



## [Diving into the Wreck](#), by Adrienne Rich

### **In A Nutshell**

Let's start out by setting the scene for "Diving into the Wreck." There was a lot going on in the U.S. when this poem was written (in the early 1970s). There was the Vietnam War, the struggle for women's rights, and the echoes of the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s. In many ways, Adrienne Rich was a major part of that world. She was (and is) a political poet. She was angry about the war, and she was also a strong feminist voice. Rich wasn't shy about connecting her work as a poet with her feelings about social justice.

In fact, there's a story about this poem that we think says a lot about Rich, her views, and her career. When this poem appeared in 1973, it was part of a book with the same title: *Diving into the Wreck*. In 1974, that book won the National Book Award, a big deal for a poet. But Rich refused the award as an individual. Instead, she accepted it in the name of all unknown women writers. That was a big public gesture at a turbulent time. On the one hand, this story reminds us that Rich herself is important and influential. She's certainly won just about every poetry prize in the around. At the same time, she keeps a focus on the outside world, and on her responsibilities as a person and a writer.

While it's important to know the context, we don't think it'll give you the magic key to this poem. It can be helpful to know what was going on in the writer's life, but a great poem is usually about way more than just the author and her life at a particular moment. Think of these facts like a few ingredients in a delicious stew. They are certainly going to change the taste,

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but they don't determine everything about the finished product.

This is true about personal details from the Rich's life, too. For example, Rich's marriage collapsed a few years before she wrote this poem. Sadly, her ex-husband also committed suicide not long after that. We'd be foolish to think that those events wouldn't affect this poem. Again, they're just one ingredient. There are other flavors in here that we can't even recognize. Bottom line, this is a wide-ranging, personal, mysterious poem. We can't hope to trace all its images and ideas back to a personal tragedy or a particular political issue. The poem goes beyond any single event.

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## Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 Have you ever had an experience where you felt like you were suddenly in a totally new world? How did it happen? Do you remember the exact moment when things changed? Were you a different person after that?
- 2 Do you feel like you know who is talking in this poem? Is he or she less mysterious at the end than at the beginning?
- 3 When you are really upset, does reading make you feel better? Do you think it's even possible for a poem to make someone hurt less? Is that's what this poem is trying to do?

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