Request to a Year

SUMMARY

The speaker says that if the year itself is trying to think of a worthy present to give her, she'd like her great-great-grandmother's way of seeing the world. Her great-great-grandmother famously loved art.

But, seeing as she had eight kids, it was difficult for her to find time to paint. One day, she was perched on top of a towering rock next to a river in Switzerland.

She looked down from that great height and saw her second-eldest son clinging to a small sheet of free-floating ice. He was being swept by the current toward a waterfall, which fell 80 feet to the rocks below.

Meanwhile, her second-eldest daughter, despite being hindered by voluminous underskirts that made it difficult to move, held out a walking stick toward the boy in a desperate, last-ditch attempt to save him (and it thankfully did catch him before he went over the waterfall).

But it was clear to the speaker's great-great-grandmother that there was nothing she could do to help. So, with the artist's ability to focus on one thing amidst everything that's going on, she quickly drew a picture of the events unfolding in front of her. The drawing remains to this day as proof of what happened.

Addressing the year ahead directly, the speaker says that if it hasn't already chosen a Mother's Day gift for her, it should go back in time and retrieve her great-great-grandmother's steadiness and strength.

The speaker emphasizes that, in a terrible moment, her ancestor created art rather than becoming distraught or making a futile attempt at heroism. When the speaker's great-great-grandmother saw one of her sons floating downstream toward a waterfall, she realized that she could do "nothing" to help him because she was too far away. The boy was, "luckily," saved by his sister, but the poem narrates his survival in parentheses; it isn't really the focus of the story. The focus is on the great-great-grandmother's decision to "sketch[] the scene" as it unfolded, using her "artist's isolating eye" to quickly get down the details despite not knowing how the story would end.

There's an old saying that artists must "turn their back on the world" in order to create. Here, the artist is basically turning her back on her own motherly instincts in order to do the only thing she can do in her position: bear witness to what's happening. And the fact the speaker knows this story at all is a testament to her ancestor's successful portrayal of the "scene." The survival of this powerful drawing suggests that memorializing life's events, no matter how tragic, is central to the artist's mission. Artists may not be able to *alter* events, but they can depict them, preserve them, and prevent them from being forgotten.

Some people might be disturbed by the great-great-grandmother's choice to draw what she was seeing, wondering how a mother could remain so calm when her child is in peril. But the speaker admires her ancestor's resolve and essentially asks the universe to grant her "the firmness of her hand"—that is, to grant her the steadiness and control her great-great-grandmother exhibited under the most trying of circumstances.

The speaker asks for this quality as a "Mother's day present," suggesting that she doesn't yet believe herself capable of doing what her great-great-grandmother did. Recording things as they happen *while* they happen requires strength, the poem implies; not everyone can—or would want to—do what the artist does.

THEMES

THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IN DIFFICULT TIMES

In "Request to a Year," the speaker recounts the story behind one of her great-great-grandmother's drawings. She was sitting on top of a rock overlooking a river, when, far below, her son was swept away by the current toward a waterfall. Knowing she couldn't reach him in time to help, she did the only thing she could do: quickly sketch the scene in order to document what happened. The speaker knows this story only because her ancestor had the "firmness of hand" to commit it to paper, and the poem thus makes a case for the value of art in difficult times. Though it may sometimes seem as if artists do nothing useful, the art they create serves an essential purpose: it "survives to prove the story by," helping people to remember and understand events even if they can't always alter them.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12
- Lines 17-22

MOTHERHOOD AND FEMALE STRENGTH

"Request to a Year" illustrates how restrictive gender norms can hinder women's bodies, minds, and creativity. It also praises the strength of women who manage to create and preserve their legacies despite these obstacles.

The poem begins by acknowledging that motherhood and art can come into conflict. The speaker says that, because her

great-great-grandmother "had eight children," she had "little opportunity for painting pictures." In other words, the expectations of motherhood meant she didn't have much time or energy to pursue her art. That the speaker is longing for her ancestor's "firmness" of hand as a Mother's Day gift might imply that she, too, is struggling to balance the demands of motherhood with making art.

Yet the speaker finds courage in reflecting on the strength and perseverance of the women of her family. Understanding that she couldn't help her son, her great-great-grandmother had the strength of mind to sketch his brush with death. In order to preserve her son's story, the great-great-grandmother thus had to defy gendered expectations about what a mother should do in such a situation.

