

Fat black woman  
goes shopping,  
tropical death and  
praise song for my  
mother



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Grace Nichols was born and brought up in Georgetown, Guyana. She was moved to London where she still lives. Due to the history of invasions the people from the Caribbean Islands are a mixture of races. Most of the original Caribbean people were killed off by disease brought to the Islands by western explorers.

As a result of this, Grace Nichols is a mixture of races and this comes through in her poetry, as she mixes standard English and Creole. Also her multicultural background leaves her searching for her roots and her identity. This also comes through in her poetry as she often creates an idyllic image of the Caribbean using warm imagery, and contrasts this with a cold, unwelcoming image of northern Europe. ' Fat Black Woman goes shopping' is a humorous poem that delivers a serious message. The message is that the British fashion industry does not accommodate everyone.

The character feels out of place, when she is shopping in London. This is because of the weather and the welcome she gets. The weather is described as being cold. The word cold has a double meaning. The first is that the weather is cold and the second meaning is the way people are treating her. If they are being cold they are being mean, bitter and unwelcoming.

An example of this is the ' salesgals', ' and de pretty face salesgals exchanging slimming glances'. The salesgals are like the ' frozen thin mannequins'. Both are cold but for different reasons. The mannequins feel cold when they are touched, but the salesgals are cold in the way they act towards the fat black woman, making her feel unwelcome. The assonance ' thin mannequins fixing her with grin'.

The assonance on the 'l' creates a harsh or sharp sound, which enforces that the salesgals are the harsh towards her. Shopping is a 'real drag' for the fat black woman, because despite all the effort she is putting in, she cannot find anything that accommodates her. Grace Nichols uses repetition to show this in 'journeying and journeying' and 'store to store'. This emphasises the effort she is putting in without result. The expression 'Lord is aggravating' is separated from the rest of the poem to show the fat black woman's isolation and her annoyance.

She is annoyed because the fashion industry does not accommodate her. In the 3rd stanza, a warm image of the Caribbean is created. The increase in tempo and the alliteration used 'bright and billowing to flow like breezy sunlight' gives a warm image of the Caribbean making it seem idyllic. When she is tormented by the 'salesgals' she curses them in Swahili.

This is because people won't understand what she is saying but it will also make her feel closer to her roots and her identity. The conclusion that the fat black woman creates about London is 'nothing much beyond size 14'. This line is on its own to make it stand out and to show that the fat black woman stands on her own in London. This poem may be Grace Nichols way of showing how she feels about the Caribbean and about London, but expressing her view in a humorous way. The poem 'Tropical Death' shows a strong contrast between European funerals and Caribbean funerals. The poem is similar to the 'Fat black woman goes shopping' because they are both about a fat black woman and both have a serious message.

In the poem Grace Nichols gives her impression of European funerals. She believes they are short, polite and quiet and that Europeans hide their emotions ('cold sojourn' and 'far/forlorn' is a good example of assonance. The end sound of the words, 'orn', sounds soft and bleak, much like Grace's view of Europeans funerals). The phrase 'cold sojourn' shows that Grace believes that at Europeans funerals people just make a short story to say goodbye, and cold suggest they hide their emotions and behave falsely. That links with 'The fat black woman goes shopping' poem, where the 'salesgals' behaved coldly towards her. The line 'no quiet jerk tear wiping also tells us a lot about how Grace feels about European funerals.

Firstly the line is awkward to say, many of the words are monosyllabic and are difficult to say. This tells us that Grace feels Europeans find it hard to express emotion. It also tells us what kind of funeral fat black woman, and possibly Grace Nichols wants. It tells us she wants people to express emotions and 'brawl' backs this up. A brawl is usually an emotionally driven event, and that is what she wants her funeral to be. The alliteration of 'heart/hibiscus' also tells us more about the funeral that the fat black woman wants.

A 'hibiscus' is a shrub that is usually placed on the coffin at Caribbean funerals. When we link this, with the other information we have, its clear that the fat black woman wants a traditional Caribbean funeral. A long, emotionally driver celebration of her life. The rhythm of: 'first night third night nine night' This is like the beat of a drum or a heart, reinforcing the idea that she wants to die in her roots, in the Caribbean. The overall

message of the poem is that even in death her roots are important to her.  
<https://assignbuster.com/fat-black-woman-goes-shopping-tropical-death-and-praise-song-for-my-mother/>

This is similar to the message of 'The fat black woman goes shopping' that she is not accommodated for in Europe.

The third poem 'Praise song for my mother' has a different style than the other two. The poem is based on a series of metaphors, but doesn't contrast the Caribbean with Europe. Also 'Praise song for my mother' is very positive, Grace Nichols is rejoicing her mother's life, rather than mourning her death. The title, 'Praise', shows this. The style used by Nichols is very simple, using short simple stanzas and lots of repetition.

'You were' is an example of the repetition. The short stanzas and repetition make the poem seem childlike, possibly showing that the life giving imagery is representations of her childhood memories. Despite this difference in style there are also similarities. Nichols uses lots of imagery, like she did in 'Fat black woman goes shopping' and in 'Tropical death'.

The positive, warm imagery shows two things. Firstly it tells us that her mother was a warm person and makes an image of the Caribbean. This links with the other two poems and how she is searching for her roots and her identity. An example of this imagery is 'the crabs leg'.

A crab requires its legs for balance and stability, and it shows that Nichols mother gave her stability. 'Moons eye to me' is another good example. This suggests that her mother is looking down on her, protecting her. The overall impression of the Caribbean that we get from the poem is that they believe death is natural, and a warm positive place. We get this impression from the warm imagery 'rise and warm and streaming'. This imagery is describing the sunshine, which is idyllic, creating a warm image of the Caribbean.

<https://assignbuster.com/fat-black-woman-goes-shopping-tropical-death-and-praise-song-for-my-mother/>

The last line of the poem stands alone. We can interpret a positive reason and negative reason for this. The positive reason is that her mother may have encouraged her to be independent. The negative reason is that Nichols may stand alone without her mother. This technique has been used before in both 'Tropical Death' and 'The fat black woman goes shopping'.

The three poems can be linked in many ways. Firstly all three use similar language. Little punctuation is used in all three poems; this is because Nichols doesn't want the reader to be restricted like her ancestors were during the European invasions of the Caribbean. She wants to give the reader the freedom that her forefathers were denied. The poems all contain lots of repetition. It is used to emphasise various points and comments.

Also the poems all contain lots of natural, life giving, imagery to create an idyllic image of the Caribbean and emphasises the idea of Nichols searching for her roots. Another way the poems can be linked is that they all are about strong, assertive characters searching for their identity. We see this the most in 'The Fat Black Woman Goes Shopping'. The 'fat black woman' is in search of accommodating clothes to make her feel closer to her roots.

The three poems together are about the cycle of life. "Praise Song for my Mother" is written in a very simple style and is about Nichols' childhood. "The Fat Black Woman Goes Shopping" is about a woman struggling to belong in her adulthood and "Tropical Death" is about death. However all three poems show a character searching for her identity at all stages of her life. Through the poems Nichols makes it clear where she feels most comfortable. It is in the Caribbean.

In “ The Fat Black Woman Goes Shopping” she shows this by contrasting North Europe with the Caribbean. Dull bleak imagery is used to describe Europe and warm natural imagery is used to describe the Caribbean. In “ Tropical Death” it is shown in a similar way, but by contrasting European funerals with Caribbean funerals. In “ Praise Song For My Mother” it is made clear by using imagery to create an idyllic image of the Caribbean.