Needs Glasses" is a poem that speaks of the blindness of Lady Liberty and the American justice system. Shakur refers to them as being "blind as bats stumbling thru the system." Although the minorities and downtrodden are treated poorly by Justice, there are others that commit worse crimes and are overlooked due to money and power. Shakur refers to slavery, the ill-treatment of the Indians, and the fact that the justice system overlooked the crimes committed by rich and powerful people such as Oliver North and Ronald Reagan. According to Shakur, if people really cared about the value of life, someone would take Lady Liberty and Mrs. Justice to get glasses.

The topic of equality is featured in "How Can We Be Free." The poem talks about society being blind when it comes to racial equality. Shakur states that it is impossible to believe in racial equality as Nelson Mandela rot in prison, Africans are being killed by the score, and the black men who to survive are bum rushed to join the military as soon as they turn 18. Shakur states that some people may think he is a racist for making these comments but the poet asserts that these opinions come from historical fact.

Passion that is governed by reason is a frightening topic to Shakur. Corrupt politicians try to convince the people that what they say is true; however, the poet knows that these words are nothing but a trick. Shakur states that he will never trust a promise made by politicians, to whom he refers to as "Masters of the Art." Deceit, he writes, cannot fool an honest heart.

Shakur's commitment to hope, the future and proactive behavior often becomes extremely difficult when everything around him suffers from the effects of tragedy and hatred. The poet claims that there is always pressure and that his sanity is weakening. No matter what the situation, Shakur continues to see hope and knows that there is a chance to change and build a new.

"No-Win" is a poem written about a dream. In the dream the poet is trapped, alone and confused. The man is exhausted and can no longer run away even though his manhood has suffered abuse. Although Shakur is haunted by the event of abuse and has run away before, he finds that it is time to stand up to the abuser. In the poet's mind there is no longer the capacity to accept this horrible fate, and if Shakur must kill to protect himself, that is what will happen.

"The Unanswerable?" is a simple problem that asks when there will be peace on earth. Shakur's answer is, "When the earth falls to pieces!"

Shakur states that the powerful and rich people will always forge ahead, while the poor will always struggle to survive strife. If a person marries struggles with perfection, one's



faults will always seem magnified. One must remember to always obey the heart, otherwise the soul will be haunted by nightmares.

"So I Say Goodbye" is the poem written before some unidentified event in Shakur's life. Regardless of the outcome of this event, Shakur says that it is important to know that he did everything he could and must live with the results.

The final poem in "The Rose That Grew from Concrete" is titled "In the Event of My Demise." In this poem Shakur states that in the end he hopes he will have died for a belief or a principal that represented him as a person. The poet knows that he will die before it is time, because he feels a sense of pervasive darkness. Although Shakur was never able to accomplish all of the goals that he set forth, he willingly accepts that there is not much life left. In the end, the poet says that he loved all of the people who were positive influences in his life.

Section 4 Analysis

Shakur has a lot of resentment in regards to the justice system. Although Lady Justice is supposedly blind, Shakur asks someone to buy glasses for her and Lady Liberty. However, the blindness that is supposedly in place still allows for the justice system to persecute minorities while allowing the rich and powerful to escape prosecution, no matter how violent and despicable their crimes.

The poet wonders how those who are less fortunate can possibly persevere and rise above when the government is continually pushing them back down while showing favoritism to those who already have so much. These people are not asking for handouts, simply fairness.

Shakur struggles to find his place in the middle between struggle and success. It is obvious that the poet makes a strong attempt to remember his roots and how his upbringing encouraged him to follow dreams and achieve goals that were once considered impossible.

Although Shakur works hard to advance in career as well as in his personal relationships, there are times when circumstances seem to take control. It is unclear why Shakur allows this to happen, one can only surmise that it is a combination of one's nature plus times that defeat seems eminent. One can only wonder what might have happened if Shakur had totally removed himself from the environment that created him.

Predicting one's own death has been a common thread throughout history. Many relate this to a primal instinct, akin to fight or flight. Much has been written about people, regardless of age, race or occupation, who have predicted that the end is near. This applies to people in all stages of life and health, not just those that are aged, ill or dying.

This phenomenon seems to apply to Shakur's life, as well. In the poem, "So I Say Goodbye", gives the reader a clue that something is about to happen to Shakur. Although there seems to be an element of choice in whatever is about to occur, Shakur

seems almost powerless to stop it. Regardless of the circumstances, this is something that Shakur is driven to do, and the poet claims that he will have to live with the results of his own actions.

"In the Event of My Demise" tells the reader that Shakur knows the end is near. The poet is only 25 years old, yet he knows that death is coming. However much Shakur wishes to continue on the path of completing his goals, personally and professionally, there is a part of him that is prepared for death and does not fear its arrival. While there was some sadness, Shakur claims that he has "come 2 grips with the possibility." The end of the poem, and the book, sends love to those positive influences in the poet's life.



