

# The Colourful Life of Calum McCall

## Context

### 1. Visual Prompt



Photograph © Sayan Chakrabarti

Xidan Market, Beijing



Describe this photograph. How does it relate to the story 'Calum MacCall'? In what way is it different? Does it make any difference to your interpretation of the photograph when you learn that the musician is blind?



## 2. Colours

In the Pre-reading section we looked at some of the widely accepted “meanings” of colours recognised by many cultures. Now look at this poem by John Agard and consider the different interpretation he gives it. Before you read it, you should know that it comes from his collection of poems called ‘From the Devil’s Pulpit’ and all the poems are spoken, as it were, by the devil!



Put these colours into the appropriate gaps in the poem as you read.

White	Red	Yellow	Green	Blue	Brown	Black
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### Colour of Evil

What is the colour of evil I asked of \_\_\_1\_\_\_  
 who led me past Wordsworth's daffodils and Van Gogh's sunflowers  
 till we came to flashbacks of Vietnam  
 where the sun's rays were \_\_\_1\_\_\_ robes of mourning.

What is the colour of evil I asked of \_\_\_2\_\_\_  
 who showed me the springtime hills that held a child's scream  
 and the grass lost its innocence  
 to the god of forensic evidence.

What is the colour of evil I asked of \_\_\_3\_\_\_  
 who spoke of the romance of autumn leaves  
 but I saw baked earth writing its own epitaph  
 and empty bowls reaching for the world's charity.

What is the colour of evil I asked of \_\_\_4\_\_\_  
 who said blood speaks your language as well as mine  
 but take comfort from the rose  
 and the anonymous heart of a Valentine.

What is the colour of evil I asked of \_\_\_5\_\_\_  
 who led me through the archives of the skies  
 where birds of death fashioned by the hands of men  
 circled in the dazzling air.

What is the colour of evil I asked of \_\_\_6\_\_\_  
 who guided me through galleries and museums  
 where the dark was equated with the beast of fear.  
 Then stepping through doorways of ancient lore I found darkest  
 chaos was a mothering force that sat upon a brood of stars.

What is the colour of evil I asked of \_\_\_7\_\_\_  
 who walked with me across the fugitive snow  
 that covered a city's scars  
 under an angelic apron. So I walked on in the light.

And grinned to see the pureness of a page reflecting  
 my own chameleon grin.

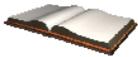
© John Agard

**Question:** why does the devil claim to have a “chameleon grin”?

### 3. Loss of Innocence

1. Many people would interpret the story of Calum McCall of one of a loss of innocence, where the young's atonement with nature gets less and less, perhaps as we get caught up in our commercial and industrialised worlds. Many poets have commented on this, not least some Romantic poets from the age of the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Britain at the ends of the eighteenth Century and beginning of the nineteenth.

Here is the beginning of a famous poem by the English poet William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'. Some of the language is poetic and might be difficult to understand, but you are only required to understand the gist of the first two stanzas.



THERE was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,  
 The earth, and every common sight,  
 To me did seem  
 Apparell'd in celestial light,  
 The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
 It is not now as it hath been of yore;—  
 Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
 By night or day,  
 The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The rainbow comes and goes,  
 And lovely is the rose;  
 The moon doth with delight  
 Look round her when the heavens are bare;  
 Waters on a starry night  
 Are beautiful and fair;  
 The sunshine is a glorious birth;  
 But yet I know, where'er I go,  
 That there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth

*Now have a look at what the twentieth century Welsh poet had to say. Here is the last verse of the poem 'Fern Hill' by Dylan Thomas*

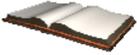
Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me  
 Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,  
 In the moon that is always rising,  
 Nor that riding to sleep  
 I should hear him fly with the high fields  
 And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.  
 Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,  
 Time held me green and dying



What do the two poems have in common? How might they be related to the story of 'Calum McCall'?

