

# Intertextuality and the context of reception: *The Lowest Place* by Christina Rossetti

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### Lesson plan

#### Resources needed

- ❖ Post-it notes
- ❖ **Resource A** – copies of *The Lowest Place*
- ❖ **Resource B** – film clip of *The Lowest Place*
- ❖ **Resource C** – copies of the poem with corresponding Bible verses
- ❖ **Resource D** – analysis task sheets

#### Learning objectives

- ❖ To understand the possible meanings of the poem
- ❖ To consider Rossetti's use of the Bible and the religious beliefs of the Victorians

#### Starter activity – prayers and wishes

- ❖ What do people generally pray or wish for?
  - Write ideas on post-its then stick up on board at front of classroom
    - Get a volunteer to come up and read post-its and try to sort into categories
    - What are the types of things we think people generally request?

#### Main activity 1 – reading and responding

- ❖ Read the poem *The Lowest Place* [**Resource A**] and establish that it is a prayer – a person giving a request to God
  - Hear students' initial responses:
    - Why might a person pray for the lowest place?
    - What reasons does the narrator give in the poem? (annotate them)
    - What other reasons can we think of?
  - Students choose a word to describe what they think about

the poem's narrator, and then justify their choice: sweet, ridiculous, humble, devout, obsessed. 'I think the narrator is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.'

#### Main activity 2 – understanding the poem through the lens of the Bible

- ❖ Watch the film clip [**resource B**] in conjunction with the handout [**Resource C**]
  - Does this change our opinion of the narrator at all?
- ❖ Read again the Luke quotation.
  - What values does Jesus promote here? (e.g. humility, self-denial, sacrifice, considering eternal rewards instead of immediate pleasures, not being proud, etc.)
    - How does Rossetti reveal these values in her prayer?
    - What does that suggest about her and other Victorian women?
  - What sort of picture does Rossetti have of heaven and where has this come from?
    - How does this compare to our own ideas?

#### Main activity 3 – analysis jigsaw group tasks

- ❖ Divide class into three groups and assign each group one of the task sheets [**Resource D**]
  - Then jigsaw the groups into threes so that each new group has someone from each of the original three groups. Students peer-teach what they have been analysing.

#### Plenary

- ❖ Students summarise the poem and its purpose into one or two sentences
  - Hear some ideas.

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### Homework

- ❖ Students can undertake either of:
  - Research – Use the Cross Reference website to do further reading on the poem (<http://www.crossref-it.info/textguide/The-poetry-of-Christina-Rossetti/28/1871>)
  - An essay – Analyse the language, structure and meaning of *The Lowest Place*, carefully consider the way in which the poem is inspired by the Bible.

**Resources**

**Resource A**

***The Lowest Place* by Christina Rossetti**

Give me the lowest place: not that I dare  
Ask for that lowest place, but Thou hast died  
That I might live and share  
Thy glory by Thy side.

Give me the lowest place: or if for me  
That lowest place too high, make one more low  
Where I may sit and see  
My God and love Thee so.

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**Resource B** – <http://www.crossref-it.info/articles/483/The-Lowest-Place>

## **Resource C - *The Lowest Place* by Christina Rossetti**

**Luke 14:8-11** <sup>8</sup>When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room ... <sup>10</sup>But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher... <sup>11</sup>For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Give me the lowest place: not that I dare  
Ask for that lowest place, but Thou hast died  
That I might live and share  
Thy glory by Thy side.

**Romans 6:4** <sup>4</sup>like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Give me the lowest place: or if for me  
That lowest place too high, make one more low  
Where I may sit and see  
My God and love Thee so.

**Luke 10:39** <sup>39</sup>Mary ... sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word

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## Resource D

### Group one – analysing language

- 1) Find and label the following on your poem:
  - Imperative verbs (commands)
  - Archaic (old fashioned) language
  - Monosyllables (words with only one sound or 'beat')
  - Pronouns (words which replace a noun e.g. 'I', 'you')
  - Religious words
  - Sibilance (repetition of 's' sounds).
- 2) For each feature you have labelled, try to make notes on the effects created
- 3) Which of these words describe the language and tone of the poem and why? (make notes on your poem explaining your choices)
  - Direct
  - Elevated
  - Simple
  - Angry
  - Demanding
  - Child-like
  - Trusting.

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## **Group two – analysing structure**

- 1) Find and label the following on your poem:
  - Repetition
  - Rhyme
  - Pairings (something and something)
  - Opposites
  - Enjambement (where a sentence runs onto the next line of verse, rather than having a full stop at the end of the line).
- 2) For each feature you have labelled, try to make notes on the effects created.
- 3) Which of these words describe the structure of the poem and why? (make notes on your poem explaining your choices)
  - Simple
  - Patterned
  - Repetitive
  - Song-like
  - Jerky.
- 4) What overall effect was Rossetti trying to imitate? (Clue: Try singing the poem. Where might this kind of song be sung?)

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### Group three – analysing meaning and message

1. Discuss and make notes on what the poem suggests about:
  - The role of Victorian women
  - The strength of Rossetti's religious faith
  - Beliefs in heaven and the afterlife
  - Beliefs about the nature of humanity's relationship with God
  - Beliefs about the purpose of prayer
  - The paradoxes (apparent contradictions) of the Christian faith (think carefully about the Bible verses and the opposites suggested – high and low, dead and alive)
2. Then consider:
  - Why did Rossetti write this poem?
    - Is it private and for public use?
    - Personal or universal?
  - How is the reader to respond to the poem?
    - How might the Victorian reader respond differently from the modern reader?