

Comprehensive by carol ann duffy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The poem Comprehensive consists of seven stanzas and each stanza has a different voice. Carol Ann Duffy uses the idea of conflict and differences in race and culture in 1985. Comprehensive is written in seven stanzas of six or seven lines. All verses are similar in structure to emphasize the fact that whatever the culture or origin everyone is equal.

There is no rhyme or rhythm because this would not be suited to the subject matter, which is serious and emphasises the disparity of the speakers and their disjointed society in which they live in. By using rhyme and rhythm Carol Ann Duffy would also inhibit the ability to allow her speakers to use their own dialogue and express themselves. The first stanza sets the scene of the speaker's thoughts. The character compares Africa to England, by describing the memories of the speaker's life in Africa to the reader. Carol Ann Duffy uses comparisons making it easier for the reader to see the characters thoughts and feelings and the sadness of the speaker is shown, especially through the bittersweet way in which she (the speaker) refers to her family. This suggests that she feels isolated and cannot adjust to her environment.

This also applies to the speaker's sister, because the change in her language causes confusion between the siblings. The speaker seems to feel that everything has changed and wants life to be as it was- "then we were happy". The character Wayne is introduced in the second stanza. He comes across as quite an arrogant person and Carol Ann Duffy portrays him as a character who wants to be superior to others, e.

g. -“ games are for kids”. He has learned to be opinionated maybe through the influence of others. For example,” I support the National Front”.

Wayne’s attitude is ironic, because one would expect him to be more mature, as he tries to act more mature than others, but he fails miserably, for example: “ Paki-bashing and pulling girls knickers down” suggesting that in fact he is actually racist and ignorant. He has a lack of eloquence, “ I don’t suppose I’ll get a job”, but instead of admitting he has no ambition, he puts the blame on the immigrants-“ It’s all them coming over here to work”. The third verse tells the reader of the speaker’s culture and religion emphasising the cultural differences for the speaker in Africa. Again, Carol Ann Duffy evokes the readers senses (in this case-food) to give a cosy, warm atmosphere, for example: “ They ground it at home to make the evening nan”.

As oppose to the carefree life in Africa, the speaker now feels life is not easy in London, as he/she sounds doubtful-“ People wrote to us that everything was easy here”. This is not the dream that he/she thought it was. The forth stanza is the shortest one. The speaker now changes to a British person named Michelle.

Michelle seems slightly racist but not as racist as Wayne is-“ Marlon Frederic’s nice but he’d a bit dark”. Her attitude is similar to Wayne’s attitude in that she is carefree and bored with life. She also has no ambition in life-“ Probably work in Safeways”, but she has a lot to cope with-“ my mum is bad with her nerves”, which suggests that her mum is going through depression. Michelle says-“ she won’t let me do nothing”. This suggests she

doesn't have as much independence as she would like, but she uses her mum's ill health as an excuse. In fact she just doesn't want to work.

Stanza five is unusual, because unlike the other stanzas in the poem, an event occurs instead of characters expressing their thoughts and feelings. This incident doesn't seem to fit in, compared the rest of the poem, but is relevant because the first positive feeling is shown from an emigrant in England. The speaker Ejaz has made a friend and this gives a sense of hope for Ejaz's future. But in a way this new friendship is quite sad because this boy asks Ejaz in Urdu if he is Muslim, then they became friends, which gives the impression that if Ejaz did not speak the same language and have a similar culture to this boy, their friendship would not have been valid.

In Stanza three Carol Ann Duffy uses the plural form of words, for example: They, Families, We and Us, whereas in Stanza five the singular form of words are used. The contrast between the singular and plural terms in stanza three and five gives the impression that the unity in Africa was much more dominant than the isolation in England, for the immigrants and the racism from Michelle and Wayne seems to have drawn an invisible line between the British and the immigrants, making it difficult for both cultures to mix with each other. In Stanza six the speaker is racist not because he is arrogant and dislikes people of another culture but because he is ignorant. He says-“ I'd like to be mates, but they're different from us”. This suggests that he thinks they are not good people to be with because he also says-“ My sister went out with one”.

There was murder” which implies that he is afraid that something violent will happen if he becomes friends with an emigrant. The quote that suggests he is racist is-“ Some of them wear turbans in class”. “ You can’t help taking the piss”. He doesn’t understand that it is part of a Sikhs religion to wear a turban, maybe because he doesn’t know anything about their religion. This character seems to fear that associating with the emigrants would be bad for his image, or that he might get bullied. This fear could arise from peer pressure because when he says-“ you can’t help taking the piss”, it sounds as though the whole class picks on the immigrants and he feels he has to join in.

This character is also sounds like a stereotypical “ white male”, because he wants to marry “ a girl who can cook with long legs” which shows that unlike Wayne and Michelle, this speaker does want to make something of his life and wants to emigrate-“ Australia sounds alright” The first part of the last stanza is quite picturesque and romantic because the image of a beautiful country is conjured-“ Some of my family are named after Moghul Emperors”. Aurazeb, Jehangir, Batur, Humayun. “ This exotic phrase makes the rest of the stanza seem dull and ordinary as a school would be. This character feels proud of his/her culture-“ Some of my family are named after the Moghul Emperors”. As oppose to this, Carol Ann Duffy portrays the teacher as being crude, for example-“ I didn’t understand what she was saying so I didn’t get any milk”. This suggests that the speaker feels that he/she does not fit in and is unjust that he/she is being alienated.