The speaker celebrates her great-great-grandmother for having the strength to create art under such difficult circumstances. The speaker also implicitly praises the quick-thinking of her ancestor's daughter, who, despite being "impeded" by the restrictive women's garments "of the day" managed to save her brother's life. This daughter, too, had to overcome gender-based restrictions (represented by those petticoats) in order to save her family. The poem thus honors multiple generations of women for their strength: the great-great-grandmother, her daughter, and the speaker herself, who upholds her ancestors' legacy by writing this poem.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 2-6
- Lines 13-15
- Lines 18-22

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

If the year ...
... of the arts,

The speaker personifies the "year" ahead, saying that it might be thinking about a "suitable," or appropriate, gift for the speaker. If the year happens to be searching for a gift, the speaker would "like it to be the attitude / of my great-great-grandmother."

The speaker doesn't *really* expect the "year" to magically grant her her great-great-grandmother's "attitude." The "year" isn't capable of *doing* anything. Instead, the speaker seems to be thinking about what she wants to get out of (or work on in) the year to come. She hopes additional time and experience will bring out in her the qualities she admires in her ancestor.

It isn't clear yet what the nature of the great-great-grandmother's "attitude" was, although the speaker does mention that she was a "legendary devotee of the arts." This suggests that the speaker's ancestor's dedication to art is a central part of what she admires about her.

Notice how an abundance of flitting /t/ consonance throughout the stanza adds a subtle musicality to the poem: "meditating a suitable gift," "attitude," "great-great-grandmother," "devotee of the arts." These /t/ sounds have a crispness to them that encourages the reader to really enunciate and pay attention to each word. So far, this "request" feels quite polite and proper.

This stanza also establishes the poem's form, for the most part: most of the stanzas here will be quatrains (or four-line stanzas). The poem doesn't follow a fixed meter or rhyme scheme, instead unfolding almost like a prose tale.

LINES 5-8

who, having had ...
... river in Switzerland

The speaker's great-great-grandmother didn't have much time to pursue her love of art because she had "eight children." Notice the use of alliteration and consonance in line 6:

> and little opportunity for painting pictures,

Those plosive /p/ sends add music and emphasis to the line, calling readers' attention to the great-great-grandmother's passion for art. Readers will learn later in the poem that the speaker herself is meditating on all this around Mother's Day. Perhaps, then, the speaker has felt like her own responsibilities as a mother have been undermining her ability to be an artist.

"One day," the speaker continues, her great-great-grandmother sat atop "a high rock / beside a river in Switzerland." The speaker doesn't mention if this was where her ancestor lived, or if she was vacationing with her family. Either way, notice how the great-great-grandmother has separated herself from the world below. The fact that the speaker mentions this scene right after talking about the burdens of motherhood suggests that the grandmother has perched herself atop this rock in order to have some space and peace to work on her art.

Enjambment across lines 7-8 creates a sense of momentum:

> sat one day on a high rock
> beside a river in Switzerland

Though the reader doesn't yet know where this story is going, this enjambment builds anticipation and tension.

LINES 9-12

and from a ...
... eighty feet below,

The significance of the "high rock" the great-great-grandmother was sitting on becomes clear in the third stanza:

"from a difficult distance," the speaker says, her ancestor saw her "second son, balanced on a small ice-floe" (a sheet of free-floating ice) being swept downriver towards an 80-foot waterfall. In other words, the great-great-grandmother's son was in mortal danger, and she was too far away to do anything about it.

This scene reflects the conflict between motherhood and art mentioned in the previous stanza: the great-great-grandmother presumably climbed on top of this rock to paint (again, readers learn soon enough that she has her art supplies with her), yet this focus on her art has separated her from her child in need.

This stanza is filled with pounding alliteration that adds drama to the poem: "difficult distance," "drift down," "rock-bottom [...] below." Smooth, slippery sibilance adds to the general sense of dread ("distance," "second son," "balanced on a small ice-floe," etc.). Overall, the intense sounds of this stanza signal that something major is happening. Enjambment also rushes the poem along, reflecting the way the boy is being swept towards certain death.

LINES 13-16

while her second ...
... on his way).

The great-great-grandmother was too far away to help her son, but, thankfully, she wasn't the only person seeing this happen: her "second daughter" was also there and "stretched out a last-hope alpenstock" (a hiking staff) for her brother to grab onto (or to snag his clothing).

