

# 12

CHAPTER

## Reading Functions *Close Reading of Poetry*

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### Aims of Chapter

*By the end of this chapter you should have greater confidence in:*

- *the skills needed for reading poetry.*
  - *the understanding of poetry.*
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### My Educated Son

There is a special skill in reading poetry. Some poems, like “My Educated Son”, have very little punctuation – line lengths are used instead. Others, like “Frogs”, have a lot of punctuation, and should be read, not by line lengths, but from one punctuation mark to the next.

All poems are written to be read aloud, so read each of these poems aloud. You will hear that the sound of the words and the **rhythm** (or beat) are very important and help give the poem extra meaning.

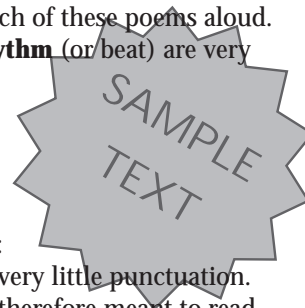
#### **My Educated Son** by Maunga Itaia, Gilbert Islands

Happiness fills me.  
My son now returns  
The plane now lands  
While I wait

Passengers come down  
My son comes down  
He and his friends  
My heart beats

Notice that:

- a. there is very little punctuation. You are therefore meant to read each line at a time. As each line is a sense phrase, the end of the line gives you the pause that makes sense of the poem.



I love him  
 I run to him  
 With arms wide open  
 Shouting his name

But...

He doesn't hear me!  
 He passes me by  
 With his white friends!  
 Denying his mother!

I'm very old  
 I'm a skinny woman  
 I'm a dirty mother  
 I'm not good enough

He walks away  
 I burst into tears  
 Crying, crying and crying  
 Calling his name

He is educated  
 He lives a foreign life  
 He denies his mother  
 His own mother.



- b. any punctuation marks used are there for a purpose, eg:
- i. But...  
 The three dots show a long pause, indicating the mother's surprise.
  - ii. !  
 The exclamation marks show further the surprise and unhappiness the mother feels.
  - iii. .  
 The full stop shows that the poem has ended.
- c. The words used are very simple. The woman says that she is not good enough, that it is her son who is educated, not she. To show her point of view, the story of the poem is told in the simple words she might use.
- d. There is a lot of **repetition**, eg: the word **crying**. This is usually done to stress a feeling, or an argument.
- e. There are two moods:
- i. The happy mood of the mother as she sees the plane land, and her son walk towards her.
  - ii. The sad, disappointed mood, as the woman sadly watches her son pass her by. She realises then that her son thinks she is worthless.

These two moods are contrasted and put in contrast by the use of the word **But...**

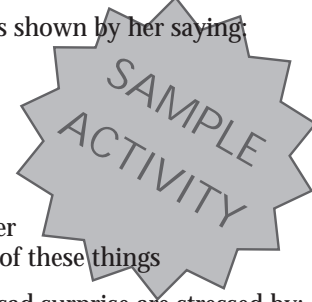
Notice that it is in a **stanza** (verse) all of its own. A word like **but**, used in this way, is called a pivot word, as it turns or pivots one mood, idea or part in a poem, to another that is quite different.



## Activity A: Understanding the Poem

Re-read “My Educated Son” and answer these multi-choice questions. They should help you to understand the poem. Don’t forget to use your dictionary if you need to.

1. The repetition of the word “**now**” in stanza one gives a feeling of:
  - a. urgency
  - b. excitement
  - c. anxiety
  - d. fear
2. By saying “**while I wait**”, the old woman is telling us that she is:
  - a. proud
  - b. bored
  - c. patient
  - d. tired
3. That the woman is getting increasingly excited is shown by her saying:
  - a. “**Passengers come down**”
  - b. “**My son comes down**”
  - c. “comes down” (she says this twice)
  - d. “my heart beats”
4. After stanza three, we expect that her son will:
  - a. stop and greet her
  - b. hug her
  - c. perhaps run to her
  - d. do all of these things
5. In stanza five, the mother’s disappointment and sad surprise are stressed by:
  - a. the repetition of the word “**He**”
  - b. the repetition of the exclamation mark “**!**”
  - c. his friends being white
  - d. by the build-up of feeling to the son denying her.



