

## Mama

Akin Jeje

The horned glasses –  
tortoise-shell, bright and gleaming,  
were all that remained  
constant;  
5 a shuffle rather than stride;  
smooth cheeks caressed  
into distant lands’  
unknown planes, deep an’ wizenened;  
warm silica grin conceals  
10 the barbs in back; the  
varicose veins  
brightly garbed  
in *uhuru* caftan.

Of course, much has changed  
15 for the one whose  
baked cashew hue  
resembles mine.

When I was a child, just before dark, she would  
read baby Yemi and me  
20 ancient tales of the mighty sun, the endless  
earth, the brilliance of sky.

Now it is I  
who sends these tales  
in electronic blips  
25 to an old woman

separated from i  
by  
the setting sun  
an endless ocean  
30 and the vastness  
of the sky.

## **Suggested Questions and Answers**

1. Where do you think the speaker's mother is from?
2. What is the main theme of the poem?
3. What kind of person is the speaker's mother? Support your answers with textual evidence.
4. In Stanza 2, the speaker mentions "much has changed" (line 14). Identify the change(s) the speaker refers to.
5. Why is "i" in small letter (line 26) in the last stanza?
6. How does the speaker highlight the distance between him and his mother?

## Suggested Questions and Answers

1. Where do you think the speaker's mother is from?  
The baked cashew-like dark skin and the costume (e.g. "uhuru caftan") she wears suggest that she is from Africa.
2. What is the main theme of the poem?  
The poem is about family love. The speaker expresses his love to his mother who lives in another country by reminiscing how she looked like and took care of him and what they usually do now.
3. What kind of person is the speaker's mother? Support your answers with textual evidence.
  - She is a gentle, cheerful and caring woman as she smiles warmly. She also read her child stories when he was small.
  - She is a traditional woman as her outfits and accessories have remained the same over the years. Moreover, she wears African traditional costumes, i.e. "uhuru caftan".
4. In Stanza 2, the speaker mentions "much has changed" (line 14). Identify the change(s) the speaker refers to.
  - The changes in the physical appearance of his aging mother – the words "deep an' wizened" (line 9) suggests that she is now having wrinkles and dry skin because of her old age. The "barbs in back" and "varicose veins" (lines 11-12) are signs of aging. Her walking slowly ("a shuffle rather than stride" in line 5) also suggests her deteriorating physical strength.
  - The changing roles between the speaker and his/her mother – the speaker's mother would read him bedtime stories in the past but now it is the speaker's turn to send his stories and updates through the Internet.
5. Why is "i" in small letter (line 26) in the last stanza?  
The use of a small "i" shows the speaker's smallness as compared with the "endless ocean" and the "vastness of the sky". The small letter "i" suggests that separation from "Mama" causes a reduction of the speaker.
6. How does the speaker highlight the distance between him and his mother?  
The last two stanzas, which consist of only one sentence, are closely related. However, the poet breaks the sentence by using run-on lines, starting a new stanza with the word "separated" and using the only word "by" in line 27. The deliberate line breaks create distance and highlight the fact that they are far apart.