

**‘Mother any distance ...’**

**Simon Armitage**

# Themes

The connection between a mother and her child is a strong one that is not easily broken. For the mother there is the danger of clinging on too long. For the child there is both frustration at being held on to and fear at what freedom may bring.

# Attitudes, Ideas and Feelings

- Why does Armitage use 'Mother' rather than 'Mum'?
- In line 7, Armitage writes that the line between them is 'still feeding out'. In 12-13, he writes that his mother's fingertips 'still pinch / the last one-hundredth of an inch'.

***What different aspects of the mother's relationship with her son are suggested by these two details? Eg 'pinch' might mean hurting or stealing, both of which show the mother does not want to give her son his freedom.***

# Attitudes, Ideas and Feelings

- Armitage describes the mother as 'at the zero-end'. This means the end of the tape she is holding. What are the other possible meanings?
- How could you describe the voice's relationship with the mother?
- Many young people want to leave home but are also worried about the problems and responsibilities of being independent. At the end of the poem it seems Armitage has two options:
  - *to open the hatch and live his own life as an independent person, maybe to succeed, maybe to fail and fall*
  - *to leave the hatch closed and go back downstairs to her and stay safe, secure and sheltered (at least for the time being).*

What could be his reasons for choosing either option?  
What would be the disadvantages of each?

# Language, Structure & Form

- Astronauts sometimes have to walk in space to conduct experiments or repair their spacecrafts.
- *How does the image of walking in space connect to the image of the tape measure?*
- *How does it connect to line 7?*
- *How does it connect to the last line?*
- Can you think of two ways in which holding the tape measure conveys something about the relationship between mother and son?
- Why has Armitage chosen the words 'Anchor' and 'Kite'?

# Language, Structure & Form

- How does the use of lists help convey the extent of his task?
- Line 8 uses two single-words sentences to describe the relationship. What is implied by these metaphors? Why has he separated the images in this way?
- Why is the tape measure at 'breaking point'?
- Most of the poem has a regular rhythm, but exceptions can be found on lines 8 and 11. why did he choose to break up the rhythm in these lines?

# Language, Structure & Form

- Lines 11 and 15 are very short and so they have an extra impact on the reader. What is this?
- The poem is in 3 stanzas. The ideas in each are ...
  1. *He often needs his mother's help. She has come to help him measure up his new house.*
  - 2.
  - 3.

# Meanings & Responses

- The poem is directly addressed to Armitage's mother. What do you think she must have felt about it when she first read it?
- What is the tone? Warm & loving / Cold & objective / Embarrassed / Amused / Nostalgic / Proud?
- What is the relationship between the poet and the mother?