**Background to Poem**

**Where are YOU from?**

Grandmother

Grandfather

Grandmother

Grandfather

Dad

Mum

You

**Duffy’s Journey**

Became lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, 1996 (aged 41)

Attended University of Liverpool, studying Philosophy, 1974 (aged 18)

Born in The Gorbals, Glasgow, 1955

Became Poet Laureate, London 2009 (aged 54)

Became poetry critic for The Guardian, London, 1988 (aged 32)

Moved to Stafford (between Birmingham and Manchester), 1961 (aged 6)

**‘Originally’**

* ‘Originally’ is about Duffy’s journey, moving from Glasgow to Stafford as a young girl
* She explores the idea of identity and place, loss of identity and nostalgia
* She explores both the physical and metaphorical journey of moving to a new place

**Form and Structure**

Like much of Duffy’s work, the poem has a regular structure. The three stanzas of eight lines help to divide the poem into a straightforward timeline:

**Stanza 1** recalls the journey from Glasgow towards her new home.

**Stanza 2** explores her initial sense of not fitting in to this new landscape.

**Stanza 3** considers the larger question about how our sense of identity is formed, shaped and affected by such transitions.

**‘Originally’**

We came from our own country in a red room

which fell through the fields, our mother singing

our father’s name to the turn of the wheels.

My brothers cried, one of them bawling, Home,

Home, as the miles rushed back to the city,

the street, the house, the vacant rooms

where we didn’t live any more. I stared

at the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw.

All childhood is an emigration. Some are slow,

leaving you standing, resigned, up an avenue

where no one you know stays. Others are sudden.

Your accent wrong. Corners, which seem familiar,

leading to unimagined pebble-dashed estates, big boys

eating worms and shouting words you don’t understand.

My parents’ anxiety stirred like a loose tooth

in my head. I want our *own* country, I said.

But then you forget, or don’t recall, or change,

and, seeing your brother swallow a slug, feel only

a skelf of shame. I remember my tongue

shedding its skin like a snake, my voice

in the classroom sounding just like the rest. Do I only think

I lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first space

and the right place? *Now, Where do you come from?*

strangers ask. *Originally?* And I hesitate.

**Understanding The Poem**

1. How does Duffy create a contrasting sense of comfort and distress in the first stanza of the poem? Look particularly at lines 1-5.

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1. How does the poet emphasise the speaker’s age in the first stanza of the poem?

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1. “All childhood is emigration”. Explain what the writer means in this comparison(stanza 2).

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1. How does the poet’s use of language create a sense of discomfort in stanza 2? Look particularly at lines 11-14.

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1. How does the writer’s use of imagery in the final lines of stanza 2 convey her emotional state?

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1. How does the poet’s use of language in the opening lines of stanza 3 create a turning point in the poem?

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1. How does the poet use imagery to create a sense of change in stanza 3?

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1. How would you describe the tone of the final lines of the poem? Explain.

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**Analysing Imagery**

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| **Image** | **Comparison** | **Analysis** | **Theme** |
| “we came from our own country in a red room” (stanza 1) | A car and a red room | Just as a red room is cozy, comforting, full of a person’s belongings, so too the car seemed large and crammed full of the family’s things | Nostalgia-longing to remain in same place |
| “All childhood is emigration.” (stanza 2) | Growing up to moving country |  |  |
| “My parent’s anxiety stirred like a loose tooth.” (stanza 2) |  |  |  |
| “feel only a skelf of shame.” (stanza 3) |  |  |  |
| “I remember my tongue, shedding its skin like a snake” (stanza 3 |  |  |  |

**Links to other poems**