

Color Codes:

TS: Topic Sentence (including story, in quotation marks, genre (short story), author's name, lit device used, how it shapes your character of choice, and for what purpose)

SM: Summary/ Context of Story

CX: Context to quotation

CD: Concrete Detail (blended in)

CM: Commentary (3+ sentences each)

CS: Concluding Sentence

UA: Universal Application (optional)

Sample Student

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English I, Period 3A

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Darkened Sadness

In James Hurst's short story, "The Scarlet Ibis" the author utilizes vivid imagery throughout the story to help readers understand and emotionally connect to the loss that Brother, the unnamed protagonist, feels. The story itself outlines a memory of Brother and the few years he spent with his younger brother, William "Doodle" Armstrong. Doodle was born with a weak heart, was never expected to live, and yet, miraculously, lives on until he is seven. Sadly, Brother witnesses the death of Doodle, having overexerted his heart, and Brother cannot seem to get over this extreme sense of sadness. From the start, by the vivid description of the setting Brother provides, we can tell that Brother relives the life of Doodle, and more significantly, the

death, as pungently fresh in his mind; he has not yet seemed to overcome the guilt and sadness he faces, despite several months, or even years, having passed after the death of Doodle. When describing the state of the flower garden in the year that Doodle passed, Brother notes that it “was strained with rotting brown magnolia petals, and ironweeds grew rank amidst the purple phlox” (1). Brother could have mentioned something simpler, perhaps noting that the garden was withering away from the summer heat, but with intricate detail and imagery, we can picture the pinkish-white, now browned magnolia flowers, and the decayed destruction of thorny ironweeds ruining the once picturesque, budding, bright purple phlox flowers. We can also almost smell the rot and decay of something that once was beautiful and now is a disgrace. Significantly, because such description is incredibly vivid, we understand that Brother is a sad and distraught character, torn by the memory of images of the loss of his younger brother. Just as the author intends, we too, through such imagery, are brought back with Brother into a burning, nostalgic time, and, as we continue to read the details brought forth through the story and understand that his beloved Brother passes at his hands, this initial paragraph becomes emotionally significant. For Brother, as well as the reader, there is a overwhelming sense of sadness, and the mood set by the vivid description is one of regret and despair. Not only does Hurst create a strikingly vivid garden in the opening scene, but this type of imagery is used throughout the story, as Brother and Doodle age, as they learn to love each other, and ultimately, as Doodle dies. The memory that most likely pains Brother the most is the moments leading up to Doodle’s death, as Brother runs through a storm back to the house, feeling defeated at his attempts to strengthen Doodle, and not caring to make sure Doodle was okay. Describing the storm, Brother notes that “the rain was coming, roaring through the pines, and then, like a bursting Roman candle, a gum tree ahead of us was shattered by a bolt of lightning” (11).

Again, if this was a memory of distant past, the image of a Roman Candle, a brilliant firework, and the ear-piercing sound of shattering, may not have been remembered—unless the one remembering still felt stung and dismayed by such memories. For Brother, the memory of Doodle's life and the day of his death will never become dull, and thus, we can understand that Brother himself is sorrowful and depressed. The imagery itself here is not a pretty one, and, while thunderstorms can be described with wonder and amazement, a positive appreciation placed upon them, the thunderstorm, to Brother, ugly and vicious. This ultimately takes the reader in with Brother, and we, too, see the thunderstorm as a necessary type of evil, especially when we connect it with Doodle crying out for mercy to his brother, and then experience the death of Doodle only four paragraphs later. Thus, with intricacy, James Hurst, through the lens of the narrator of Brother, uses vivid and dark imagery to shape the depressed and regretful mind of Brother and ultimately emotionally impact the reader, allowing him or her to experience the sadness and dismay Brother himself felt. By this, we can understand that Brother's suffering was not unique, but this pain itself is universal.