Home

SUMMARY

The speaker, talking about what makes people become refugees, declares that nobody flees their home unless that home has become a shark's mouth—a dangerous place ready to consume them.

The speaker goes on to detail the violence and terror that pushes people to flee from their own countries—such as when they realize that everyone around them is fleeing too, some people even more quickly than they are, running so fast that it makes their breath painful and ragged. They flee when regular people—like a boy from school with whom they snuck a kiss—take up huge weapons and join in the fighting. In short, people only become refugees when they have no other choice.

The violence and horror of these people's homes push them out, lighting a fire beneath their feet and filling them with the intense, urgent need to escape.

People never even dream of fleeing their homes until the threat of being killed is immediate and undeniable, like a hot knife at their neck. And even then, people don't want to go: they still feel tied to their homes, whispering their national anthems to themselves and holding onto their passports until the last possible moment, when they reach the airport. Then, they cry deeply while tearing their passports up and swallowing the pieces, knowing full well that this means they can never return to their homelands.

Those who have never had to become refugees must understand, the speaker says, that people don't simply risk their own children's lives by trying to cross international waters unless that dangerous journey by sea is still safer than the chaos and violence of the land left behind.

Refugees don't willingly put themselves through the pain and horror of trying to escape unless they absolutely have to do so; no one lets the skin get scraped off their palms while hanging on to the underside of a moving train, or agrees to be locked for weeks or months inside a smuggler's truck, unless every mile placed between themselves and their dangerous homelands is worth the immense pain of the journey. Refugees don't want to have to crawl under border fences and walls, or to be abused by border patrol guards, police, or angry citizens. They don't want other people to feel sorry for them.

Refugees don't just decide that they want to live in uncomfortable refugee camps, undergo invasive strip searches, or be imprisoned—if it weren't for the fact that a camp or prison is safer than the war-ravaged place left behind, or the fact that being raped by one foreign prison guard is preferable to being gang-raped by a group of their fellow countrymen.

Nobody could survive all this horror, the speaker insists; nobody would be strong enough to withstand all this unless they had to.

No one would swallow having racist insults and slurs hurled at them in the countries where they settle, where they're called dirty and uncivilized and told to go home or that they're lazy and just trying to freeload. Refugees put up with their new neighbors believing that their homeland's horror is the refugees' own fault, and that they've come to inflict the same chaos on these new countries. How do refugees deal with all this hatred, the speaker asks? They deal with it because it's still better than having a body part blown off by a bomb in their war-torn home countries.

Even this abuse is gentler than being raped by a group of men back home. Taunts and insults are easier to handle than witnessing your home be completely destroyed, your friends and family killed, and your child blown to bits. The speaker wants to go home but can't because home is incredibly dangerous—it'd be like walking into a shark's mouth or in front of a loaded gun. Again, the speaker insists, people don't just up and leave home unless that home drives them away with its violence and terror, making them flee as fast as they can, leaving all their belongings behind, and struggle through the harsh desert and vast ocean in order to find safety. People only put themselves through nearly drowning, losing everything, starving, and begging when their literal survival is on the line.

People don't become refugees until their home itself tells them they have to escape right now. They leave only when home has become utterly unrecognizable, and when they'd be safer anywhere else.

THEMES

THE PAIN OF THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

"Home" is a poem about the desperation that drives people to become refugees. The speaker pulls no punches in describing the violence, chaos, and suffering that pushes people from their homelands. And through such horrific details, the poem illustrates how the choice to flee one's home is a gut-wrenching one, reached only when the many, many dangers of leaving pale in comparison to the dangers of staying. Using a second-person point-of-view that places readers squarely within the refugee perspective, "Home" makes the case that people only leave home when they truly have no other option.

The speaker emphasizes the fact that refugees cherish their homes and mourn their loss in order to hammer home just how

difficult the decision to flee can be. The speaker describes a refugee "sobbing" as they tear up their passport, for example, illustrating the grief that accompanies knowing they can never return to the world they came from. The speaker also refers several times to refugees' fond memories of home—mentioning, for instance, "the boy you went to school with / who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory"—and even explicitly states at one point, "i want to go home."

Unfortunately, going home is not an option, as the poem also makes clear. The speaker insists over and over again that refugees have no choice but to leave their homelands, however much they may wish to stay. These beloved places are now rife with warfare, rape, and destruction, and have undergone such brutal transformations that the speaker can only use metaphor (home is "the mouth of a shark") to attempt to describe what they've become.

Refugee life is dangerous too, the speaker emphasizes, describing the terrifying journeys that refugees endure, as well as the terrible conditions of the camps and detention centers that take them in. Nevertheless, the speaker argues that all the horrors of being a refugee fall far short of the danger of staying home—a fact that illustrates the depth of such migrants' desperation. In short, the poem shows that refugees' decision to leave home is no casual choice, but a painful, disorienting last resort driven by grave danger and appalling violence.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-2
- Lines 3-11
- Lines 12-14
- Lines 15-22
- Lines 23-25
- Lines 26-34
- Lines 35-44
- Lines 45-47
- Lines 48-62
- Lines 62-88
- Lines 89-95

XENOPHOBIA, RACISM, AND THE DEMONIZATION OF REFUGEES

In addition to capturing the pain of the refugee experience, "Home" also depicts the difficult circumstances that refugees confront when they finally do reach a place of comparative safety. Having already endured terrible trauma, resettled refugees now face mistreatment and misunderstanding in their adoptive countries. This abuse includes both personal and political attacks that demonize migrants as dangerous and burdensome, "dirty immigrants" who bring trouble with them to their new homes. The poem links this abuse to xenophobia, racism, and a fundamental failure to understand what actually drives refugees from their homes.

Remembering a long list of taunts and insults, the speaker makes clear that many people are deeply cruel to the refugees seeking safety in their countries. This mistreatment is in part because they perceive refugees as menaces and burdens, "sucking our country dry." In other words, people assume that refugees go to other countries because they're lazy and want to take advantage of those countries' social safety nets. Juxtaposed against the immense horror that the speaker says refugees go through in order to make it to those countries, such ideas seem utterly absurd.

This mistreatment is also in part because of plain old racism, as the speaker makes clear when recalling statements like "go home blacks," "savage," and "they smell strange." The speaker is referencing the fact that many refugees are people of color coming into Western countries where they must often contend with deep-seated racial bigotry.

In response to all this cruelty, the speaker offers a simple plea: "You have to understand [...] no one leaves home" unless they have no other choice. The repetition of this phrase—"no one could take it / no one could stomach it / no one skin would be tough enough"—hammers home the poem's message that those who demonize refugees fail to understand the real impossibility of their circumstances.

In insisting that "no one"—implicitly *including* the citizens of those lands to which refugees flee—would put themselves through all this unless they absolutely had to, the speaker highlights the stunning lack of empathy at the heart of the bigotry, racism, and xenophobia that the poem's refugees face: after all, if people *did* understand, then how could they possibly be so cruel? Refugees, the speaker implores, deserve nothing but compassion.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-2
- Lines 3-4
- Lines 10-11
- Line 12
- Line 15
- Lines 23-25
- Lines 32-34
- Lines 35-72
- Lines 76-88
- Lines 89-91

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

no one leaves ...

