

The Road by Cormac McCarthy - Key Ideas & Techniques - ANSWERS

ACTIVITY 1: KEY IDEAS

Key Idea	Significant Quotations - Find two quotations, that you think illustrate this key idea in the novel.	Commentary - Using your chosen quotation as an example, explain what McCarthy is saying about this idea in the novel.
1. Parental Love	McCarthy is showing the reader the extent to which a parent like the man would go to protect his son.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you." (pg 80) 2. "He knew only that the child was his warrant." Pg. 3 3. "The boy was all that stood between him and death." Pg 25 approx
2. Social Catastrophe (The Road is part of the genre of apocalyptic science-fiction, that deals with a future world in which a catastrophe has befallen a world and humanity struggles to survive. How is The Road a commentary on a possible future for the world?)	McCarthy is critiquing contemporary society's obsession with material possessions. By showing us a world in The Road where humankind has lost access to these possessions and security, and consequently have deteriorated to a cannibalistic state, he is critiques the modern materialist world. McCarthy employs the characters of the man and the boy to demonstrate how love is what keeps us human and moral, not material possessions.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "The richness of a vanished world" pg. 147 – description of the bunker. 2. "Within a year there were fires on the ridges and deranged chanting, the screams of the murdered by day the dead impaled on spikes along the road." Pg. 33 – emphasizes the horror that has befallen the world. 3. "Like the dying world, the newly blind inhabit, all of it slowly fading from memory." Pg. 17
3. Death, Survival & Morality – (Which values are worth sacrificing for survival?)	McCarthy critiques the lengths that people will go to to survive, highlighting that retaining morality is more important than ultimate survival. Eg. Cannibalism Death as a method of coping/ survival as illustrated in the figure of the wife. The role of values in society and how these are more vulnerable in this new world. It is not as important as survival.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Nobody wants to be here, nobody wants to leave." Pg. ? – Despite the horror and struggle, people would rather just survive even if it means sacrificing your morality. 2. "Are we going to kill them?" pg 273 – The boy says this to his father, after they are attacked. 3. "Sooner or later, they will catch us and kill us. They will rape me and they will rape him. They are going to rape us, kill us and eat us." Pg. 58 – Mother's justification for her suicide

ACTIVITY 2: TECHNIQUES

Techniques	Example Quotation - Find at least one example for each technique listed.	Commentary - Using your chosen quotation, explain how McCarthy uses this technique to explore a central idea in The Road?
1. Setting (In The Road, the setting is evoked via repetition, the effects of accumulation, connotation, choice of adjectives and adverbs. It is also significant, because through the choice of setting, McCarthy draws attention to the novel's genre.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. "The blackened shapes of rock standing out of the shoals of ash, and billows of ash, rising and blowing down country through the waste." 5. "<u>Nights dark beyond darkness and days more grey each one then what had gone before.</u>" Pg 1 6. "The shape of a city stirred in the <u>greyness</u> like a charcoal drawing sketched across the <u>waste.</u>" 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repetition of the word "ash". Negative oppressive connotative effect of words such as "waste" and "blackened". 2. Repetitive echo in the repetition of the phrase structure. Negative, oppressive words "dark", "darkness", "grey" 3. Repetition of "grey", "waste". Employs a simile likening the city to "a charcoal drawing". <p>Central Ideas explored:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social catastrophe - Parental love – what will the man be willing to do to ensure the boy survives in this bleak and desperate world (morality, survival)

<p>2. Anonymity (i) personal names (ii) place names</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "I could be anybody" – said by Ely in conversation with the man after he asks him his name. Place names": 2. "A raw hill country, aluminium houses, at times they could see stretches of the interstate highway below them...just beyond the high gap in the mountains they stood and looked out over the great gulf to the south." Pg. 12, 13 "Why are they called state roads?" "Because they used to belong to the states. What used to be called the states." "But there's not anymore states?" "No". Pg. 43 3. The catastrophe -"A long shear of light then a series of low concussions" pg. 	<p>contrast this against the action of others who resort to cannibalism.</p> <p>Emphasizes the sense of loss, ie. The world has changed so much, that the old names of places, people no longer matter. Creates a sense of mystery, heightens anxiety, adds to suspense Makes it easier for the reader to relate and understand the event Gives the man and boy as characters a symbolic importance, helps focus the reader on their plight and love for each other. Details of place names etc could be distracting Lack of names for the characters, again highlights how this world has changed, emphasis is no longer on your identity, your job, your place of residence etc such details don't matter anymore, when life is about survival</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For instance, symbolic act of throwing away his wallet. Wallets usually contain information regarding person's identity, job, residence...etc
<p>3. Imagery and Symbolism (i) horror (ii) religion</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "The mummy dead everywhere, the flesh clothen along the bones, the ligaments dried to tug and taunt as wires." Pg 23 "A charred human infant, headless and gutted, and blackening on the spit" pg. 212 2. Symbol of fire "carrying the fire" – double meaning as it can destroy but provide warmth, but also reference to the Holy Spirit, goodness. "Shivering in their rags, mendican friars sent forth to find their keep." Pg. 106 "What if I said he is a God?" pg. 125 "If he is not the word of God, then God never spoke" pg. 3 Burning bush "carrying the fire" 	<p>Symbol of the complete devastation of humanity, loss of morality of values. It is human instinct, to love your child but this has been destroyed in this new world. One of the people responsible for this horror is a pregnant woman, implying that she might be willing to sacrifice her own baby to satisfy her and her companions' hunger. Deliberate contrast of the man and his son's relationship, where the father will do anything to protect his son. Symbol – fire is the holy spirit ie. father, son are "carrying the fire" McCarthy constantly makes religious allusions in <i>The Road</i> to highlight the boy's symbolic importance, as he represent through his actions and his father's love the only hope for humanity. These religious references help ensure that the novel is also redemptive, despite its darkness. Effectively gives the reader hope.</p>
<p>4. Narrative Perspective (How does the choice of narrative perspective affect <i>The Reader</i>?)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Third person narration – point of view/reference character for most of the novel is the man. 2. In response to man's illness, the narrative perspective changes to a third person focus on the son 	<p>Effect of this is to create enough distance between the reader and the central character to ensure the man's anonymity and symbolic importance, as representing goodness and morality in this new world. It also ensures the reader's sympathy for the man and his son's struggle. Shows how the son now takes control of his existence and demonstrates his independence and ability to survive without his father.</p>
<p>5. Structure (i) The man and boy's conversations (ii) Contrast/ Juxtaposition</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "And nothing bad is going to happen to us?" That's right. Because we're carrying the fire. Yes. Because we're carrying the fire."pg 87 2. Father willing to protect the boy & struggle to survive / mother's suicide Son's charity, morality/ Father's paranoia and fear of others Cannibal house/ "tiny paradise" bunker Cannibal mother and "charred infant"/ father's love for his son 	<p>Often after a horrific or scary event, there is a conversation between the man and child in which the father offers his son reassurance. Effect of juxtapositions is to draw attention to particular themes in the novel.</p>