

Poem is framed by 2 short stanzas which show where the grandmother lives. The first creates a peaceful atmosphere.

Personal pronoun suggests a sense of detachment.

Addresses the reader - showing us her world.

Internal rhyme links 2 words - suggests these are the 2 destinations in life.

Repetition of "War" and "ever/every" gives a sense of child's perception of the length of time that's passed and the mystery of such a hoarding - sense of awe conveyed.

Tenement flat focusing on the child's favourite place - the cluttered bedroom.

Emphasises number of items.

My Grandmother's Houses

I
She is on the second floor of a **tenement**.
From her front room window **you see** the **cemetery**.

Alliteration emphasises how disgruntled the mother is.

List suggests the number of items - all frivolous - not really practical or useful - hoarding?

Highlights girl's innocence.

Her bedroom is my favourite: newspapers dating back to the **War** covering **every** present she's **ever** got since the **War**. What's the point in buying her anything **my mother moans**.
Does she use it. Does she even look at it.

Enjambment makes it seem like they go on forever.

Should be questions but seem like statements - clear contrast to the child's wonder.

I spend hours **unwrapping** and **wrapping** **endless tablecloths, napkins, perfume, bath salts, stories of things I can't understand, words like conscientious objector**. At night I **climb** over all the newspaper parcels to get to bed, harder than the school's obstacle course. **High up** in her bed all the print merges together.

Enjambment - emphasises how high the child feels she is climbing - sense of her smallness.

Enjambment - sense of awe and literal height of the bed to the child.

Metaphor - new high rise compared to a pin - reflects grandmother's animosity towards a new flat.

Definitive article - no other letter - makes it seem significant.

When she gets **the letter** she is **hopping mad**.

What does she want with anything modern, a shiny new pin? Here is home.

The sideboard solid as a coffin.

The newsagents next door which sells **hazelnut toffees** and **her Daily Record**.
Chewing **for ages** over the front page, her **toffees** sticking to her false teeth.

Suggests grandmother's energy.

Short sentence conveys a degree of poignancy, making the reader sympathise with her - she doesn't want to move and be wrenched away from familiar surroundings.

Classic signs of ageing

Simile - suggests this is where the grandmother has pictured herself staying until her life ends.

2
The new house **is called a high rise**.
I play in the lift all the way up to 24.

Once I get stuck for a whole hour.

From her window you see noisy kids playing hopscotch or home.

She makes endless pots of vegetable soup, a bit of **hoch floating inside like a fish**.

Nothing else to do - simple pleasures.

Ownership and position in community - the known and familiar.

Suggests something alien and unfamiliar.

Child's voice and desire to have fun coming through. 24 floors is an incredible height - makes it seem almost unimaginable.

Child sense of wonder - soup made from scratch is a remnant of another life.

High rise flat the grandmother moved to in the late 1960s - covers grandmother's attempts at settling in.

Simile - shows the girl's imagination - seems almost a magical production.

View has changed from a peaceful one to a noisy wild one - ambiguity - could be about the intrusion of the young and new or the arrival of life - vibrancy.

She never fully feels at home here - refuses to stop her routine.

Being swayed slowly.

Till finally she gets to like the hot running water in her own bathroom, the wall-to-wall foam-backed carpet, the parcels locked in her air-raid shelter.

Very different to her cluttered tenement - listed almost like an estate agent - no sense of connection - doesn't accept it as her place.

Items of the past not thrown away but kept locked safe - like her old life.

Shows her old fashioned work ethic - even in old age she works for a living.

But she still doesn't settle down; even at 70 she cleans people's houses for ten bob and goes to church on Sundays, **dragging me along** to the **strange place** where the air is **trapped** and **ghosts sit at the altar**.

Connotations of things past/lost but still lingering - her way of life?

Child seems as uncomfortable at church as her grandmother is in her new house - word choice suggests reluctance.

Is this how the speaker feels?

Speaker's parents aren't religious - moving away from an older, traditional way.
- shows the girl has a connection to grandmother
- her only link to this world.

Metaphor - their community but also a link to the good shepherd.

Alliteration focuses reader on their excitement about the girl.

Short sentences create detached tone - suggests lack of religious commitment - acting out a routine.

Alliteration emphasises sporadic nature of such events - shows child's connection of Gran and God.

The cleaning house where the grandmother works - introduces themes of class and the old versus the younger generation.

Simile - house layout being compared to an octopus - suggests alien nature and scale of house.

Enjambment - emphasises the length of time spent cleaning.

Hyperbole to over exaggerate the work put into cleaning the house - contrast to the piano - the mundane also excites her.

Wry humour - you can only touch something in this world if you're cleaning it.

Grandmother's role is highlighted - patronising.

Simile - image of her bent over/hunched - but also a comparison of the high rise and the bell tower - suggests she is someone who lives outside of society.

Personification highlights change in atmosphere - unlike the silent cemetery - shows the urgency of modern living - by moving, grandmother has been forced to experience this world.

Also, ambulances anticipate her death - image of sadness at the end.

Jackie Kay

Not a front room anymore - change of function - only for living in now.

View is now from the ground and not the 2nd - a drop in status? Doesn't belong anymore.

Last stanza locates grandmother - contrast of mood with 1st stanza - modern day society will do little to soothe the elderly woman in her last days.

My parents do not believe. It is down to her.

A couple of prayers. A hymn or two.

Threepenny bit in the collection hat.

A flock of women in coats and fussy hats

flapping over me like missionaries, and that is that, until the next time God grabs me in Glasgow with Gran.

Simile and comparison to saving the souls of the heathen.

Speaker growing older and grandmother seems smaller.

3

By the time I am seven we are almost the same height.

She still walks faster, rushing me down the High Street till we get to her cleaning house. The hall is huge.

Rooms lead off like an octopus's arms.

I sit in a room with a grand piano, top open -

a one-winged creature, whilst my gran polishes

for hours. Finally bored I start to pick some notes,

oh can you wash a sailor's shirt oh can you wash and clean

till my gran comes running, duster in hand.

I told you don't touch anything. The woman comes too;

the posh one all smiles that make goosepimples

run up my arms. Would you like to sing me a song?

Someone's crying my Lord Kumbaya. Lovely, she says,

beautiful child, skin the colour of café au lait.

'Café oh what? Hope she's not being any bother.'

Not at all. Not at all. You just get back to your work.

On the way to her high rise I see her

like the hunchback of Notre Dame. Everytime I crouch

over a comic she slaps me. Sit up straight.

She is on the ground floor of a high rise.

From her living-room you see ambulances, screaming their way to the Royal Infirmary.

Short sentence highlights her astonishment at such a place.

Something is striking about this woman to the girl.

Class differences - lacks access to the language the posh woman uses.

Alliteration highlights the contrast between her posture and the grandmother's - wants more for her.

Metaphor - conveys girl's feelings of wonder on first seeing object - also her growing imagination - fantastic/mythical/exotic.

Patronising tone - shows who is above the other.

Standards form another time - emphasises the difference between the generations.

Written in colloquial style to allow Kay to swap between voices - child, mother, grandmother.

Themes

- * Old age
- * Childhood
- * Class
- * Family relationships

Poem divided into 3 sections - each one describes a different house connected to the grandmother.