... of a shark

"Home" opens with a vivid metaphor:

> no one leaves home unless
> home is the mouth of a shark

The comparison of "home," typically a place of safety and belonging, to a deadly predator makes a powerful impression. Though these lines do not actually reference refugees, their message, and the central theme of the poem, is clear right away: people don't leave home unless staying has become extremely dangerous—like sitting in a shark's mouth. The diacope of the word "home"—repeated twice in the space of as many lines—add emphasis to this idea of a familiar, welcoming space suddenly transforming into just the opposite.

The sounds of these lines make them all the more striking and memorable. Note all those /l/, /n/, and /m/ sounds:

> no one leaves home unless
> home is the mouth of a shark

This consonance adds intensity to the speaker's language. Though the poem doesn't use a steady meter, rhyme scheme, or even standard punctuation, devices like this fill it with a sense of cohesiveness and music.

Finally, these lines also establish the authority of the poem's speaker. The confidence in the speaker's voice and the boldness of this opening compels readers to keep going. This authority plays a key role in the speaker's (and the poem's) ability to make a case on behalf of refugees' welfare and worthiness.

LINES 3-6

you only run ...
... in their throats

These lines echo the sentiment of the first: people don't simply up and abandon their homes, they don't try to escape their native countries, unless they realize that everyone around them is frantically, desperately doing the same thing. Refugees don't have a lot of options, the speaker implies in these lines, and leaving home is truly a last resort.

The vivid imagery of people running "for the border," their "breath bloody in their throats," evokes the terrifying, overwhelming sensation of fleeing for one's life. The speaker also introduces a second-person pronoun into the poem here: "you only run," the speaker says, placing readers within the perspective of a refugee and making the poem feel all the more urgent and personal.

The form of the poem itself again adds to its intensity. Note how the lines slam into each other without pause, this enjambment creating a feeling of frenetic movement:

> you only run for the border
> when you see the whole city running as well

Like the refugees, readers never get a chance to catch their breath.

The actual sounds of the words in this section of the poem also play an important role in conveying the chaos and fear being described. The deep, heavy alliteration and consonance ("border," "breath bloody") echo the booms of bombs and thudding of running feet, for example, while the sharp, hissing /s/ and /t/ sounds ("city," "faster," "throats") evoke the panicked sensations of people in flight.

LINES 7-11

the boy you ...
... let you stay.

The poem offers more details as to *why* people are running for the border: a violent conflict has broken out, and they're trying to escape.

However, the speaker reveals this violence through the lens of a fond memory: "the boy you went to school with / who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory" is a nostalgic detail that gets subverted when the speaker then goes on to describe this very same boy as "holding a gun bigger than his body." Suddenly, the speaker and the boy are no longer old school friends and young lovers; they have been transformed by war into a girl fleeing for her life and a soldier.

This sharp juxtaposition between nostalgia and violence captures the head-spinning sensation of seeing your home transform into a war zone. The same can be said of the hyperbole of the boy holding a gun even bigger than he is. A gun cannot literally be bigger than a boy's body, but it can certainly *seem* that way to the traumatized girl who witnesses him carrying it.

The sounds of these lines again bring their intense imagery to life. Note the quick, light assonance of "kissed you dizzy," for example, which then contrasts with the heavy, booming consonance and alliteration of "gun bigger than his body." Despite not having any steady meter or rhyme scheme, the poem is filled with rich sounds that keep the readers' attention rapt.

The speaker also personifies home for the first time in the poem, saying that it "won't let you stay." Home here takes on a larger-than-life power, growing beyond a mere backdrop or setting for the poem's action. Instead, it becomes a force in its own right, actively driving the speaker away. This use of figurative language helps the poem portray the utter lack of choice in refugees' lives.

LINES 12-17

no one leaves ...

... your neck

The speaker uses more vivid imagery and evocative figurative language to capture the experience of being a refugee.

Once again, the speaker personifies home itself as a terrorizing, human-like force, this time described as something that actively "chases" refugees away. Refugees run, the speaker argues, because they're trying to escape the metaphorical flames of destruction that threaten to engulf them if they stay. They can feel "fire under feet / hot blood in your belly," two heat-related images that evoke the intense terror and urgency refugees feel to escape.

Continuing this heat-related imagery, the speaker next mentions the "blade" of a knife "burn[ing] threats into your neck." While this image can be read literally—perhaps some refugees have literally had knives held to their throats—it also works as a striking metaphor: people don't even imagine leaving their homes behind, the speaker says, until the danger of staying is right at their doorstep, a knife at their throat. If they were to stay, the poem implies, their necks would be cut—they would die.

The use of sonic devices like alliteration ("fire under feet"; "hot blood in your belly"; "blade burnt") and assonance ("threats"/"neck") adds to these lines' intense, overwhelming atmosphere. The sounds of the poem make their terrifying images ring out all the more clearly and memorably for readers.

On that note, readers are again thrust into refugees' shoes here through the consistent use of the second person. All those "yous" continue to slip readers right into these desperate situations. Though they have likely never fled for their lives, readers can imagine the feeling of a knife blade against their neck, and can picture what it would feel and look like to run like there was "fire under [their] feet."

LINES 18-22

and even then ...
... be going back.

In these lines, the speaker hammers home the idea that people don't want to leave home—that they don't simply become refugees for a change of scenery, but because they have no other options.

Despite the fact that their homes have become dangerous and even "chase[d]" away, refugees remain devoted. They "carr[y] the anthem[s] under / [their] breath"—humming their country's national songs to themselves, a metaphorical way of describing their continued allegiance to the world they came from even as that same world violently pushes them away.

To further illustrate the intense pain of severing ties with one's home, the speaker describes a refugee crying in an airport bathroom stall as they destroy their passport—a physical representation of their connection to their homeland. That they eat that passport, shoving wads of paper into their mouths, represent their longing to stay even as they know they must go.

In truth, it's not the literal destruction of their passport that makes it impossible for them to ever go back: it's the fact that home has become a threat. Their home isn't really home anymore; as the poem's earlier lines revealed, it has become something different and terrifying, "the mouth of a shark."

This image is also notable for its juxtaposition of an everyday airport bathroom stall against the "blade burn[ing] threats into / your neck" in the previous lines. The contrast feels like emotional whiplash, jarring readers from a war zone to the humdrum environment of an airport. This whiplash, the poem seems to suggest, has become the norm for refugees, but moments like this capture just how little readers and the rest of the outside world may truly see or understand of the refugee experience.