The speaker notes that this wasn't easy for the daughter to do: she was "impeded" (or hindered) by "the petticoats of the day." In other words, she would have found it difficult to move quickly and surely due to the voluminous undergarments girls were expected to wear at the time.

Listen to the use of caesura and end-stops in lines 13-14:

> while her second daughter, impeded,
> no doubt, by the petticoats of the day,

All these pauses create a choppy, halting rhythm that evokes the difficulty the daughter faces trying to save her brother; her gendered garments are just one more obstacle she has to overcome in order to reach him.

Also notice how the first four stanzas of the poem are, in fact, all a single sentence! The end of this sentence finally comes with the period at the end of line 16, which finally reveals that the boy survives this terrifying incident; that hiking stick his sister stretched out "luckily later caught him on his way."

The boy's rescue is only mentioned in parenthesis, because his survival isn't really the focus of the poem:

> (which luckily later caught him on his way).

The parenthesis undercuts this otherwise climactic moment, suggesting that what the poem is really after—*why* it's recounting this old family story—hasn't been revealed yet.

LINES 17-20

Nothing, it was ...
... the story by.

The revelation that the boy survived has taken some of the tension out of the tale; the speaker wants readers to focus on her ancestor's actions without worrying about what happened to the boy. He is not the subject of the story the speaker wants to tell.

Now, having assured readers that the boy would be fine, the speaker backtracks to consider what her great-great-grandmother did during this ordeal. She says that it was "evident" (or apparent) that her great-great-grandmother could do "Nothing" to help her son—she was simply too far away, and any attempts she made at heroism would be in vain.

Yet rather than despairing or screaming pointlessly for help, the great-great-grandmother had the presence of mind to try to capture the details of what was happening. Creating a record of what was happening to her son was the only thing she *could* do.

She had "the artist's isolating eye," the speaker says, meaning that her great-great-grandmother was able to cut through the noise and focus on what mattered. She "hastily sketched the scene," and that drawing now "survives to prove the story by." In other words, the sketch still exists and offers proof that this story really happened.

Listen to all the sonic devices in the following lines:

> And with the artist's eye
> My great-great-grandmother hastily sketched the scene.
> The sketch survives to prove the story by.

All that sibilance and consonance emphasize what is more or less the "moral" of this poem. The poem isn't *just* preserving the speaker's family story; it is making an argument about the role of art—and of the artist. The artist, the poem suggests, is meant to bear witness: to pay attention to what is going on around them, and memorialize these events in art.

If the great-great-grandmother had been standing close enough to the river to actually help her son, there's no doubt she would have acted as her daughter did rather than "sketching the scene." Art was never going to save the boy; it could only tell the "story" of his rescue (or demise, seeing as the great-great-grandmother didn't know what the outcome of this story would be when she recorded it). The poem thus doesn't suggest that art is meant to be a *substitute* for action; rather, it's

something people may turn to when they have nothing else.

Note that in addition to another end rhyme between lines 18 and 20 ("eye" and "by"), there's also a slant end rhyme between lines 17 and 19 ("done" and "scene"). This additional musicality, subtle as it may be, further emphasizes the importance of this stanza in which the speaker outlines the role of art/the artist in difficult times.

LINES 21-22

Year, if you ...
... of her hand.

The poem's final stanza is a couplet rather than a quatrain. The change in form makes for a tidy ending; the rhyming, near-iambic lines feel conclusive, as if summarizing the poem's raison d'être—its central purpose or reason for existing.

The speaker says,

> Year, if you have no Mother's day present planned,
> Reach back and bring me the firmness of her hand.

Just as at the beginning of the poem, the speaker is personifying the "year" ahead. This time, however, she's also addressing it directly (an example of the device apostrophe). This allows the speaker to frame her great-great-grandmother's story in a way that centers her own hopes and desires for the future. That is, she is hoping that over the course of the "year" to come, she will become a stronger and more effective artist, like her brave ancestor who created something lasting in the face of nearly losing her son.

The fact that the speaker is reflecting on this desire for "Mother's day" suggests that she's thinking about her role as a mom in addition to her role as an artist. Her great-great-grandmother, in depicting what happened to her son, wasn't just making art; she was also preserving family memory. Now, the speaker is now continuing her great-great-grandmother's story. All of this suggests that in addition to wanting to be a better artist, the speaker is also thinking about the ways that mothers and women more generally often bear the weight of preserving family memory.

