

**'Mother, any distance greater than a single span'**

**LESSON 1**

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Preparation:

Divide the poem into different banks of vocabulary. I suggest the following:

<u>Bank 1</u> Prairies Anchor Kite Ladder Sky	<u>Bank 3</u> I reach towards a hatch Endless sky Fall or fly	<u>Bank 5</u> Pelmets Doors Windows Floors Loft
<u>Bank 2</u> Zero end Unreeling years Spool of tape Breaking point Space-walking Something has to give	<u>Bank 4</u> Distance Span Measure Acres Length Metres Centimetres One hundredth of an inch Zero	<u>Bank 6</u> Mother Fingertips Second pair Of hands

You could enlarge these lists of words, photocopy them and hand out to groups of pupils or you could write them on a board and assign a group to each bank.

1. There are two ways forward: either you can suggest improvisations for the students to work with where they have to incorporate their words somewhere in their speaking or you can ask the students to devise their own scenarios ensuring they use the words somewhere in their work. There is always the opportunity to write a brief script if the class is happier working that way.
2. Ask the groups to perform their work and ask the rest of the class to think about what effect the words had in the scene. Did students use the vocabulary in the manner the rest of the class expected? Were there any surprises? Discuss which group had the most interesting words and suggest why they were more appealing and what associations they had with the vocabulary.

Homework:

Ask students to write down their favourite set of words and write a short script of their own incorporating the vocabulary wherever they deem it appropriate.

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### LESSON 2

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1. Ask class to brainstorm as a group and answer the following question:

“If you were to use all the words in a description of something what might you be describing?”

2. Collect all the ideas on the board and then ask the class to decide which ones seemed most plausible. Underline those the class particularly like. In pairs ask them to write a description incorporating the words as imaginatively as they can. Ask them to work quickly. Give no more than ten minutes for this task. Tell them when time's up and then give them five minutes to proof read what they've written. Ask pupils to read out their scenes.

3. Clean the board and write the following on it:

These words come from a poem about a mother and a son. What do you think the poet might be saying about 'mother/son' relationships from the words he has chosen to use?

Ask for suggestions and put them on the board. Which words or phrases seem to be most important now you know the context? Ask everyone to nominate the most important phrase or word and attempt to explain their choice to their original group. Ask the group to vote for the most convincing explanation and then adopt that as their group choice. Write these on the board and see if the class can decide which word or phrase is their class choice. Explain any difficulties eg prairie or pelmet.

#### Homework

Give them the title: 'Fall or Fly' and ask the class to rough out an idea for a piece of original writing inspired by this title.

## 'Mother, any distance greater than a single span'

### LESSON 3

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1. Look at the poem together and then divide up again into the same groups. Ask pupils to write down what they think the poem is about and whether the vocabulary appears to have a different meaning now they have seen it in its rightful place. Ask them to write down a response to the following questions:

1. Why do you think the poet has used a mixture of metric and imperial measures?
2. Write down the list of measurements in size order starting with the smallest and ending with the largest.
3. Summarise what you think the relationship is like between the mother and the son.
4. How does the son feel, do you think, when he reaches the end of the tape and looks through the hatch of the loft?
5. Write down what the mother is thinking as she holds the zero end of the tape.
6. Make a list of what the tape might represent literally and metaphorically in the poem?
7. How do relationships with parents change as children grow up? Make a list of key years when the relationship changes eg learning to walk...going to school, going on holiday with friends' family, staying the night with a friend, first girlfriend/boyfriend, going to college etc etc.

#### Homework.

Imagine you are the house the mother and son have been measuring up. Write a piece around 250 words outlining what you think of the two people and suggest what you think their relationship is like, using the poem to guide your ideas.

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Hopefully by this stage the students will be familiar with the vocabulary and the way Armitage has employed the language to explore his response to the mother/ son relationship. The teacher can then go on to explain the technical aspects of the poem and perhaps compare it to 'Before You Were Mine' by Carol Ann Duffy.