LINES 23-25

you have to ...
... than the land

These lines are perhaps the poem's most famous, having gone viral online several times in response to refugee crises worldwide:

> you have to understand,
> that no one puts their children in a boat
> unless the water is safer than the land

What makes them so impactful? For starters, as in earlier moments, the speaker explicitly states that only terrible desperation drives people to leave their homes. In this case, that desperation is portrayed as an impossibly difficult decision: flee home in a rickety boat on the way, or stay behind and face the violence and chaos of life on land. The stakes are made even higher here by the inclusion of "children"—truly precious cargo.

Many refugees, the poem argues, choose the sea, despite its unpredictable tides and earlier association with the dangerous "mouth of a shark." As the speaker explains, this is only because even the dangerous ocean is a safer alternative to the war-torn land, an unexpected and ironic contrast that emphasizes just how dangerous the land has become.

Unlike earlier moments in the poem, however, this stanza is unique in the way the speaker directly addresses readers. "you have to understand," the speaker declares, almost pleading with readers to empathize with refugees' plight. Drawing even further attention to this plea is the fact that this stanza contains the poem's only instance of end rhyme, pairing "understand" with "land."

At the same time, the inclusion of this line implicitly suggests that most people actually *don't* understand how and why people become refugees, or what kinds of impossible choices

they face. This line hints at how common it is for people to misunderstand, mischaracterize, and mistreat refugees.

LINES 26-34

no one burns ...
... pitied

These lines continue to focus on the dangers that refugees are often willing to go through in order to escape their homelands. The speaker describes various methods by which refugees travel to safety, from "burn[ing] their palms" on the undersides of trains, to riding "in the stomach of a truck" for weeks on end, to "crawl[ing] under fences."

This accumulation of diverse details helps convey the sheer scale of the refugee crisis and the different things people put themselves through in order to escape their dangerous homelands. Furthermore, by capturing the different but equally perilous ways that people migrate, these lines highlight the shared trauma of the refugee experience—the fact that nobody undergoes this kind of dangerous trip "unless the miles travelled / means something more than the journey." In other words, no matter how they travel, refugees share the same desperate need to reach safety. Getting as far as they can from their homelands is worth whatever dangers they encounter on the journey.

The poem begins to feel even more urgent in these lines, thanks especially to the increasingly rapid anaphora of "no one" at the beginning of lines in quick succession:

> no one burns their palms
> [...]
> no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
> no one crawls under fences
> no one wants to be beaten

The steady drumbeat of "no one," "no one," "no one" is key to reminding readers that even they belong to this group of people who would never voluntarily choose to migrate, never "want to be beaten [or] pitied" (that is, felt sorry for). This repetition insists that the people who do endure these traumas only do so because they must, and that they deserve understanding and empathy.

LINES 35-44

no one chooses ...
... like your father

The poem shifts from journeys to destinations, describing the places that take refugees in.

Once again, the speaker describes this aspect of the refugee experience through insistent repetition. The speaker says again and again that "no one" would willingly "choose" to live in these places, be they makeshift "refugee camps" or "prison[s]."

Indeed, damning details, like the "strip searches" that refugees endure, make clear that these so-called safe havens are sometimes, ironically, not much better than the places refugees have left behind.

However, they are still *marginally* safer, a point the speaker makes in the lines that follow:

> [...] prison is safer
> than a city of fire
> and one prison guard
> in the night
> is better than a truckload
> of men who look like your father

Here, the speaker explains once again that refugees are forced to make a terrible calculus, between war-torn cities and migrant detention centers, or between being raped by a prison guard to being gang-raped by multiple "men who look like your father" (in other words, fellow countrymen).

In sum, as the speaker has asserted throughout the poem, there are no good options for these refugees. They only flee because even the horrors of a refugee camp or prison are better than those horrors happening at home.

Once again, the speaker turns to sonic devices like alliteration and consonance to make the poem vivid and memorable. Take the hissing /s/ and muffled /f/ sounds of "safer / than a city of fire," which might evoke the hiss and crackle of flames.

LINES 45-47

no one could ...
... be tough enough

The speaker turns again to insistent anaphora, beginning three lines in a row with "no one" to hammer home the poem's main message:

> no one could take it
> no one could stomach it
> no one skin would be tough enough

Once again, the poem's repetition of "no one" emphasizes that *nobody*, not even readers who might see themselves as distant and different from refugees, would willingly choose this life.

Listen to the harsh sounds of these lines. The consonance of sharp /t/ and /k/ sounds in "could take it," "could stomach it," "skin," and "tough" emphasize the brutality of refugees' circumstances. The quick internal rhyme of "tough enough" might evoke the inescapability of their situations.

Finally, the narrowed focus on whether anybody's "skin" would be tough enough to endure refugee life, or whether anybody could "stomach" such a life, returns to the poem's earlier focus on individual body parts. This suggests once more that the only

way to convey the challenges of migration is through narrow, specific details. Otherwise, perhaps, the experience is simply too overwhelming to get across.

LINES 48-58

the ...
... mess up ours

The speaker switches gears, turning to some of the things that "no one" could take. This time, the speaker focuses on insults and epithets, including terrible ethnic slurs, that represent the verbal abuse refugees may endure when they resettle in foreign countries.

The use of consonance, especially hissing sibilant and sharp /k/ sounds, helps convey the cruelty that underpins these comments. Note how these lines feel almost like they're being spat out in disgust:

> asylum seekers
> sucking our country dry
> [...]
> they smell strange
> savage
> messed up their country and now they want
> to mess up ours

Implicit in this collection of insults is also the fact that many refugees are people of color who go to live in Western countries where they must often contend with deep-seated racial bigotry. In addition to being called names like "dirty immigrants," refugees are explicitly told to "go home." These lines show that refugees are not only blamed for the violence in their home countries, they are accused of trying to import the same kinds of chaos while also attacked for supposedly taking advantage of the social safety nets in their new homes.

These deeply unfair accusations point to the ironic (and tragic) fact that even after finally reaching supposed safe havens, refugees are still unsafe. The poem insists that the people who make these comments simply do not understand the refugee experience and know nothing about the suffering that drives people to flee their homes. After all, this abuse only adds to the compelling list of reasons that refugees would *not* want to leave home and start over in a new place, underscoring just how desperate they have to be in order to do so.

LINES 59-72

how do the ...
... in pieces.

The poem pivots, the speaker now appearing to address refugees themselves and ask: "how do the words / the dirty looks / roll off your backs"? In other words, how on earth do refugees endure the abuse they face after they resettle?

This question is not left to linger for long, however. Once more, the speaker explains to readers—who may number among the ignorant people hurling abuse in the lines above—how and why refugees put up with this cruelty. With perhaps a hint of sarcasm, the speaker suggests that "maybe" refugees endure all this "because the blow is softer / than a limb torn off."

Of course, a cruel remark is definitely easier to endure than a body part blown off by a bomb—or kinder than rape, or better than seeing "your child's body in pieces." These lines once again make the case that refugees face unimaginably difficult situations and choices, and ultimately opt for the lesser of two evils. The ironic presentation of such circumstances as two equal or balanced choices—as though anyone might perhaps choose "rubble" and "bone" over mere "insults"—helps hammer home, however, how ridiculous it is that people levy such thoughtless accusations at refugees in the first place.