Alliteration ("present planned," "back and bring") and end rhyme ("planned" and "hand") make this final stanza musical and memorable. The reader is meant to come away with not only an impression of the great-great-grandmother's artistic prowess, but also with some ideas about the ways in which the role of the artist overlaps with the roles often fulfilled by mothers/women.

POETIC DEVICES

ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment creates momentum and adds to the poem's casual, conversational tone.

The bulk of the poem consists of a single sentence, which stretches across lines 1-16. Frequent enjambment throughout this sentence pulls readers down the page and deeper into the speaker's story. Listen to lines 7-12, for example:

> sat one day on a high rock
> beside a river in Switzerland
> and from a difficult distance viewed
> her second son, balanced on a small ice-floe,
> drift down the current toward a waterfall
> that struck rock-bottom eighty feet below,

Note, too, that all the end-stops in these lines come in the form of commas. Depending on how strictly one defines enjambment, these light pauses might not feel like end-stops at all. More important than terminology is the way that the poem seems to unfurl smoothly down the page, building anticipation and tension as readers wonder what's going to happen.

The enjambments also echo the momentum of the "current" that carries the boy down the river. Visually, the blank space after "waterfall" might even evoke falling going off the edge of said waterfall, while the end-stopped line below suggests the impact of the fall.

By contrast, the last two stanzas of the poem are mostly end-stopped. This echoes the fact that the main action of the poem has already passed.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "attitude / of"
- **Lines 5-6:** "children / and"
- **Lines 7-8:** "rock / beside"
- **Lines 8-9:** "Switzerland / and"
- **Lines 9-10:** "viewed / her"
- **Lines 11-12:** "waterfall / that"
- **Lines 15-16:** "alpenstock / (which"
- **Lines 18-19:** "eye / My"

ALLITERATION

Alliteration adds musicality and intensity to the poem, and it also helps to emphasize key words, phrases, and images.

Listen to the crisp /of/ sounds of line 6, for example:

> and little opportunity for painting pictures,

This sound, echoed by the consonance of "opportunity,"

emphasizes the importance of art to the speaker's great-great-grandmother.

Alliteration works like this throughout the poem, calling readers' attention to important moments and images: the great-great-grandmother's "isolating eye," the fact that the boy "luckily later" was saved, the instruction to "Reach back and bring" the speaker a gift, etc.

The poem also uses alliteration to actually *evoke* the scene at hand. For example, notice how the poem's language grows more intense as it introduces real danger into the story. Lines 9-10, which begin to describe the great-great-grandmother's son being nearly carried over a waterfall, contain thudding /d/ sounds as well as lots of slippery sibilance (both in the form of alliteration and internal consonance):

> and from a difficult distance viewed
> her second son, balanced on a small ice-floe,

The drumming /d/ sounds suggest the great-great-grandmother's thudding heart when she realizes her son is in danger, while all those hissing /s/ sounds suggest the precariousness of the boy's situation.

And listen to the plosive /d/ and /p/ sounds of lines 13-14:

> while her second daughter, impeded,
> no doubt, by the petticoats of the day,

These sounds require the exhalation of breath. In this way, they suggest the difficulty the daughter faces in trying to save her brother as those "petticoats" get in her way. (Note that "impeded" can be considered alliterative because that /p/ sound lands at the start of a stressed syllable, "impeded.")

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "great-great-grandmother"
- **Line 5:** "who, having had"
- **Line 6:** "painting pictures"
- **Line 9:** "difficult distance"
- **Line 10:** "second son," "small"
- **Line 11:** "drift down"
- **Line 12:** "bottom," "below"
- **Line 13:** "daughter," "impeded"
- **Line 14:** "doubt," "petticoats," "day"
- **Line 16:** "luckily later"
- **Line 18:** "isolating eye"
- **Line 19:** "great-great-grandmother," "sketched," "scene"
- **Line 20:** "sketch survives," "story"
- **Line 21:** "present planned"
- **Line 22:** "back," "bring"

PERSONIFICATION

The speaker personifies the "year" in the poem's opening and closing lines:

> If the year is meditating a suitable gift,
> [...]
> Year, if you have no Mother's day present planned,
> Reach back and bring me the firmness of her hand.

