

**Rain Scene****Collier Noguees**

*for Opal, and for Hong Kong, the city she'll grow up in*

Sheltered by the white-tiled park overhang,  
 I watch you run in nonstop loops. You've found  
 a shallow soup-bowl where a tree was planted once  
 but didn't take. Its surviving neighbor trees, each  
 5 in their own soup, quiver in the light rain  
 while you stomp, soaking the socks I'll soak again  
 tonight to leach from them their rust-red mud.  
 Of course I remember the pleasure this is.

This isn't the color my mud was. Mine  
 10 was white, limestone ground down to river clay  
 and rife with flint and fossils. At every flood  
 we found dead things risen with the water.  
 In case the road washed out we had the truck,  
 and when the creek rose past truck-axle-height,  
 15 my father drove the tractor to the highway  
 and hitched a ride to get more milk.

More milk here takes merely a walk  
 down to the Circle K, whose clerk knows you  
 and says hello. *Hello* you say to her, or if she says  
 20 *jóu sàhn*, you say *jóu sàhn*. *Jóu sàhn*, says the fruit stand man  
 who offers you an orange. You take words in  
 and give them back, but sometimes changed: *orange*  
 becomes *ocean*—because of *cháang*, I think—  
 which in our family now describes both fruit and sea.

25 The sea comes very near the fruit stand, surging in  
 on Lam Tsuen River's tide from Plover Cove,  
 but the watercourse is paved and engineered, no chance  
 of flood no matter how the rain comes down. My mother  
 would have liked that, would have liked the refuge  
 30 this city makes, the care its people take to greet  
 each other. *Thank you for the ocean*, you say to the man.  
 What she would have made of you, I wonder.

I wonder where her heaven is. Far from my father's,  
surely. Or near, in that for both of them, just as for me,  
35 you are every heaven's anchor. I am glad we've anchored here,  
where I watch you watching for snails, the giant ones  
who come out in the rain, bigger than the *ocean* you've forgotten  
in your awe, *are those its hands* you ask and *no*, I say,  
*they are a kind of eyes*, a kind which can bear water.  
40 Some creatures, even cities, make their own shelter.

The poem was first published on the Writing Plus website as part of the Urban Love Poetry Contest for the 2020 Hong Kong International Literary Festival Schools Programme: <https://www.writingplus.hk/urban-love-poem-2020>, reprinted with the permission of the poet.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is the setting of the poem?
2. Who do “I” and “you” in the poem refer to?
3. Each statement below summarises the main idea of a particular stanza of the poem. Match them to the right stanza and write the stanza number in the brackets. One has been done for you as an example.

Gist	Stanza
a) The speaker recalls her childhood and describes the place where she grew up.	( )
b) The speaker expresses her feelings about raising her daughter in Hong Kong.	( )
c) The speaker’s daughter, Opal, is playing in the rain.	( )
d) The speaker thinks of her mother while she watches her daughter.	( )
e) The speaker narrates some of their everyday life episodes such as interacting with the local shopkeepers.	( )

4. In the poem, the speaker often compares her life and living environment in Hong Kong with those in her home town when she was a child. Identify two differences between these two places from the poem.
5. Why are Cantonese expressions such as “*jóu sàhn*” and “*cháang*” and local references such as “Circle K” and “Lam Tsuen River” used in the poem? What effects does this create?

6. What do the following parts of the poem tell you about the speaker's views and feelings about Hong Kong? Match the two columns and put the letters in the brackets provided.

Hong Kong is a warm ( ) and friendly city.	a) "My mother would have like that, would have liked the refuge this city makes"
Hong Kong is a ( ) suitable place to make one's home.	b) "The care its people take to greet each other"
It's pleasure to arrive ( ) and stay in Hong Kong.	c) "I am glad that we've anchored here"
Hong Kong is a safe ( ) place.	d) "Some creatures, even cities, make their own shelter"

7. In line 35, the speaker describes her daughter as "every heaven's anchor". What technique is used and what does the line mean?
8. What is the theme of the poem?
9. What is special about the transition and linkage between stanzas in this poem? What impact does this create?
10. In the poem, the speaker is happy to settle and raise her kid in Hong Kong because of the friendly people and safe environment. To you, what are some great things about living in Hong Kong?