In addition, the poem's use of consonance in these lines draws attention their shocking imagery, forcing readers to contend with the reality of refugees' choices. Take the repeated /n/ and /t/ sound in these lines, which make them seem almost like they're being said through gritted teeth:

> Or the words are more tender
> than fourteen men between
> your legs

The sounds of the lines refuse to let readers look away from the horror they describe.

Similarly, the repeated /l/ and /b/ sounds in "insults," "swallow," "rubble," "bone" and "body" challenge readers to sit with the uncomfortable metaphor of swallowing down bigotry *and* the stark reality of seeing one's home, friends, and family blown up by bombs. Implicit in these lines is the notion that if refugees cannot escape these realities, neither should readers.

LINES 73-88

i want to ...
... is more important

Line 73 suddenly slips into the first-person voice of a refugee: "i want to go home." This sudden shift in perspective coupled with such a deeply vulnerable admission, especially coming right after depictions of truly horrific realities of the refugee experience, heightens the emotional stakes of the poem. (No small feat, considering how intense the poem has been since the beginning!)

It is also a fitting opening to what becomes an absolute onslaught of horrifying images, including multiple metaphors that suggest there is no way to describe why refugees *cannot* go home except through forms of comparison. Home is, once again, "the mouth of a shark"; it is also "the barrel of the gun."

In case these deadly, dangerous metaphors don't convince readers of refugees' dire straits, the refrain "no one would

leave home" returns, as does the personification of home as a human-like force, commanding refugees to endure horrible trials:

> [...] quicken your legs
> leave your clothes behind
> crawl through the desert
> wade through the oceans
> drown
> save
> be hungry
> beg
> forget pride

The increasingly intense rhythm paired with these intense images, as the lines shorten to just one word each, emphasizes the dire nature of the circumstances being described. Refugees do whatever it takes to secure their safety, the speaker argues, even it means essentially putting themselves through hell.

Then the stanza ends by revealing the ultimate bottom line: despite all this trauma, at the end of the day, "your survival is more important." Nothing trumps life itself, a painful truth that refugees know all too well.

LINES 89-95

> *no one leaves ...*
> *... safer than here*

The poem's final stanza opens with one more instance of the same anaphora the speaker has turned to throughout: "no one leaves home," the speaker says, doubling down on the poem's main message that only life-or-death desperation can drive a person to become a refugee. The speaker returns to personification here as well, presenting home as something that can talk:

> no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
> saying
> leave,
> run away from me now

A voice can't literally be sweaty; this moment of synesthesia, with the sense of touch and hearing getting switched around, speaks to the confusing, overwhelming nature of the refugee experience. That "sweaty voice" also suggests that home itself has been running, that it's desperate and frantic or perhaps sweating from the heat of being a "city of fire." It's not a comfortable voice, in any case.

Home takes on that first-person perspective now, as it admits it has transformed beyond recognition into a dangerous force it can barely comprehend itself:

> i dont know what i've become
> but i know that anywhere
> is safer than here

Part of the immense pain and trauma of the refugee experience, the speaker implies in these lines, is knowing that your home has been irrevocably changed. Home is meant to be a place of comfort, security, and familiarity, but it has lost its identity in the face of terrible violence. Refugees must leave home because home as they know it no longer exists.

Home's insistence to "leave / run away from me now" is particularly heartbreaking, sounding like a loved one telling refugees that they must flee for their own good, before it's too late. As the poem has insisted over and over, and emphasizes one last time in its very last lines, they must "run away" because "anywhere / is safer than" where they come from.

SYMBOLS

THE SEA

References to the sea appear several times throughout the poem, either implicitly through metaphors like "mouth of a shark" or in explicit contrast with the shore or the land. The sea's constantly changing nature symbolizes the uncertainty and danger that refugees face when they embark on their treacherous journeys to safety.

The following lines make this contrast explicit, as the speaker implores readers:

> you have to understand,
> that no one puts their children in a boat
> unless the water is safer than the land

Here, the sea's symbolic association with danger and fear plays an important role in emphasizing just how dangerous the otherwise (seemingly more constant) land is. However uncertain and challenging the sea may be, it offers something the land cannot: a chance of escape and freedom.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 23-25:** "you have to understand, / that no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land"
- **Line 76:** "and no one would leave home"
- **Line 77:** "unless home chased you to the shore"
- **Lines 82-83:** "wade through the oceans / drown"

THE ANTHEM

When the speaker says, "and even then you carried the anthem under / your breath," this is a subtle reference to the national anthem of this refugee's country. More broadly, this anthem symbolizes refugees' deep, personal attachment to their homelands.

This attachment persists despite the fact that these homelands have become dangerous places, so dangerous that refugees are forced to leave. As such, this person sings this song under their breath even though they are in an airport, either bound for or having just landed in a foreign nation. The anthem remains a touchstone for this refugee—perhaps the only touchstone of home that remains, since, as the poem describes, they are humming it under their breath at the same time that they tear up their passport, their last physical tie to their home.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 18-22:** "and even then you carried the anthem under / your breath / only tearing up your passport in an airport toilet / sobbing as each mouthful of paper / made it clear that you would not be going back."

POETIC DEVICES

ANAPHORA

"Home" originated as a spoken word poem, and like much oral poetry, relies heavily on repetition to create musicality and meaning. The most common repetitive device here is anaphora. There are a few different versions of anaphora throughout the poem, but the most prominent is the repetition of the phrase "no one" (and sometimes the longer "no one leaves home"), which opens the poem and appears again and again.

This phrase becomes a kind of refrain, and it plays an important role in delivering the poem's message: that people only become refugees when they truly have no other option. Each time the speaker asserts that "no one would leave home / unless home chased you," or "no one crawls under fences / no one wants to be beaten," or simply, "no one could take it," it implicitly reminds readers that they themselves are included in that "no one" and would never willingly undergo such suffering. Thus, this repetition insists, the people who do endure these traumas only do so because they must, and they deserve understanding and empathy.

The poem includes other instances of anaphora as well, such as the repetition of the word "than," as in:

> than rubble
> than bone
> than your child's body

These moments not only add to the poem's message, underscoring the traumas that refugees may endure, but they also add to the poem's compelling rhythm. The reiteration of the same phrases over and over again gives the poem a sense of forward momentum, as well as a claustrophobic or inescapable sonic quality, which helps capture the dire straits that refugees find themselves in against their will.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "no one leaves home"
- **Line 12:** "no one leaves home"
- **Line 24:** "no one"
- **Line 26:** "no one"
- **Line 29:** "no one"
- **Line 32:** "no one"
- **Line 33:** "no one"
- **Line 35:** "no one"
- **Line 45:** "no one"
- **Line 46:** "no one"
- **Line 47:** "no one"
- **Line 63:** "than"
- **Line 65:** "than"
- **Line 69:** "than"
- **Line 70:** "than"
- **Line 71:** "than"
- **Line 76:** "no one would leave home"
- **Line 77:** "unless home"
- **Line 78:** "unless home"
- **Line 89:** "no one leaves home"

ALLITERATION

"Home" uses lots of striking alliteration, as well as assonance and consonance, to elevate and intensify its language. All this repetition of sound also helps to hammer home the key images and emotions that make the poem so gripping, holding readers (and listeners) rapt at attention.