If you want to read the whole of these two poems, go to: <http://www.bartleby.com/101/536.html>  
 and <http://www.bigeve.com/fernhill.htm>

## 4. The Rat Race



..... a winter country of darkened tenements, black railings and streets of pitiless traffic .....

..... he could not afford to turn up at his office dishevelled with lack of sleep, not among his ambitious colleagues .....

(from 'The Colourful Life of Calum McCall')

In the story, there is a strong feeling that Calum McCall has simply conformed to contemporary life, submerging his dreams into the routine of his life and 'the rat race'.



### Rat race

A **rat race** is a term used for an endless, self-defeating or pointless pursuit. It conjures up the image of the futile efforts of a lab rat trying to escape whilst running around a maze or in a wheel. In an analogy to the modern city, many rats in a single maze run around making a lot of noise bumping into each other, but ultimately *achieve nothing (meaningful) either collectively or individually*.

*The rat race* is a term often used to describe work, particularly excessive work; in general terms, if one works too much, one is *in the rat race*. This terminology contains implications that many people see work as a seemingly endless pursuit with little reward or purpose. Not all workers feel like this. It is the perceived Conventional Wisdom, for example, that those who work for themselves are generally happier at work.

The increased image of work as a "rat race" in modern times has led many to question their own attitudes to work and seek a better alternative; a more harmonious Work-life balance. Many believe that long work hours, unpaid overtime, stressful jobs, time spent commuting, less time for traditional family life, has led to a generally unhappier workforce/population unable to enjoy the benefits of increased economic prosperity and a higher standard of living.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



Tick as many of the following list that you think contribute to 'the rat race' in contemporary society. Be prepared to justify the ones you **didn't** tick.

	✓ or x
working longer hours;	
sleeping less;	
playing less (or not at all);	
driving larger vehicles;	
building houses that are too large to be "homes";	
consuming more goods;	
taking on huge amounts of debt;	
lavishing our children with things but not with time;	
spending less time with our partners;	
abusing our health;	
passing children on to paid caregivers for 50-60 hours a week;	
drugging ourselves so we can keep up;	
drugging our children to ensure they fit the social mould;	
pushing our kids into activities designed to "seal" their futures;	
polluting our environment;	
convincing ourselves that we're living the good life	

<http://www.ratracerebellion.com/>



### 5. Facing the future

Children often dream about the kind of job or lifestyle they are going to have. The reality usually turns out very different. Decide which ideal jobs the children below might dream of, and then plot the course to a possible reality. Make sure that you fill in some details in the 'reality strikes' column which turn the dream into another reality. One has been done for you.

Dreams	Kids	Reality Strikes	Resulting Jobs
Football player		<p>KEPT "FORGETTING TO GO TO SCHOOL" AND DIDN'T GET GOOD GRADES</p>	<p>DELIVERING PIZZA</p>
Ballet dancer			
Pop singer			
Film star			
Engine driver			
Fashion model			
Astronaut			
Soldier			
Explorer			
Scientist			
Doctor			
Nurse			
Actor			
TV Personality			
Teacher			
Pilot			
Racing driver			
Hairdresser			
Gardener			
Farmer			



## 6. The final questions

1. Why is the story called 'The Colourful Life of Calum McCall'?
2. What will happen to Calum's son? Unless?



### Follow up

Have a look on-line



*Colourless World*  
*Anita Kelsey*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48DVHa-pWAw&feature=related>

Step outside  
That comfort zone  
Wanna take you  
To a place youve never known

At the end of the line  
Oh yeah  
Dont you worry bout falling  
Falling  
Wont you play this game with me

I dreamed there will always be  
Someone that never leaves me  
Hear in this darkness i need to feel free  
From this colourless world  
Free from this colourless world

Step into  
This solitude  
Nothings quiet  
What it seems from the start

At the end of the line  
Oh yeah  
Dont you worry bout falling  
Falling  
Wont you play this game with me

I dreamed there will always be  
Someone that never leaves me  
Hear in this darkness i need to feel free  
From this colourless world  
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