Characters

Tupac Shakur appears in All

Tupac Shakur (1971-1996) was a rapper, civil rights activist, producer, actor, and poet. Born in California, Shakur was raised in New York City in impoverished conditions.

Shakur started out as a roadie for a hip hop group before breaking out with his first album, *2Pacalypse Now*. The album immediately caught the attention of critics who both praised and condemned Shakur for his brutally realistic views on poverty, gangs, racism, and drugs. Although there were many that objected to the violent and explicit nature of Shakur's music, the controversy only elevated the rising star's influence. It was Shakur that is credited with taking rap to a new level, adopting the moniker "Gangsta Rap." Shakur remains listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the hip hop artist with the highest number of records sold, a total of more than seventy five million worldwide.

Despite Shakur's stellar success, the rapper could not seem to avoid trouble. A number of lawsuits plagued Shakur and the rapper often considered himself to be a target of many who opposed his views. Shakur was shot five times in a New York recording studio, an event that led Shakur to believe that he had been set up. That incident began the East Coast - West Coast rivalry between a number of rappers. The conflict escalated and resulted in many acts of violence.

Despite legal troubles and growing conflicts with other rappers, Shakur's career continued to soar. In 1996, Shakur was the victim of a drive-by shooting in Las Vegas. Shakur was shot four times and died six days later. He was 25 years old.

Nikki Giovanni appears in Tupac C U in Heaven

Nikki Giovanni (1973 -) is a poet, activist, feminist and writer who is well known for her outspoken views on a number of topics, including racial equality. Giovanni is also a Distinguished Professor at Virginia Tech's English Department. Giovanni was present at the Virginia Tech Massacre and in fact, taught the shooter in one of her poetry classes. Giovanni referred to the shooter, Seung-Hui Cho, as "downright mean" and sought to have him removed from her class. Giovanni was one of the professors that came forth after the tragedy to try to ease the pain of colleagues and students.

Giovanni's early work was mostly inspired by the civil rights movement and black power. Giovanni is known as an outspoken woman with strong views on a number of topics although she spends a great deal of time lecturing on non-violence and hate crimes.

Tupac Shakur was a friend of Giovanni's and someone that the fellow poet admired. Giovanni wears a tattoo that reads "Thug Life" in honor of the rapper. Her 1997 book of poetry, "Love Poems," was written in memory of Shakur.



April Shakur appears in Wife 4 Life, Tears from a Star, March 1st - The Day After Ap

Tupac's wife.

Afeni Shakur appears in Family Tree, When Ure Hero Falls

Tupac's mother

Mrs. Yusef Hawkins appears in For Mrs. Hawkins

A woman who lost her son to a hate crime.

Vincent Van Gogh appears in Starry Night

a famed painter known for vibrant images and mental instability.

Marilyn Monroe appears in The Shining Star Within!

An actress and sex symbol of the 1960s who died mysteriously.

Renee Ross appears in Genesis

The love interest and woman who Shakur credits with reviving his heart.

Marquita appears in Black Woman

Marquita is a beautiful black woman that exudes a tremendous amount of personal power, a trait admired by Shakur.

Jada appears in 4 Jada

One of Shakur's love interests and muses.



Objects/Places

Justice System appears in Liberty Needs Glasses

In Shakur's eyes, the justice system has a lot to answer for in regards to its ill treatment of minorities. Although Justice is supposed to be blind to race, social status, political power and wealth, Shakur asserts that the reality is exactly the opposite. While many fat cat politicians continue to get away with a wide variety of crimes, those in the lower class or of a different ethnic background are prosecuted and persecuted for lesser crimes.

This opinion is not new nor does it only apply to the American justice system. Shakur refers to the imprisonment of South African leader Nelson Mandela, the man who spent 27 years in a prison because of his political beliefs and stand against apartheid. Mandela was finally released and managed to make significant changes in South Africa and throughout the world, however skewed justice systems still exist and often seem unlikely or unwilling to change.

Poverty appears in Government Assistance, Family Tree

Poverty plays a huge part in Shakur's work and his life. Tupac Shakur grew up in East Harlem in New York City, a part of the city known for extreme poverty and violence. The Shakur family routinely struggles to make ends meet and do the best they can in order to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. There are many times when the family goes hungry due to lack of money and food, yet neighbors and friends are not in any position to offer assistance.

Shakur writes about government assistance and how it would be easy to apply for help from the government so that he could eat. Shakur sees asking the government for help as an act of degradation and refers to it using the metaphor of the hunted asking the hunter for meat. Shakur claims that while he may be cold and hungry, the lack of food and shelter is still preferable to selling his soul to the government.