For example, take these lines near the poem's beginning:

> breath bloody in their throats
> the boy you went to school with
> who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
> is holding a gun bigger than his body

This section would be emotionally resonant even without the alliteration, given the horrors it describes: a refugee's experience of seeing their home become a war-torn city full of people either fleeing for their lives or caught up in the conflict. However, the use of alliteration—in this case, the forceful /b/ in words like "border," "bloody," and "boy"—helps highlight the most horrific details, thus refusing to let readers turn away from the pain and suffering being described. The speaker turns to alliteration like this often, calling readers' attention to

certain moments and making the poem's often horrific imagery feel all the more immediate and powerful.

Alliteration can also change the poem's tone to match its content. Take the sibilant /s/ sounds of "asylum seekers / sucking our country dry [...] they smell strange / savage." Readers can hear the cruel, dismissive hiss of those taunts and jeers.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "breath bloody"
- **Line 7:** "boy"
- **Line 8:** "behind"
- **Line 9:** "bigger," "body"
- **Line 13:** "fire," "feet"
- **Line 14:** "blood," "belly"
- **Line 16:** "blade burnt"
- **Line 20:** "tearing," "toilet"
- **Line 21:** "mouthful"
- **Line 22:** "made," "be," "back"
- **Line 26:** "burns"
- **Line 28:** "beneath"
- **Line 30:** "miles"
- **Line 31:** "means," "more"
- **Line 33:** "be beaten"
- **Line 36:** "strip searches"
- **Line 39:** "safer"
- **Line 40:** "city"
- **Line 44:** "look like"
- **Lines 52-53:** "asylum seekers / sucking"
- **Lines 55-56:** "smell strange / savage"
- **Line 61:** "backs"
- **Line 62:** "because," "blow"
- **Line 79:** "quicken"
- **Line 80:** "clothes"
- **Line 81:** "crawl"
- **Line 85:** "be"
- **Line 86:** "beg"

ASSONANCE

Assonance, like alliteration and consonance, adds intensity and rhythm to the poem's language, in turn strengthening the poem's emotion and meaning.

For instance, toward the poem's beginning, the short /ih/ sounds when the speaker mentions the boy who "kissed you dizzy" seem to evoke the delighted dizziness of young love—making the revelation that this same boy now holds a "gun bigger than his body" all the more brutal.

Assonance often appears alongside the poem's other sonic devices, as in these lines:

> [...] the blade burnt threats into
> your neck
> and even then you carried the anthem under
> your breath

Here, the assonance of short /eh/ sounds, consonance of /th/ sounds, and alliteration of /b/ sounds combine to make the poem feel all the more urgent and striking at this moment. Those repetitive sounds seem to pull readers/listeners through the lines, just as the refugees are pulled away from their homelands.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "kissed," "dizzy," "tin"
- **Line 9:** "is holding," "bigger," "his"
- **Line 11:** "home won't"
- **Line 16:** "threats"
- **Line 17:** "neck"
- **Line 18:** "then," "anthem"
- **Line 19:** "breath"
- **Line 23:** "understand"
- **Line 25:** "land"
- **Line 47:** "one," "tough enough"
- **Line 49:** "go home"
- **Line 64:** "words," "more"
- **Line 65:** "fourteen"
- **Line 73:** "go home"

CONSONANCE

Consonance, like alliteration and assonance, adds music and intensity to the poem, drawing readers' ears to certain moments and making the poem's striking imagery linger in readers' minds.

For instance, note the sharp /t/ and /p/ sounds as the speaker describes refugees tearfully destroying their passports—a final connection to their homes:

> only tearing up your passport in an airport toilet
> sobbing as each mouthful of paper

The sharpness of these sounds evokes the painfulness of this moment.

Consonance works similarly throughout the poem. For another example, listen to the /b/ and /l/ sounds in the following lines, when the speaker says that the insults and abuse refugees face in their adoptive countries is easier:

> to swallow
> than rubble
> than bone
> than your child's body

Those thudding /b/ sounds add a kind of heaviness to the lines.

Mixed with those throaty /l/ sounds, they seem almost like a kind of gulping sob. The sounds here, then, reflect the horror and pain being described.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "leaves," "unless"
- **Line 2:** "home," "mouth"
- **Line 6:** "breath bloody," "their throats"
- **Line 7:** "boy," "school"
- **Line 8:** "kissed," "behind"
- **Line 9:** "gun bigger," " body"
- **Line 12:** "leaves," "unless"
- **Line 13:** "fire," "feet"
- **Line 14:** "blood," "belly"
- **Line 16:** "blade burnt threats into"
- **Line 18:** "then," "anthem"
- **Line 19:** "breath"
- **Line 20:** "tearing up," "passport," "airport toilet"
- **Line 21:** "mouthful," "paper"
- **Line 22:** "made"
- **Line 23:** "understand"
- **Line 24:** "no one," "children in"
- **Line 25:** "unless," "than," "land"
- **Line 26:** "no one burns"
- **Lines 26-27:** "palms / under trains"
- **Line 28:** "beneath"
- **Line 29:** "nights," "stomach," "truck"
- **Line 30:** "unless the miles travelled"
- **Line 31:** "means something more"
- **Line 33:** "be beaten"
- **Line 36:** "strip searches"
- **Line 39:** "safer"
- **Line 40:** "city," "fire"
- **Line 43:** "truckload"
- **Line 44:** "look like"
- **Line 45:** "could take it"
- **Line 46:** "could stomach it"
- **Line 47:** "skin," "tough enough"
- **Lines 52-53:** "asylum seekers / sucking"
- **Line 53:** "country"
- **Lines 55-57:** "smell strange / savage / messed"
- **Line 61:** "backs"
- **Line 62:** "because," "blow"
- **Line 64:** "words," "more tender"
- **Line 65:** "fourteen men between"
- **Line 68:** "swallow"
- **Line 69:** "rubble"
- **Line 70:** "bone"
- **Line 71:** "body"
- **Line 74:** "home," "mouth"
- **Line 79:** "quicken," "legs"
- **Line 80:** "leave," "clothes"
- **Line 81:** "crawl"
- **Line 85:** "be"
- **Line 86:** "beg"

ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment is one of the defining poetic techniques of "Home." There is strikingly little punctuation in the poem, even at the ends of lines, meaning that the vast majority of lines and stanzas are enjambed, thoughts running quickly, even jarringly, from one to the next.