## Activity B: Questions to Think About

These are short-answer questions to make you think about the poet’s reasons for writing, and the messages that the poem is giving us.

1. In stanza six the mother says she is not good enough for her son, because she is old, skinny and dirty.
  - a. Why does she feel that being old and skinny is so bad?
  - b. What does she really mean when she says she’s dirty?
2. Stanza seven puts a picture in our mind. Try to draw it.
3. The son has been sent away, probably to New Zealand, to be educated. But what has this education done to him?
4. What makes this poem so sad?
5. What is the writer’s main message to us in this poem?

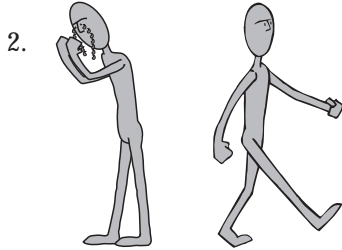
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### Activity A: Understanding the Poem p. 61

1. b    2. c    3. d    4. d    5. d

### Activity B: Questions to Think About p. 61

- 1a. Being old and skinny means she is no longer young and beautiful and therefore nobody will want her now.
- 1b. She means by “dirty” that she is somehow unclean, unworthy – she lacks education, she is not well dressed, she is not as smart as her son, therefore she is not good enough for him.



3. The education has made her son think that he is better, grander than his mother – he may even be ashamed of her.
4. The mother sent her son away to be educated in the pakeha/palagi way, to give him the best opportunity to succeed in life that she could. He does not appreciate this – he does not want to be seen with her, so ignores her.
5. The writer’s message is a warning that education in the pakeha/palagi way can separate children from parents because:
- they become better educated especially in book learning and therefore cannot talk to their parents and/or are ashamed of them; or
  - they lose their own culture while away from home and in a pakeha/palagi environment.

## Glossary/Index

- abbreviation (3):** the shortened form of a word or phrase.
- action (68):** the pace at which the story-line of a book unfolds.
- adjective (23):** a word that describes colour, shape, size, quantity and other identifying characteristics.
- adjudicator (200):** a judge of a debate or of a speaking contest.
- adverb (23):** a word that tells how, why, when and where.
- affirmative team (200):** speaks for the moot in a debate.
- alliteration (157):** several words in the same sentence or phrase which begin with the same consonant sound.
- ambiguity (157):** a statement that has more than one meaning.
- apostrophe (38):** punctuation (') which indicates: possession; omission of letters.
- appendix (3):** extra information added to the back of a book.
- appropriate language (75):** a form of communication that suits the purpose, audience, place and situation.
- assonance (81):** several words in the same sentence or phrase which have similar vowel sounds.
- audience (75):** people with/to whom we are communicating.
- audition (183):** an interview for a role as a singer, actor, dancer, etc, in which the interviewee gives a demonstration of their ability.
- autobiography (71):** a book written about the author's own life.
- ballad (63):** a narrative poem of 4-lined stanzas, lines 1 and 3 longer than lines 2 and 4; in modern times, any poem of short stanzas that tells a story.
- bibliography (146):** a list of books, magazines and other sources used in your research.
- biography (71):** a book about the life of a real person.
- body copy (158):** the written text in an advertisement.
- body language (167):** emotions and feelings expressed through the movement of hand and body generally; also facial expression.
- brainstorm (99, 102):** to jot down instantly all the ideas on a subject.
- buzz words (157):** fashionable words, "in"-words or terms used.
- caption (166):** a brief description of a photograph or illustration; the message with a one-panel cartoon.
- capital letters (36):** show: the start of a sentence; the proper name of someone or something; titles of books, films, plays etc.
- caricature (165):** a drawing that exaggerates the physical features of a person.
- CD-ROM (87):** (Compact Disk – Read Only Memory) computer disk for information storage and retrievals.