

"Dear dirt" Shows that the dirt is treated like a person. The dirt is 'personified' into a friend maybe

Who are the leading characters do you think?

(technique – alliteration) "subtle" "sensitive" "skin" these words are not next to each other but are close in the same sentence. It creates a soft and caring tone. It adds to the idea of the dirt being like skin.

(technique – metaphor) "you're our democracy" A democracy is our system of government. If the dirt IS democracy then it must be very important. It must lie at the heart of the way we live and make decisions.

(structure) You might notice that the poem does not have a structure like other poems. It does not rhyme and it does not have stanzas (paragraphs) BUT the writer does create a structure to make an idea clear. E.g. "same basic materials" This has its own line because it is an important message.

## "Ode to Dirt"

by Sharon Olds

Dear dirt, I am sorry I slighted you,

I thought that you were only the background

for the leading characters—the plants

and animals and human animals.

It's as if I had loved only the stars

and not the sky which gave them space

in which to shine. Subtle, various,

sensitive, you are the skin of our terrain,

you're our democracy. When I understood

I had never honored you as a living

equal, I was ashamed of myself,

as if I had not recognized

a character who looked so different from me,

but now I can see us all, made of the

same basic materials—

cousins of that first exploding from nothing—

in our intricate equation together. O dirt,

help us find ways to serve your life,

you who have brought us forth, and fed us,

and who at the end will take us in

and rotate with us, and wobble, and orbit.

"cousins" the poet builds this idea of dirt as a person but as the importance of this person grows the poet realises we are more like family, coming from the same source – the big bang. We are bonded with the dirt more than just sharing space, it is like we share blood.

"I slighted you," There is a connection between the speaker "I" and the person they are talking to Dirt is their name.

"it's as if" meaning "it is like" the poet is comparing us to the stars and the sky to the dirt. (Technique - simile)

(technique – metaphor) "you are the skin of our terrain" What ideas (or words) come to mind when you think of your skin?

Words like:  
"honoured"  
"democracy"  
"equal"  
"serve"

They all create the idea of dirt being significant, important, respected.

The end begins mirror religious ideas. "ways to serve your life" comes across as dirt being a god. The last message of the dirt bringing us into the world, feeding us and then we are buried in it is also very similar to religious ideas of humanity being born of earth and God breathing life into the earth to create us. Then when we die we return to the earth.

## **Vocabulary**

Words/Phrases	Meaning/Definition
Slighted	A slight is an insult ( to slight is to insult someone)
Subtle	It is an adjective (describing word) that describes how something is low key, delicate, difficult to analyse.
Terrain	The physical features of the land e.g. mountainous terrain is land that has lots of mountains.
Democracy	A system of government where the people are represented and heard in order to make decisions for the state. We have a democracy in the UK.
Honored (US) Honoured (UK)	To show respect to something/someone
Intricate Equation	A complex balanced maths problem. Meaning that the world is a complicated balance of so many different parts it can sometimes seem like a maths problem that is perfectly balanced.
Brought forth	Bring forward
Wobble	To move unsteadily around or side to side. (like trying to balance on a fence post, you will start to wobble and maybe fall)
Orbit	When something moves round another on a circular path. For example the moon orbits the earth. It has a path that it follows moving around the earth.