This creates compelling momentum, both on the page and out loud. Indeed, the poem's reliance on enjambment speaks to its origins as a spoken word performance, in which rhythm helps propel the poem forward. Here, the poem's reliance on enjambment helps to hammer home its major themes: the relentless forward motion created by the enjambed lines mimics the desperate rush of refugees' journeys as they flee to safety. It also evokes the overwhelming nature of the refugee experience, as lines seem to rush at the reader without end, without time for a breath or break.

Importantly, the moments where enjambment is *not* in effect serve as an important contrast. Again, there's not much punctuation in the poem—but there are some distinct pauses, as in the first two lines:

> no one leaves home unless
> home is the mouth of a shark

That first line is enjambed, but the second is not. The clear pause after "shark" adds weighty intensity to the speaker's claim that people don't become refugees unless they have no other choice.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "unless / home"
- **Lines 3-4:** "border / when"
- **Lines 7-8:** "with / who"
- **Lines 8-9:** "factory / is"
- **Lines 10-11:** "home / when"
- **Lines 15-16:** "doing / until"
- **Lines 16-17:** "into / your"
- **Lines 18-19:** "under / your"
- **Lines 21-22:** "paper / made"
- **Lines 24-25:** "boat / unless"
- **Lines 26-27:** "palms / under"
- **Lines 29-30:** "truck / feeding"
- **Lines 30-31:** "travelled / means"
- **Lines 35-36:** "camps / or"
- **Lines 36-37:** "your / body"
- **Lines 39-40:** "safer / than"
- **Lines 41-42:** "guard / in"

- **Lines 42-43:** “night / is”
- **Lines 43-44:** “truckload / of”
- **Lines 48-49:** “the / go”
- **Lines 49-50:** “blacks / refugees”
- **Lines 51-52:** “immigrants / asylum”
- **Lines 52-53:** “seekers / sucking”
- **Lines 55-56:** “strange / savage”
- **Line 57:** “messed”
- **Lines 57-58:** “want / to”
- **Lines 59-60:** “words / the”
- **Lines 60-61:** “looks / roll”
- **Lines 62-63:** “softer / than”
- **Lines 63-64:** “off / or”
- **Lines 64-65:** “tender / than”
- **Lines 65-66:** “between / your”
- **Lines 66-67:** “legs / or”
- **Lines 67-68:** “easier / to”
- **Lines 68-69:** “swallow / than”
- **Lines 71-72:** “body / in”
- **Lines 76-77:** “home / unless”
- **Lines 78-79:** “you / to”
- **Lines 89-90:** “ear / saying”
- **Lines 93-94:** “become / but”
- **Lines 94-95:** “anywhere / is”

HYPERBOLE

Hyperbole is used sparingly but to important effect in "Home." For the most part, the extreme circumstances presented throughout the poem are *not* exaggerated but are in fact meant to capture the true brutality of war, rape, and trauma.

However, on a few occasions, the poem does use hyperbole, stretching reality just a bit in order to more vividly convey the sheer scale of the terror and violence being described. For instance, in the first stanza, the speaker says "you only run for the border / when you see the whole city running as well," and then, a few lines later, describes a school friend and first love as "holding a gun bigger than his body."

A gun cannot literally be bigger than a boy's body, but it can certainly *seem* that way to the traumatized girl who witnesses him carrying it and will never forget how deeply shocked and frightened it made her feel. Likewise, it's unlikely that literally every single citizen of this city is running by foot towards the nearest international border. Again, however, the hyperbole here helps capture the overwhelming trauma of this unsettling experience—that of suddenly seeing your friends, family, and neighbors flee the country in response to violence, and joining them yourself.

Where Hyperbole appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** “the whole city running ”
- **Line 9:** “ a gun bigger than his body”
- **Lines 43-44:** “ a truckload / of men”

IMAGERY

"Home" is full of compelling imagery. The poem's theme centers on the pain of the refugee experience, and its imagery is used in order to conjure that experience in vivid detail for readers/listeners.

Its imagery covers everything from the violence and chaos that drives refugees away from home—"the blade burn[ing] threats into / your neck"—to the brutal journeys that refugees undergo—"burn[ing] their palms / under trains," "crawl[ing] through the desert," "wad[ing] through the oceans." The poem's imagery plays a crucial role in making these dire situations concrete, immediate, understandable—and thus more sympathetic for readers who may never have experienced them.

Imagery like that of a refugee sobbing while "tearing up [their] passport in an airport toilet" is striking for how mundane it is—the image of an airport bathroom stall offering a stark contrast with a "city of fire" and people running so hard and fast that their "breath" becomes "bloody in their throats." Moments like this capture just how little the outside world may truly see or understand of the refugee experience, and how jarring it can be to leave one's entire world behind.

Other imagery is truly brutal, like that of "a limb torn off," buildings turned to "rubble," and "your child's body / in pieces." These moments are purposefully horrifying, and are meant to convey the immense trauma and violence that many refugees are trying to escape.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “the mouth of a shark”
- **Lines 3-6:** “you only run for the border / when you see the whole city running as well / your neighbors running faster than you / breath bloody in their throats”
- **Lines 7-9:** “the boy you went to school with / who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory / is holding a gun bigger than his body”
- **Lines 12-14:** “home chases you / fire under feet / hot blood in your belly”
- **Lines 16-17:** “the blade burnt threats into / your neck”
- **Lines 18-22:** “carried the anthem under / your breath / only tearing up your passport in an airport toilet / sobbing as each mouthful of paper / made it clear that you would not be going back.”
- **Lines 26-28:** “burns their palms / under trains / beneath carriages”
- **Lines 29-30:** “days and nights in the stomach of a truck / feeding on newspaper”

- **Line 32:** "no one crawls under fences"
- **Lines 36-37:** "strip searches where your / body is left aching"
- **Line 40:** "a city of fire"
- **Lines 43-44:** "a truckload / of men who look like your father"
- **Line 63:** "a limb torn off"
- **Lines 65-66:** "fourteen men between / your legs"
- **Lines 69-72:** "than rubble / than bone / than your child's body / in pieces."
- **Lines 74-75:** "home is the mouth of a shark / home is the barrel of the gun"
- **Line 77:** "home chased you to the shore"
- **Lines 78-82:** "home told you / to quicken your legs / leave your clothes behind / crawl through the desert / wade through the oceans"
- **Line 89:** "home is a sweaty voice in your ear"

IRONY

The ironic aspects of "Home" do not occur on a line-by-line level, but instead occur at the level of its major themes and messages.

Perhaps the most obvious (and painful) example is the fact that after suffering so much to reach places of relative safety, refugees continue to face abuse and mistreatment in their new homes.

Many supposed refuges, whether literal refugee camps or simply foreign countries to which refugees flee, are sites filled with more violence and trauma. All that's changed is the *type* of suffering refugees undergo: now they face things like "strip searches," a total lack of empathy, and racist insults. The statement that "prison is safer" than anywhere else doubles down on this irony, and the fact that the prison guard is a rapist completely subverts the expectations of protection attached to his role.

