

How is childhood presented in 'Games at Twilight' and 'The Red Ball'?

There are many similarities between the ways that childhood is presented in these two short stories. When acting as a group, the children are frequently portrayed as cruel and aggressive. In 'The Red Ball' the young boy is given a variety of cruel names by other children due to his thin frame, for example 'Thinny Boney' and 'Match-stick foot'. This shows the brutal honesty of children of a young age. In 'Games at Twilight' the children are rough and belligerent, shown by 'the shoves became harder' and the frequent quarrelling of the children over who will be It in their game of hide and seek.

In 'Games at Twilight' the children are frequently shown in an animalistic light. The author's use of vocabulary reveals this, for example 'wild', 'maniacal', and 'snarling'. Words such as 'prey', 'stalked' and 'pounded' relate to hunting in the animal kingdom, and therefore reinforce the author's portrayal of children as animalistic. In 'The Red Ball' Bolan is said to have 'waited like a small animal', so children are again compared to animals. The fact that the children in both stories play their games in large groups could represent the packs that animals exist in in the wild. By using animalistic images the authors are able to reinforce their portrayal of children as cruel and aggressive.

Childish games seem to hold great significance to the children in both stories. In 'Games at Twilight' the author says that the children are desperate to start their business - 'the business of the children's day which is – play'. By making the children in the story so dependent on games the author suggests that the children have basic, immature values, since play is not an adult business. In 'The Red Ball' games also hold a great significance for the children – it is Bolan's ability to play cricket well that gains him acceptance amongst the other children. It is obvious that friendships are built when games are participated in, as Bolan steals money from his parents to buy a red cricket ball in order to be more highly thought of by his friends. It is interesting to see that the games in both of the stories are carried out outdoors. In 'The Red Ball' the author writes 'the boys played cricket until the fireflies came out'. In 'Games at Twilight' Raghu is described as 'crashing and storming in the hedge wilder'. Thus the children in both stories are more closely linked to nature, reinforcing the authors' portrayal of them as animals.

In both stories the main characters are portrayed as outcasts. In 'The Red Ball' the young boy watches other children play cricket from the outskirts of the park, and in 'Games at Twilight' young Ravi hides alone, only to find that the other children have 'quite forgotten him'. The difference between the stories is that the young boy in 'The Red Ball' is eventually accepted by his peers and revered by them – he becomes their 'star' bowler and therefore essential for their game. In 'Games at Twilight' we are led to believe that Ravi will eventually be accepted by the other children for winning the game of hide and seek – 'he ... smiled to himself ... at the thought of so much victory'. However Ravi never achieves such victory as the other children forget about him – 'having disappeared from the scene, he had disappeared from their minds. Clean.' By using such a short sentence, 'clean', the author is stressing the fact that Ravi was forgotten by his peers, and therefore emphasises his insignificance to the other children; he is bottom of the pecking order.

In 'Games at Twilight' young Ravi is portrayed as rather unintelligent and cowardly. He is frequently described as fearful – 'Ravi shook ... with fear'. His desperation to be accepted by his siblings shows that he is not highly thought of, and is also somewhat pathetic. Thinking that he will win the childish game of hide and

seek he thinks that 'nothing more wonderful had ever happened to him'. His unimportance is confirmed in the final sentence of the story – 'he lay down full length on the damp grass ... silenced by a terrible sense of his insignificance'. In 'The Red Ball' Bolan is portrayed as a somewhat more intelligent, wise individual. He is capable enough to understand that by replying when he is called offensive names by the other children, he will be labelled with those names. He is also able to comprehend more difficult family situations, and shows perception and intelligence when the author writes – 'it was one of those moments when he felt as if he had held his mother in front of him as a sort of shield to save himself from a rain of blows'.

In conclusion, the presentation of childhood in the two short stories, 'Games at Twilight' and 'The Red Ball' varies. The main characters, when alone, are portrayed as more innocent individuals, whereas when in larger groups, the children seem to be more cruel and hostile. 'Games at Twilight' offers the less favourable impression of children overall, frequently incorporating animalistic images into the story to describe the children.