Poverty is a predominant subject in many of Shakur's poetry and music and is credited with bringing awareness to those in power.

American Government appears in Government Assistance

Shakur believes in the premise of the government but sees that it does not treat people equally and therefore is not living up to its promises. This can be seen in the court system, civil rights movement and laws, and the distribution of wealth.



Zap's appears in At First Glance

A famous bar in New York City

Pretoria appears in Just a Breath of Freedom

The capital of South Africa, site of civil and political unrest.

America appears in Liberty Needs Glasses, Just a Breath of Freedom

Shakur is a staunch supporter of America but sees many flaws in its civil rights laws and stand on racial equality.

Family Tree appears in Family Tree

Family Tree covers Shakur's feelings about his own family tree, with his mother at the helm.

Society appears in Just a Breath of Freedom

Shakur refers to the inequality of society in reference to minorities and the persecution of activists.

Bronx appears in Carmencita of the Bronx!

The Bronx is one of the five boroughs of New York City and home to Shakur's friend Carmen.

Liberty appears in Liberty Needs Glasses

Shakur questions the impartiality of liberty as it pertains to minorities.



Themes

Poverty

Poverty is one of the central themes in *The Rose That Grew from Concrete* as well as in Tupac Shakur's music. Shakur grew up in the East Harlem section of New York City, a part of the city known for extreme poverty and violence. Throughout Shakur's youth, poverty was a way of life and the Shakur family routinely struggled to make ends meet. There were many times when there was not enough food to eat and the family's friends and neighbors are not in any position to offer assistance.

Want shapes a person. One can easily see a common thread in Shakur's work regarding reaching for dreams yet fearing that they will become real only long enough to elevate him out of poverty and then cast him back down. There is a fear associated with poverty and the struggle to survive whether it regards having a roof over one's head, having enough to eat, or trying to exist outside of the violence of a ghetto.

Shakur knows that there are some things a person in poverty can do to get help, even if only temporarily. The poet writes about applying for government assistance and how it would be easy to get welfare so he could eat. Yet Shakur sees asking the government for help as an act of degradation and claims that while he may be hungry, the lack of food is better than selling his soul to the government.

Liberty and Justice

In Shakur's eyes, the justice system has a lot to answer for in regards to its ill treatment of minorities. Although Justice is supposed to be blind to race, social status, political power and wealth, Shakur asserts that the reality is exactly the opposite. While many fat cat politicians continue to get away with a wide variety of crimes, those in the lower class or of a different ethnic background are prosecuted and persecuted for lesser crimes.

If the way to true liberty cannot be granted as it was promised then there needs to be action taken so that the injustices can be corrected and prevented from reoccurring. This is why Shakur admires people like Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Nelson Mandela, and the Black Panthers. Each in his own way was fighting against the justice systems, both in America and abroad. It is the role of the activist to make politicians and the public see the light and to learn the depths of its own unfairness.

Shakur makes his point in a humorous way when he suggests that someone take Lady Liberty and Mrs. Justice to get glasses.

One of the most well documented cases of injustice was the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela, the South African political figure who was arrested due to his political beliefs



and stand against apartheid. Mandela was kept in prison for nearly three decades while his supporters fought for justice and the man's release.

Fate

There are several elements in Shakur's poetry that suggests the possibility and presence of Fate. One is the loss of the baby through a miscarriage. While Shakur is saddened over the loss of the child, it seems that fate will make sure the baby is waiting for its parents in the hereafter. It may have been fate that prevented the child from coming into a world in which its parents were unprepared to care for it properly.

Probably the most evident references to fate appear in the final two poems: "So I Say Goodbye" and "In the Event of My Demise."

In "So I Say Goodbye," Shakur speaks of an unidentified event that could possibly change his life forever. Although Shakur has a choice whether or not to go through with what is laid before him, it seems as if fate has written the next pages of the poet's life. Shakur has learned to accept whatever comes.

In the poem titled, "In the Event of My Demise," it is clear that Shakur has seen and is prepared for his own death.



Style

Point of View

There is more than one point of view used in "The Rose That Grew from Concrete." For the majority of the work, the point of view is first person. First person in poetry is common since it allows the poet to convey a certain level of subjectivity and emotion that would otherwise not be possible. Considering Shakur's depth of emotion and bevy of experiences regarding relationships, success, failure, poverty and violence, using the first person is a logical and correct choice to convey the poet's feelings and ideas.

The first person is also interesting in regards to the opinions based on historical facts. Shakur has definite opinions on the lives and actions of various civil rights activists which may or may not mirror the events as they happened.

The third person point of view is used in several poems that do not require as much subjectivity but rather an overall view of a particular situation. This point of view gives the reader more of a chance to decide facts on their own merit rather than through the opinion of the poet.