In addition, the poem contains a few lines that turn readers expectations upside-down, sometimes quite explicitly. For instance, the speaker at one point states, "no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land"—deliberately alluding to the irony of a rickety boat being safer than the solid shore.

Where Irony appears in the poem:

- **Lines 24-25:** "that no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land"
- **Lines 35-39:** "no one chooses refugee camps / or strip searches where your / body is left aching / or prison, / because "
- **Lines 39-44:** "prison is safer / than a city of fire / and one prison guard / in the night / is better than a truckload / of men who look like your father"
- **Lines 49-58:** "go home blacks / refugees / dirty immigrants / asylum seekers / sucking our country dry / niggers with their hands out / they smell strange / savage / messed up their country and now they want / to mess up ours"
- **Lines 62-63:** "the blow is softer / than a limb torn off"
- **Lines 64-66:** "the words are more tender / than fourteen men between / your legs"
- **Lines 67-72:** "the insults are easier / to swallow / than rubble / than bone / than your child's body / in pieces."

METAPHOR

"Home" opens with an unforgettable metaphor:

> no one leaves home unless
> home is the mouth of a shark

From there, the transformation that refugees' homes have undergone is compared to other terrifying, violent things, like "a city of fire," "the barrel of the gun," and "a sweaty voice in your ear" telling them to run. In each case, the poem's turn toward metaphors indicates that what has happened to these once-beloved homelands is so terrible that the only way to begin to describe it is through comparison or implication. The straightforward details—though painful in their own right, as the poem also makes clear—sometimes simply cannot capture the true horror of a situation in the way a successful metaphor can.

"Home" actually relies most often on straightforward, painful detail; there are only a handful of metaphors used throughout the poem. However, these metaphors are so compelling and impactful that they are among the most oft-quoted sections of the poem. The speaker even repeats "home is the mouth of a shark" later in the poem, suggesting that the poet understood just how emotionally resonant this particular metaphor would be.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "home is the mouth of a shark"
- **Line 13:** "fire under feet"
- **Line 40:** "a city of fire"
- **Line 74:** "home is the mouth of a shark"
- **Line 75:** "home is the barrel of the gun"
- **Lines 89-92:** "home is a sweaty voice in your ear / saying / leave, / run away from me now"

PARALLELISM

Though "Home" does not use a traditional form, resulting in stanzas and lines of all different lengths and rhythms, it does use a few poetic techniques to create structure and

consistency. Chief among these devices is parallelism: the poem returns again and again to the same sentence grammar and arrangement of words and phrases, creating a chorus-like sound that consistently hammers home the poem's main message: "no one leaves home unless [...]"

The reasons vary ("unless / home is the mouth of a shark," "unless home chases you," "unless home told you / to quicken your legs") but the action, and sentence structure, is always the same, driving home the poem's main point—that refugees have no choice but to flee—through repetition.

Likewise, the poem's repetition of "no one" emphasizes as another important, repeated idea: that *nobody*, not even the readers who might see themselves as very different kinds of people than those who become migrants, would willingly choose refugee life. "no one could take it / no one could stomach it / no one skin would be tough enough," the speaker emphasizes, the parallel construction of each line heavily hammering home that the subject—"no one," absolutely no one—remains the same.

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "no one leaves home"
- **Lines 1-2:** "unless / home is the mouth of a shark"
- **Line 3:** "you only run"
- **Line 4:** "when you see"
- **Line 10:** "you only"
- **Line 11:** "when home"
- **Line 12:** "no one leaves home," "unless home chases you"
- **Line 24:** "no one puts their children in a boat"
- **Line 25:** "unless the water is safer than the land"
- **Line 26:** "no one burns their palms"
- **Line 29:** "no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck"
- **Line 32:** "no one crawls under fences"
- **Line 33:** "no one wants to be beaten"
- **Line 34:** "pitied"
- **Line 35:** "no one chooses refugee camps"
- **Line 36:** "or strip searches"
- **Line 38:** "or prison,"
- **Lines 45-47:** "no one could take it / no one could stomach it / no one skin would be tough enough"
- **Lines 49-52:** "blacks / refugees / dirty immigrants / asylum seekers"
- **Line 59:** "the words"
- **Line 60:** "the dirty looks"
- **Line 63:** "than a limb torn off"
- **Line 64:** "or the words"
- **Lines 65-66:** "than fourteen men between / your legs"
- **Line 67:** "or the insults"
- **Lines 69-72:** "than rubble / than bone / than your child's body / in pieces."
- **Line 74:** "home is the mouth of a shark"
- **Line 75:** "home is the barrel of the gun"
- **Line 77:** "unless home chased you to the shore"
- **Line 78:** "unless home told you"
- **Lines 79-82:** "quicken your legs / leave your clothes behind / crawl through the desert / wade through the oceans"
- **Lines 83-87:** "drown / save / be hungry / beg / forget pride"
- **Line 89:** "no one leaves home until home," " is a sweaty voice in your ear"

PERSONIFICATION

Throughout the poem, the speaker consistently personifies "home," transforming it from a physical place into a powerful, human-like force. Home "chases" refugees away; it "[tells] you / to quicken your legs [and] leave your clothes behind"; it even becomes "a sweaty voice in your ear" warning you to leave.

This device captures the intense new role that home plays in the lives of refugees, no longer simply the setting or backdrop, but rather a pivotal force that changes literally everything.

The poem's use of metaphor and imagery (not to mention the title) also helps capture the immense impact of home on refugees' lives. What makes the personification in the poem so unique, however, is its ability to convey the deeply personal aspect of this devastation, an intimate betrayal that feels as close as a "voice in your ear."

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 10-11:** "you only leave home / when home won't let you stay."
- **Line 12:** "no one leaves home unless home chases you"
- **Lines 76-83:** "and no one would leave home / unless home chased you to the shore / unless home told you / to quicken your legs / leave your clothes behind / crawl through the desert / wade through the oceans / drown"
- **Lines 89-95:** "no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear / saying / leave, / run away from me now / i dont know what i've become / but i know that anywhere / is safer than here"

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

"Home" is an excellent example of stream of consciousness. The poem relies heavily on enjambment to capture the overwhelming sensations of the refugee experience, bombarding readers with an onslaught of sensory detail and emotion that immerses them in the refugee perspective.

Though the poem does not represent a singular refugee's thought process, the poem's use of the second-person allows it to nevertheless achieve a stream-of-consciousness style by uniting various examples of the refugee experience under a

singular "you." That this compound speaker feels as intimate and real as a first-person speaker would has much to do with the dizzying stream-of-consciousness style achieved through the poem's loose, run-on lines and stanzas. In addition, the poem's reliance on repetition emphasizes the way refugees' minds are preoccupied with the same brutal truth: "home won't let [us] stay."

Where Stream of Consciousness appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-95

VOCABULARY

Anthem (Line 18) - A song associated with a specific country or group.

Carriage (Line 28) - A railway passenger coach.

