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Marigolds
Eugenia Collier



The memories of growing up may not always be pleasant, but will always be there to sway the outlook that one has on life. In the short story "Marigolds", Eugenia Collier uses the theme of immaturity to tell the story of a girl, Lizabeth, who at the beginning of the story is an immature child but as the story develops, matures into a young adult. Collier uses symbolism, internal thoughts, and metaphors best to represent the claim that growing up changes one's perspective on the right and wrong of life.

To begin, Collier uses the symbol of the marigolds to represent the hazardous journey of growing up. Lizabeth, frustrated with her new realization of her poor, dirty life, sneaks out to Miss Lottie's garden and "leaped furiously into the mounds of marigolds, trampling and pulling and destroying the perfect yellow blooms" (89). At first Lizabeth viewed the Marigolds as something that was out of place and didn't belong. She was confused because they were the one beautiful thing out of all of the ugliness in Mrs. Lottie's yard. However, as soon as Lizabeth destroyed them, she realized that they were the only beautiful thing that Mrs. Lottie possessed and she felt miserable that she had ruined them. By the end of the story, she was capable of putting herself in other people's shoes and she says, "And I too have planted marigolds" (90). The fact that Lizabeth plants marigolds clearly shows that her journey of maturing had changed the way she saw the world. The marigolds, a representation of the hazardous journey of growing up, made Lizabeth capable of understanding other people's feelings and not just her own.

Next, Collier uses a metaphor to show how the maturing that one goes through effects the way one sees their loved ones. Immaturity often prevents one from seeing the truth of what's really right in front of them. Lizabeth, at first, was convinced that her father was the "rock" of the family. Then, as she finally opened her eyes up to the truth, she comes to realize that that was not the case. "My mother, who was small and soft, was now the strength of the family, my father, who was the rock on which the family had been built, was sobbing like the tiniest child. Everything was suddenly out of tune, like a broken accordion" (88). The metaphor compares Lizabeth's father to a rock which shows that Lizabeth at first, believed that her father was the foundation of the family. She then realizes that it wasn't her father who was; it was her mother. The reason Lizabeth could now see this truth is because she was finally not a kid anymore, she had grown into a woman. A woman that was capable of seeing that even the strongest, durable thing is not always the provider. Her mother, soft and small, was the actual rock that grounded the family. Collier uses that metaphor to show that growing up is strong enough to change the way we see our loved ones.

 Finally, Collier uses an internal thought to show how drastically growing up can change the way one views other people. Lizabeth realizes her journey of immaturity was coming to an end and she was finally reaching "the end of innocence." She thinks to herself, "In that humiliating moment I looked beyond myself and into the depths of another person. This was the beginning of compassion, and one cannot have both compassion and innocence" (90). Collier is trying to show through Lizabeth's internal thoughts that the youth cannot have compassion. Compassion is gained through maturity and Lizabeth, at the beginning of the story, did not have enough maturity to understand compassion. By the end of the story however, she had grown up into a woman and was capable of understanding sympathy for others. For Lizabeth, Mrs. Lottie was the first apprehension of compassion. She realizes, "the witch was no

longer a witch but a broken old woman who had dared to create beauty in the midst of ugliness and sterility" (89). The way Lizabeth had viewed Mrs. Lottie at first was immature and childish. Yet, she realizes that Mrs. Lottie was only trying to keep some beauty in her life despite all of the ugliness surrounding her. Collier's use of internal thoughts has shown that one's outlook on other people can change dramatically during the journey of growing up.