Obviously, a "year" isn't capable of "meditating" (or contemplating) anything—it has no mind! But by treating the "year" as if it were a being capable of bestowing a "gift," the speaker suggests that time and experience are capable of making her as strong and quick-thinking as her great-great-grandmother was. She's projecting her desire to become a better artist in the "year" ahead onto the year itself, but really that's just a playful way of making her desires clear to *herself*.

The speaker personifies the "year" again at the end of the poem, this time addressing it directly (an exampleo f the device apostrophe). This time, she speaks as if the year has the ability to "Reach back and bring [her]" her great-great-grandmother's "firmness of hand" as a "Mother's day present." Once again, though, the speaker doesn't really believe the "year" is capable of doing any such thing; this is just a rhetorical device that allows her to express her desire to become a more effective artist.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "If the year is meditating a suitable gift,"
- **Lines 21-22:** "Year, if you have no Mother's day present planned, / Reach back and bring me the firmness of her hand."

APOSTROPHE

In the final stanza of the poem, the speaker uses apostrophe to address the "Year" directly despite the fact that it obviously cannot answer her back. The speaker says,

> Year, if you have no Mother's day present planned,
> Reach back and bring me the firmness of her hand.

the speaker already personified the "year" in the poem's opening lines, granting it the power to "meditat[e] a suitable gift" (that is, to think about an appropriate present for the speaker). Both then and now, the speaker seems to be beseeching something greater than herself—time maybe, or experience—in the hopes of becoming more like her great-great-grandmother. Readers might even get the sense that, in calling out to the year directly in the final moments of the poem, the speaker is really calling out to her own ancestors—looking to them for strength in difficult times.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Lines 21-22:** "Year, if you have no Mother's day present planned, / Reach back and bring me the firmness of her hand."

VOCABULARY

Suitable (Line 1) - Appropriate or worthy.

Meditating (Line 1) - Considering or thinking about.

Devotee (Line 4) - Someone who is committed to or enthusiastic about something.

Ice-floe (Line 10) - A large piece of free-floating ice.

Rock-bottom (Lines 11-12) - The very bottom; the lowest possible point.

Petticoats (Lines 13-14) - Voluminous garments worn under skirts or dresses to give them shape.

Impeded (Lines 13-14) - Held back; hindered.

Alpenstock (Line 15) - A hiking stick.

Isolating (Line 18) - In this context, *isolating* is choosing or focusing on one element among many.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Request to a Year" consists of 22 lines broken up into six stanzas. The first five of these stanzas are quatrains (four-line stanzas), while the last is a rhyming couplet.

The use of quatrains lends the poem some structure, breaking up the speaker's rather meandering tale into more discrete chunks. Quatrains are very common in poetry and here might also subtly recall the ballad form. Ballads were traditionally used to tell a story, and this poem is doing just that.

The couplet at the end of the poem, meanwhile, almost feels like the final verse in a sonnet. The clear rhyme makes the poem's ending feel more dramatic and conclusive.

METER

The poem doesn't use a regular meter. Its language feels casual and conversational, which, in turn, makes the speaker's story feel more reflective and intimate.

That said, some lines here approach iambic pentameter. An iamb is a metrical foot made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (da-DUM), and pentameter means there are five of these feet per line. Take a look at line 16 for example:

> (which luck- | ily lat- | er caught | him on | his way).

Lines 18 and 20 use iambic pentameter as well:

> And with | the art- | ist's i- | sola- | ting eye
> [...]
> The sketch | survives | to prove | the sto- | ry by.

Other lines (such as line 12) are also pretty close to iambic pentameter or contain a string of iambs.

The fact that the poem inserts some metered lines into its freewheeling free verse perhaps echoes the struggle of the great-great-grandmother and artists like her who must juggle art and with the chaotic demands of motherhood.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem doesn't use a fixed rhyme scheme. In fact, in the first two stanzas, there aren't any rhymes at all. The poem feels almost like prose, which suits its meditative story-telling.

In the third, fourth, and fifth stanzas, however, the poem slips into an ABCB pattern:

> [...] viewed
> [...] ice-floe,
> [...] waterfall
> [...] below,
> [...] impeded,
> [...] day,
> [...] alpenstock
> [...] way).
> [...] done;
> [...] eye
> [...] scene.
> [...] by.

Note that readers might take the fifth stanza's rhyme scheme as ABAB, since there's a slight slant rhyme between the first and third lines ("done" and "scene"). In any case, all these rhymes add some music and intensity to the speaker's tale, making it all the more memorable for the reader.

