

# Questions on ‘You’re’

1. What do you notice about the title of the poem? Why is this an appropriate title? (think about content)

‘You’re’ is a contraction. This suggests an intimate relationship. ‘You’re’ is present tense which reveals that the speaker already views the baby, who has yet to be born, as an actual person. (Opposed to ‘you will be’) 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun which means the poem is directly addressed to the auditor (baby) again suggesting an intimate and close relationship.

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2. Who is auditor in the poem?  
Baby in the womb.

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3. Comment on the form of the poem. Why is this form appropriate?

Dramatic monologue. The speaker (mother) is directly addressing the auditor (baby). Creates a personal and intimate tone. A dramatic monologue offers insight into the feeling of the speaker. The poem describes the speaker's feelings towards the baby, both positive and negative.

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4. What do you notice about the structure of the poem?

Two stanzas of nine lines reminding us of the nine months of pregnancy.

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5. Note down any words/ phrases/ lines/ sentences which describe the position of the baby in the womb. Choose one of these and comment on its effectiveness.

‘happiest on your hands’

‘feet to the stars’

‘Bent-backed Atlas’

- Not only does this imply the position of the baby but it also suggests the close connection the mother has to the child. She appears to be able to gauge its moods, even though the child is ‘mute’. It would appear to be describing the middle months of pregnancy when the foetus can still freely move about and its movement be felt by the mother.
- ‘stars’ is important as it brings to mind phrases such as ‘reaching for the stars’ implying that the mother feels the child may be a high achiever. Certainly she is reminding us of the potential of the, as yet, unborn child.
- Again, the position of the child in the womb is described. ‘Atlas’ recalls the Greek god of burden who, literally, had the world on his shoulders. The speaker may be expressing her concerns about her child’s future and the burdens they may have to carry.

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6. Note down any words/phrases/lines/sentences which describe how the baby looks. Choose one of these and comment on its effectiveness.
  - ‘Gilled like a fish’
  - ‘moon-skulled’
  - During early development foetus has gills. Reveals the mother’s interest in her baby that she should know this scientific fact. (Sea imagery is often used in Plath’s poetry)
  - Suggests the perfect roundness of the baby’s skull. Also that it is delicate – think about moonlight?

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7. Note down any words/phrases/lines/sentences which describe or suggest the speaker’s **pride** in the baby. Choose one of these and comment on its effectiveness.
  - A common-sense/Thumbs-down on the dodo’s mode’
  - ‘Right, like a well done sum’
  - ‘O high-riser’
  - The dodo is extinct and is closely connected with a lack of common sense. The speaker celebrates her baby’s superiority in this comparison. ‘Thumbs-down’ could be a reference to the baby’s position or the universal ‘thumbs-down’ sign which suggests dissatisfaction with something. This is a childish gesture gives the sense that the mother is able to relate to the baby.
  - A sense of satisfaction is conveyed. Again the image is quite childlike as it would normally be a child who would feel satisfaction in achieving this. ‘well done’ sounds self congratulatory revealing mother’s pride in her achievement.
  - The exclamation ‘O’ reveals the mother’s excitement. ‘high-riser’ suggests something growing (other images in the poem like ‘sprat’ and ‘bud’ also do this). High-rise buildings may come to mind reminding us of the earlier phrase of ‘feet to the stars’?

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8. Note down any words/phrases/lines/sentences which describe or suggest the speaker’s **affection** for the baby. Choose one of these and comment on its effectiveness.  
‘my little loaf’  
‘our travelled prawn’
- In both these quotations the possessive (belonging to) pronoun is important as the baby is seen as belonging to the mother (and the father in the second). Both the nouns used ('loaf' and 'prawn') sound affectionate, almost like nicknames. 'Loaf' has homely, safe, warm connotations. 'Prawn' could also be a reminder of the shape of the baby in the womb.

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9. Note down any words/phrases/lines/sentences which describe or suggest a **negative view** of the pregnancy or the baby. Choose one of these and comment on its effectiveness.
  - ‘Wrapped up in yourself like a spool’
  - ‘Trawling your dark like owls do’
  - ‘Vague as fog’
  - a. Suggests the baby’s selfishness. The simile at the end of the line emphasises how wrapped up (self-absorbed) the baby is. Could also be describing the position of the baby (foetal position).
  - b. ‘owl’ is a predator and is an unusual animal to compare the baby to. There is a suggestion that the mother may feel threatened by the child.
  - c. Suggests her lack of connection to the baby. This contrasts with other images in the poem when it is clear that the mother has a close connection to the child. It realistically conveys the conflicting emotions that the pregnant woman may have to the unborn child.

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10. ‘Mute as a turnip from the Fourth/Of July to All Fools Day,’ Explain these lines as fully as you can. Comment upon the dates mentioned and the simile used at the start.
- The dates span nine months. ‘Turnip’ is an usual comparison. Could suggest the shape of the bump, its solidity or convey the idea of growth. It is an organic image.

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11. Note down any words/phrases/lines/sentences which describe or suggest the baby’s experience of the womb (as the speaker imagines it) and the physical experience of pregnancy for the speaker. Choose one of these and comment on its effectiveness.
- a. ‘Trawling your dark’
  - b. ‘Snug as a bud’
  - c. ‘A creel of eels, all ripples’
  - d. ‘Jumpy as a Mexican bean’
- a. ‘Trawling’ suggests the baby looking intently into the darkness.
- b. Again an image of growth and potential. ‘Snug’ suggests the mother and baby’s close relationship. They fit together.
- c. Assonance aurally creates a sense of the baby’s rippling movement. The words sound rippling.
- d. A fun, lighthearted comparison to give a sense of the baby’s constant movement.

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11. Comment on the tone and the effectiveness of the final line.

Tone of satisfaction, pride. The speaker reminds us of the baby's potential. The adage 'a clean slate' is well known and easily understood. There is a contrast between Plath using this well known adage and then mentioning the face of the new born child which is unique. This contrast helps to emphasise the uniqueness of each human being, despite there being billions of us and the unique experience each individual woman has of pregnancy.