Refugee (Line 35) - A person who flees to a foreign country to escape danger or persecution.

Asylum seekers (Line 52) - Asylum is a kind of protection that nations may offer people fleeing persecution in their native countries. Asylum seekers are people looking for this kind of protection.

Savage (Lines 55-56) - A slur suggesting immigrants lack complex, civilized culture.

Rubble (Lines 67-69) - Rough broken pieces of stone or brick from destroyed buildings.

Barrel of the gun (Line 75) - The part of a gun that the bullets go through when the gun is fired.

Quicken your legs (Lines 78-79) - Move your legs more quickly, faster.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Home" does not follow a fixed or traditional form, and does not use a consistent rhyme scheme or meter. It consists of 11 stanzas that vary widely in length, from two lines to 24 lines, which in turn can run anywhere from one to 13 words long.

"Home" is a prime example of contemporary 21st-century spoken word poetry, a modern form that builds on the ancient traditions of oral poetry and relies heavily on the poet's live performance of the work, particularly the rhythm of their language to heighten emotion and extend poetic meaning.

In fact, "Home" has never been officially published, and thus there is no definitive written-down version of the poem. However, when transcribed, it becomes clear that formal poetic techniques like enjambment, anaphora, and parallelism play a large role in giving the poem its structure and shape, both orally and on the page.

METER

"Home" was written in free verse, which means it does not adhere to any strict meter. Instead, its rhythms vary from line to line and stanza to stanza. As a result, the poem feels free-flowing and unpredictable, the speaker varying the pace and emphasis throughout.

RHYME SCHEME

"Home" does not use a consistent rhyme scheme. Instead, the poem is written in free verse and uses devices like anaphora, assonance, and alliteration to lend it a sense of free-flowing music and rhythm.

That said, there is a striking moment of end rhyme towards the poem's middle section:

> you have to **understand**,
> that no one puts their children in a boat
> unless the water is safer than the **land**

This is perhaps the most oft-quoted part of the poem, which may be due as much to the musicality of those rhyming lines as the powerful image they contain.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "Home" is never named or clearly identified but is obviously someone very familiar with the refugee experience. The fact that the poem is written in the second person thrust the reader into that experience as well.

This second-person perspective also allows for the speaker to create a universal voice, incorporating a multitude of different refugee experiences under the shared umbrella of one "you"—from those refugees who "crawl through the desert" to those who "wade through the oceans" in order to reach safety.

At the same time, the "you" also enables the speaker to directly address the reader, as in moments like, "you have to understand." This is also the case when the speaker uses the third person to admonish the reader, emphasizing again and again that "no one leaves home" unless given no other choice. The "no one" to whom the speaker refers includes not only refugees but also implicitly refers to readers who are *not* refugees. In other words, the speaker speaks on behalf of everybody while stressing the horrors of the circumstances and choices that refugees face.

Finally, the speaker does occasionally lapse into first-person, acknowledging a singular voice directing the course of the poem and offering its most vulnerable admissions: "i want to go home" and "i don't know what i've become / but i know that

anywhere / is safer than here."

SETTING

The setting of "Home" varies throughout the poem. One key location, of course, is "home" itself—the place that refugees flee from and later miss and mourn. Though the speaker dedicates many lines to describing home, especially by recounting memories from this place (such as "the boy you went to school with / who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory"), the speaker stops short of explicitly giving "home" a name or precise location.

This technique of evoking but never specifying the setting is used often in the poem in order to represent the many different places from which refugees across the globe originate, as well as the many different types of journeys they undertake to reach safety. For instance, some lines describe different modes of transportation that migrants take, from trains to boats to planes. The places they travel to are in turn depicted as refugee camps, prisons, and foreign countries where refugees are made to feel unwelcome.

By including such a wide variety of settings, while also never explicitly naming them, the speaker essentially makes the case that setting does not matter—refugees endure the same degree of trauma and suffering no matter where they come from or where they are going. In short, by never pinning the poem down to a specific setting, the speaker is able to encompass a broader, more universal refugee experience.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Warsan Shire is part of a wave of contemporary writers, many of them people of color, capturing the experiences of displacement, migration, and assimilation (or lack thereof) in the postcolonial West. An immigrant to the United Kingdom from Kenya, she is the daughter of Somali parents who fled their home country as refugees. Shire cites family, friends, and immigrants and refugees whom she has personally met as her biggest influences.

Her work can also be compared to that of other first- and second-generation immigrant poets, particularly women, like Suheir Hammad, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Aria Aber, Sharif Solmaz, and Safia Elhillo. These writers, like Shire, often pay attention to the intersection of patriarchy and misogyny with racism and xenophobia.

Shire has a background in spoken word, a form of contemporary poetry intended for performance and drawn frequently to issues of social justice, politics, race, and community. Her poetry is also often character-driven, striving to tell the stories of immigrants and refugees whose voices are often flattened or outright ignored in contemporary media. Her spoken word poetry was even included in Beyonce's visual album, *Lemonade*.

Shire drafted an earlier poem titled "Conversations about home (at a deportation centre)" in 2009 after meeting refugees in a Somali embassy in Rome. That poem, too, focuses on the trauma and terror of the refugee experience, and the ways in which refugees are mistreated and misunderstood by mainstream society.

There are a few different versions of "Home" on the internet, each with slightly different language.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Warsan Shire's "Home" first went viral in response to the tragic drowning of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy. The photograph of his body, washed up on a Turkish beach, not only drew renewed attention to Syria's civil war and refugee crisis, but it also prompted the fierce online circulation of Shire's poem as people sought to explain and justify the dangerous journey that resulted in Kurdi's death. "no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land" became a rallying cry on behalf of refugees.

Indeed, Shire's poem has become a touchstone in response to multiple moments in what has become broadly known as the 21st-century global refugee crisis. Currently, around 80 million people worldwide have been displaced by war, violence, and environmental destruction, the largest number since immediately after World War II. In other words, 1 in every 95 people on earth has fled their home. The sheer magnitude of this crisis has created vast challenges, from finding solutions to the crises driving people from home to addressing xenophobia and bigotry in countries where refugees often resettle.

Behind these statistics, of course, are millions of individual stories. Shire's poem seeks to—and many would say, succeeds—in giving those people and stories a voice.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Warsan Shire's Biography — Read about the poet's life and work. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/warsan-shire)
- The Writing Life of Warsan Shire — An in-depth profile of poet Warsan Shire in The New Yorker magazine. (https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-writing-life-of-a-young-prolific-poet-warsan-shire)
- Poetry on the Refugee Crisis — Five young poets, including Warsan Shire, reflect on the refugee experience. (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/16/

poets-speak-out-for-refugees-)

- The Poem Out Loud — Listen to a powerful, illustrated performance of the poem read by the poet herself. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xiygo&ab_channel=GarrettMogge)
- The Refugee Crisis — Information on the global refugee crisis, provided by the International Rescue Committee. (https://www.rescue.org/topic/refugee-crisis)

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