A good example of the third person point of view can be seen in "Can U C the Pride in the Panther," in which Shakur uses a metaphor of the wild cat to compare to the activist group of the 1960s and 1970s. Both groups exhibit a great amount of pride and ferocity best seen through the eyes of an objective viewer.

Setting

There is not one single setting used throughout Shakur's poetry. Rather, there are brief mentions of various locations while most of the work relates to emotions such as love and disillusionment.

Various parts of New York City are featured throughout the book. The Bronx is mentioned in "Carmencita of the Bronx!" Carmen is a girl that is a friend of Shakur's and the Bronx is a nearby and familiar locale to one who grew up in New York City.

Zap's is a famous bar in Manhattan that is often patronized by celebrities. Shakur writes "At First Glance," a poem to a girl he meets at the bar.

Shakur grew up in East Harlem, a location known for poverty and violence. The elements taken from his neighborhood are woven throughout the work as an inescapable part of the poet.

Shakur has much to say about America, from its justice system to liberty to opportunity, violence, and poverty. In Shakur's eyes, America does not do enough to protect the downtrodden or the minorities, thereby breaking its promises.



Pretoria, South Africa is also referenced in "Just a Breath of Freedom." Pretoria is the capitol of South Africa and the sight of much of the political uprising that Nelson Mandela worked so hard to combat.

Language and Meaning

The language used throughout "The Rose That Grew from Concrete" by Tupac Shakur may be seen as typical in the world of slang and hip hop. Shakur often uses erroneous spellings, abbreviations, and replaces words with numbers as a way to stylize the writing and poetry. Many critics have dismissed work that does not follow traditional language patterns and that may be part of the reason Shakur chose to write this way.

The altered spelling and language adds an air of modern day flair to the work although at times it seems to detract from the mood or concept that the writer is attempting to convey. There are some poems that do not contain this version of shorthand although it is not made clear why this is so.

Overall, there is little slang that would be difficult for the average reader to decipher. The level of vocabulary is higher than one might expect from someone of Shakur's reputation and the poet has structured the work and words with care.

It is also refreshing to see that included in the book are the original handwritten documents and that the language has not changed from the original.

Structure

"The Rose That Grew from Concrete" by Tupac Shakur is a book of poetry containing a total of 151 pages.

There are four sections in the book. The first section, "The Rose That Grew from Concrete," is comprised of 16 poems in 33 pages. The second section, "Nothing Can Come Between Us," is comprised of 33 poems in 64 pages. The third section, "Just a Breath of Freedom," is comprised of 14 poems in 29 pages. The fourth section, "Liberty Needs Glasses," is comprised of 9 in 15 pages. The longest section is 64 pages in length; the shortest section is 15 pages in length. The average length of the sections is 35 pages in length.

Each poem is two pages long. One page is the original handwritten poem from Shakur. The second page is the typeset version of the same poem.

Each section has a specific topic. Although topics tend to be used more as guidelines than as strict headings, the poems seem to follow a common thread, which gives the reader a clear picture of the poet's views, feelings, and thought processes.

The sections can be seen as housing four main topics: survival and hope; love and friendship; freedom, and liberty. In these, Shakur separates poems into running themes that create an even flow to the work.



Quotes

"I exist in the depths of solitude pondering my true goal."
Page 5

"The tears I cry R bitter and warm; they flow with life but take no form; I cry because my heart is torn."
Page 7

"Life through my bloodshot eyes would scare a square 2 death."
Page 11

"I cannot bear captivity; where my culture, I'm told holds no significance."
Page 15

"I am not a perfectionist, but I still seek perfection."
Page 17

"I only follow my voice inside."
Page 27

"I don't have everything; as a matter of fact I don't have anything; except a dream of a better day."
Page 47

"I know my heart is lied before; but now it speaks with honesty."
Page 67

"My faults could scare the night."
Page 73

"I reminisce about your touch, and suddenly miss the scent u wear, the tone of your voice."
Page 97

"Your ways are similar 2 the rays of the sun; warm 2 many but 2 strong 4 some."
Page 109



"Strength is overcome by weakness."

Page 121

"I will give you liberty, but first give me your spirit."

Page 139

"I hope I die for a principle or a belief that I had lived for."

Page 150

Topics for Discussion

How might Shakur's life have changed if he had removed himself from his previous environment and all its negative aspects?

What would Shakur's work be like today if he were still alive?

Do you think that Shakur's work was given more or less credit than it deserved due to his untimely demise? Discuss.

Do you think Shakur's professional life would have changed in a significant way if the baby had lived? Explain.

Do you believe that fate played a role in Shakur's death?

How might Shakur have avoided being assassinated?

Do you feel that Shakur's icons, such as Huey Newton and Nelson Mandela, seriously affected the tone of his poetry and music? How?