## Suggested Answers

1. What is the setting of the poem?

The poem is set in a shelter park on a rainy day.

2. Who do “I” and “you” in the poem refer to?

“I”, the speaker, is the mother and “you” refers to her daughter Opal.

3. Each statement below summarises the main idea of a particular stanza of the poem. Match them to the right stanza and write the stanza number in the brackets. One has been done for you as an example.

Gist	Stanza
a) The speaker recalls her childhood and describes the place where she grew up.	( 2 )
b) The speaker expresses her feelings about raising her daughter in Hong Kong.	( 5 )
c) The speaker’s daughter, Opal, is playing in the rain.	( 1 )
d) The speaker thinks of her mother while she watches her daughter.	( 4 )
e) The speaker narrates some of their everyday life episodes such as interacting with the local shopkeepers.	( 3 )

4. In the poem, the speaker often compares her life and living environment in Hong Kong with those in her home town when she was a child. Identify two differences between these two places from the poem.

- The mud the speaker sees here is rust-red but the colour of the mud she saw in her childhood was white.
- Flooding was common where she grew up but the place she lives in Hong Kong is safe from flooding even after heavy rain.
- It is convenient to get milk in Hong Kong but it took a long drive to do so in her childhood.

5. Why are Cantonese expressions such as “*jóu sàhn*” and “*cháang*” and local references such as “Circle K” and “Lam Tsuen River” used in the poem? What effects does this create?

The poem captures the childhood experience of a girl born in Hong Kong to expatriate parents. The use of non-English words from other languages, such as “*jóu sàhn*” and “*cháang*” helps to show the multi-lingual and multi-cultural experience of the family, which suits a poem that celebrates cultural diversity. The mentioning like “Circle K”, “Lam Tsuen River” and “Plover Cove” makes the poem more culturally and geographically specific, which helps to show how the speaker and her daughter are engaged with and integrated into the local community.

6. What do the following parts of the poem tell you about the speaker’s views and feelings about Hong Kong? Match the two columns and put the letters in the brackets provided.

Hong Kong is a warm ( <b>b</b> ) and friendly city.	a) “My mother would have like that, would have liked the refuge this city makes”
Hong Kong is a ( <b>d</b> ) suitable place to make one’s home.	b) “The care its people take to greet each other”
It’s pleasure to arrive ( <b>c</b> ) and stay in Hong Kong.	c) “I am glad that we’ve anchored here”
Hong Kong is a safe ( <b>a</b> ) place.	d) “Some creatures, even cities, make their own shelter”

7. In line 35, the speaker describes her daughter as “every heaven’s anchor”. What technique is used and what does the line mean?

Metaphor is used in the line “you are every heaven’s anchor”. An anchor is something that helps a boat to stay in one position by fastening it firmly. It also means something that offers a purpose and support. The speaker uses this to describe her daughter because with her around, there is a purpose to her life and everywhere/anywhere could feel like home or a paradise.

8. What is the theme of the poem?

The poem is about cultural identity and diversity, as well as a sense of belonging and rootedness, feeling at home, cultural integration and assimilation

9. What is special about the transition and linkage between stanzas in this poem? What impact does this create?

The last words of each stanza are repeated and used as the beginning words of the next stanza (e.g. "...both fruit and sea" in line 24 is followed by "The sea comes..." as the opening in line 25). This creates a sense of continuity, suggesting how life is passing on and carrying forward from one generation to another.

The ending the poem (i.e. "make their own shelter" in line 40) echoes the beginning (i.e. "Sheltered by..."), creating a loop that envelopes the whole poem and suggesting the cyclical nature of life and the return to one's roots and origins.

The repetition of words across stanzas and the echo between the opening and closing lines help to knit the scenes together and connect the experiences of three generations (i.e. the speaker's daughter, the speaker and the speaker's parents) across different times and places. This not only enhances the cohesion of the poem, but also conveys the unity of the family.

10. In the poem, the speaker is happy to settle and raise her kid in Hong Kong because of the friendly people and safe environment. To you, what are some great things about living in Hong Kong?

(free answer)