

The poem 'Slow Reader' is based on a mother's relationship with her son, who struggles with reading.



- **Key question:** How does the speaker feel about her son? How can you tell?

### Task one: Looking at the poem

Answer the following questions to help you prepare your ideas for this key question.

1. Look at the punctuation in the first stanza. Why might the poet have used a dash to break up the writing?
2. A 'Ladybird book' is an old fashioned book used to teach children to read. Why has the poet called it this?
3. What does the image of the 'old man / who knows the mountains / are impassable' tell you about the little boy?
4. What does 'go cold / as gristly meat' tell you about the boy's feelings about reading?
5. Find the word 'relent'. Why might the speaker have given up and 'let him wriggle free' from his reading practice?
6. The image of a fish in its 'element' suggests that the fish is in water. How does the fish feel to be in water? Does the boy feel *in his element* reading or somewhere else?

### Task two: Interpretations

Here are two interpretations of the poem 'Slow Reader'. Which one do you agree with and why? Add your own ideas too.

The speaker is frustrated and ashamed of her son because he can't read. She is making excuses for him by explaining other things he is good at. It's probably her fault that he can't read.

The speaker understands how hard it is to learn to read. She knows her son is intelligent and thinks he's just not ready to read yet. She is confident that he will learn to read eventually.

### Task three: Writing about the poem

Now return to the key question:

- How does the speaker feel about her son? How can you tell?

Use the words in the word banks below to help you write out your ideas in response to the question.

sympathy	ashamed	ability	struggle	difficult	pity	attitude
sympathetic	responsibility	embarrassed	intelligence	concerned	parenting	

I can relate	... suggests	... implies	... infer
phrase	punctuation	imagery	language