



A visual representation of "Contrast" by Tammy Ho

Chan Ho Yau Yoyo
St. Paul's Convent School



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My painting focuses on the theme of love and self-acceptance. In the foreground, the brightness evokes feelings of love and hope. The old man is hugging his grandchildren, with his grey hair extending like angel wings to envelop them in love and protection.

In contrast, the darker background features rows of bottles of hair-dye and a distraught child plucking out the man's grey hair, conveying a sense of sadness and self-loathing. The purple shading of the bottles contrasts with the highly saturated yellow box mentioned in the poem, emphasising the false cheer of hiding signs of ageing. The contrast between the background and the foreground also suggests the old man's act of letting go of his insecurities to protect his grandchildren, through accepting his hair turning grey.

My piece aims to evoke feelings of love and protection while highlighting the contrasts between light and dark, youth and ageing, and self-acceptance and self-loathing.

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Contrast

Tammy Ho

He asked me to put the hairs
in a small yellow box. It was plastic,
with a catch at the front that clicked
when closed.

Every Sunday, I looked carefully
at my father's head
and plucked out the grey hairs
that hid sneakily

among the robust black ones.
He gave me twenty cents for each strand
until one day, a few years later,
the box was full

and there were still so many more to pluck.
Overcome with sadness, I said,
'Father, I don't want the money.'
He then began dyeing his hair

and in the bathroom sink every week
drips of black water
revealed that father was clawing
back his youth.

Fifteen years later, he
has stopped dyeing his hair,
worried that the chemicals
might harm his grandchildren

whom he often rests
on his shoulders,
proud now
to highlight the contrast.

"Contrast" first appeared in the Asia Literary Review:
<https://www.asialiteraryreview.com/contrast>.
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Positive value(s) and attitude(s):
Love, self-acceptance and hope

Positive message(s):
The old man's acceptance of ageing enables him to embrace the natural life cycle and serve as a source of protection and guidance for his grandchildren.

Meanwhile, the bright colours in the foreground, which symbolise the present moment, evoke hope and optimism, and the importance of cherishing the living present.