Finally, the poem's concluding couplet rhymes perfectly: "planned" and "hand." This makes the poem's ending sound like the final verse of a sonnet. It wraps things up on a firmly conclusive note.

SPEAKER

Readers can assume that the poem's speaker is a mother, given that she frames her request to the year as a Mother's Day gift.

The fact that the speaker admires her great-great-grandmother's steady hand—that is, her ancestor's ability to

make art in extremely difficult situations—also implies that the speaker is an artist herself. Perhaps she's a poet, like Judith Wright, or maybe she's a painter like her great-great-grandmother. And perhaps she's currently dealing with a difficult situation and/or struggling to balance the demands of motherhood with art (given that she seems to empathize with her grandmother having "little opportunity for painting pictures" due to caring for her eight kids).

That the speaker longs for her ancestor's "attitude" suggests that she's a different sort of person than her great-great-grandmother was; she doesn't seem to think she possesses that "attitude" yet, but she wants to. Finally, it's clear that both art and family are important to the speaker; this poem is her way of continuing her great-great-grandmother's legacy.

SETTING

The speaker is re-telling a story that her great-great-grandmother captured in a sketch. As such, readers don't learn anything about the poem's setting in the present. Instead, the poem sweeps them off to the past.

The main action of the poem takes place by a river in Switzerland many years before the speaker was born. There's a "high rock" next to this river, on which the speaker's great-great-grandmother sits in the hopes of doing some painting. It's cold enough that there are chunks of ice still floating in the river, which flows toward an 80-foot waterfall. The speaker's great-great-grandmother watches, "from a difficult distance," as her son gets swept away on one such ice-chunk and nearly dies.

Just as the great-great-grandmother uses "the artist's isolating eye" to "hastily" capture the "scene" in front of her, the speaker of this poem brings the scene to life a second time on the page.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

The Australian author Judith Wright (1915-2000) published over 50 books in her lifetime. In addition to her work as a poet, she's also known for her short stories, literary criticism, and activism around environmentalism and Aboriginal land rights. Her poetry often explores the tensions between humanity and the natural world and between Australian settlers and indigenous cultures.

Wright included "Request to a Year" in her ninth poetry collection, *The Two Fires*, published in 1955. The title of this collection refers to the twin bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the American government during WWII. Many have come to identify the "two fires" as Wright's two greatest passions, art and activism, as well.

Wright's literary influences included the modernist poets T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and W.B. Yeats. Wright's own writing, however, doesn't lean into the more formal experimentation that was popular in the first half of the 20th century.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Wright's poetry was the product of the time and place in which she lived. She was inspired by the beautiful landscapes of southern Queensland, Australia, where she spent most of her life. At the same time, Wright lived through World War II and was horrified by the way human beings ravaged each other and the environment alike. She also witnessed the devastating effects of British colonialism on Australia's native peoples.

Wright spent much of her life fighting not only for the land rights of Aboriginal Australians but also for the land itself. She famously campaigned for the conservation of the Great Barrier Reef against harmful oil drilling and also contributed to the founding of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, one of the earliest conservation efforts of its kind.

Though she wrote extensively about these issues in her poetry, Wright believed that art, unlike activism, didn't necessarily have the power to *change* the world. Instead, she argued that "the true function of art and culture is to interpret us to ourselves, and to relate us to the country and the society in which we live."

Indeed, "Request to a Year" seems to argue for this "function of art," as the speaker's great-great-grandmother isn't able to save her son by sketching him (her daughter is the one to save him, by holding out a walking stick). What she *is* able to do is preserve the story of what happened, just as the speaker is now preserving her family history through this poem.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- A Look at the Poet's Life — A biography of Judith Wright. (https://poetandpoem.com/Judith-Wright)
- Two Fires Festival of Arts and Activism — The website of the Two Fires Festival, an arts and activism festival held in honor of Judith Wright's "twin passions." (http://twofiresfestival.org.au/home-2014/home/inspiration/)
- Listen to the Poem Out Loud — A reading of the poem. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_CAn3vbHyU)
- Reflecting on the Poet's Life — An obituary written by Christopher Zinn for The Guardian. (https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/jun/29/guardianobituaries.books)
- "An activist poet who was ahead of her time" — An article discussing the importance of Wright's underappreciated

non-fiction works and her activism. (https://theconversation.com/judith-wright-an-activist-poet-who-was-ahead-of-her-time-178422)

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