

Name: _____ Class: _____

Mothers

By Nikki Giovanni
1972

Nikki Giovanni is a well-known African American poet, writer, commentator, activist, and educator. Her work ranges from writings about race and social issues to children's literature. In this poem, the speaker describes seeing her mother. As you read, take notes on the words and phrases that show how the speaker feels about her mother.

[1] the last time i was home
to see my mother we kissed
exchanged pleasantries
and unpleasantries pulled a warm
[5] comforting silence around
us and read separate books
i remember the first time
i consciously saw her
we were living in a three room
[10] apartment on burns avenue
mommy always sat in the dark
i don't know how i knew that but she did
that night i stumbled into the kitchen
maybe because i've always been
[15] a night person or perhaps because i had wet
the bed
she was sitting on a chair
the room was bathed in moonlight diffused¹ through



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those thousands of panes landlords who rented

[20] to people with children were prone to put in windows

she may have been smoking but maybe not

her hair was three-quarters her height

which made me a strong believer in the samson² myth

and very black

[25] i'm sure i just hung there by the door

i remember thinking: what a beautiful lady

she was very deliberately³ waiting

perhaps for my father to come home

from his night job or maybe for a dream

[30] that had promised to come by

"come here" she said "i'll teach you

a poem: *i see the moon*

the moon sees me

god bless the moon

and god bless me"

[35] i taught it to my son

who recited it for her

just to say we must learn

to bear the pleasures

as we have borne the pains

1. **Diffuse (verb):** to spread over a wide area

2. a character in the Hebrew Bible who would lose his incredible strength if his hair was cut

3. **Deliberate (adjective):** done or said in a way that is planned or intended; done or said on purpose

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following identifies a theme of the poem?
 - A. As children grow up, their views of their mothers evolve and change
 - B. The most important lessons that children can learn come from mothers.
 - C. As children grow up they will, without a doubt, grow apart from their mothers.
 - D. Children only come to truly understand their mothers when they become parents themselves.

2. PART B: Which section from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "the last time i was home / to see my mother we kissed / exchanged pleasantries" (Lines 1-3)
 - B. "i remember the first time / i consciously saw her / we were living in a three room/apartment" (Lines 7-10)
 - C. "mommy always sat in the dark / i don't know how i knew that but she did" (Lines 11-12)
 - D. "her hair was three-quarters her height / which made me a strong believer in the samson myth" (Lines 22-23)

3. PART A: How does the speaker's view of her mother change as she grows older?
 - A. When she is a child she views her mother as an almost mystical being, but when she is an adult she views her more realistically.
 - B. When she is a child she views her mother as average, but when she is an adult she views her as a larger-than-life figure.
 - C. When she is a child she views her mother with a sense of jealousy, but when she is an adult she views her with admiration and respect.
 - D. When she is a child she views her mother negatively, but when she is an adult she views her with more understanding.

4. PART B: Which TWO details from the text best support the answer to Part A?
 - A. "the last time i was home / to see my mother we kissed / exchanged pleasantries / and unpleasantries" (Lines 1-4)
 - B. "i remember the first time / i consciously saw her / we were living in a three room" (Lines 7-9)
 - C. "mommy always sat in the dark / i don't know how i knew that but she did" (Lines 11-12)
 - D. "i'm sure i just hung there by the door / i remember thinking: what a beautiful lady" (Lines 25-26)
 - E. "i taught it to my son / who recited it for her" (Lines 36-37)
 - F. "we must learn / to bear the pleasures / as we have borne the pains" (Lines 38-40)

5. How does the author's inclusion of the poem within the poem (Lines 32-35) develop the theme of the text?
