Work in a group to look at one stanza from the poem. Read it through together and discuss your responses to the following questions. Make notes to share with the other groups.

When you have finished, complete some of the further activities on the poem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content:</th>
<th>What is the poem about? Who is the speaker talking to and why? What are the themes of the poem?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language:</td>
<td>What word choices has the poet made? Is there a pattern (a semantic field) in the word choices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic techniques:</td>
<td>Has the poet used any similes or metaphors? Is any vivid imagery created? What about aural techniques like alliteration or onomatopoeia?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure:</td>
<td>How is the poem laid out on the page? What are the stanza and line lengths and what might this represent? Are there any examples of enjambment or caesura and why is this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form:</td>
<td>What type of poem is it? What is the rhyme scheme / rhythm and why do you think this is? Is it a regular or irregular form?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context:</td>
<td>Why did the poet write the poem? What is the tone of the poem and is there anything personal they are referring to?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suggested answers

Stanza 1

Context

The speaker in the poem is measuring up a house, as this person is moving in, measuring the carpets and curtains.

The poem is about the emotional connection between a mother and child. The child is now to be free: moving into a house will show if the child can survive on their own.

His mother has always been there for him and will come to his aid for anything he needs. The mundane act of measuring the house is a metaphor for his life and all the things he has ever needed help with.

Language/techniques

‘Mother’ becomes personal, as the poet is addressing the mother directly for help: maternal help.

His mother has ‘come to help’ him as he needs ‘a second pair of hands’ to measure distances greater than the span of his two arms. This could be a metaphor for the fact that the son needs constant help from his mother with every aspect of his life which is ‘greater than a single span’ (a small measurement).

Structure

The use of asyndetic listing for all the things that are to be measured shows the number of times the son has needed his mother.

The use of enjambment at the start shows how ‘disjointed’ he feels without his mother.

Form

Rhyming couplet of ‘doors’ and ‘floors’ creates a very structured end to the stanza which juxtaposes with the previous enjambment to represent that his mother ‘holds him together’.

Stanza 2

Language/techniques

‘Tape’ is a metaphor of the person’s life like a timeline. His mother holds the zero-end: she has always been there since he was born. He holds the growing end. Perhaps the tape could also be a metaphor for the umbilical cord with which he was attached to his mother in the womb. Although this has been literally cut, the connection between them is still there and he still depends on her for many things like a foetus depends on its mother for food and oxygen in the womb.

Maybe the mother is the ‘anchor’ holding back the son who is the ‘kite’. This could mean either security or that his freedom to fly is controlled.
The reeling out of the tape could be a metaphor for the passing of the years; although the son has grown up and moved away from home, he still relies on his mother and regularly ‘reports back to base’.

**Structure**

The abrupt end to the poem with the use of caesura between the words ‘anchor’ and ‘kite’ juxtaposes the soft end to the previous stanza. This could represent the idea that perhaps his mother is holding him back and preventing him from being independent.

**Stanza 3**

**Language/techniques**

The metaphor of the ‘space-walk’ could suggest how great a step this is for the son to break free of his mother by moving into this new house. A ‘space-walk’ also connotes moving slowly and unnaturally, as if it isn’t really happening to him and is surreal. The implication of a lack of gravity from the phrase suggests imagination and a lack of reality, whilst the image of a spaceman could link to childhood.

The speaker claims he has reached ‘breaking point’ which portrays his struggle with leaving home and having his own independence. He no longer feels safe and secure like he did when with his mother; the longer the tape stretches out, the further away he is from her, and the more anxious he feels. This could also literally refer to the tape reaching its full length and that ‘something has to give’ meaning someone has to ‘let go’ (both literally and metaphorically) even though neither of them wants to.

The ‘last one hundredth of an inch’ marks the end of the tape measure showing the mother has to let go and let her son cope without her.

The mother’s fingertips ‘still pinch’ - she has come to help the child measure up, but now may be reluctant at the end to let go.

**Structure**

Armitage’s use of ellipsis here (...) could signify a passing of time, indicating that the final line of poem refers to sometime after the rest of the poem. It could also represent a change in attitude and emotion as the speaker talks about ‘reach(ing)’ for an ‘endless sky’, as if they are now ready to become independent, regardless of whether they ‘fall or fly’.

**Context**

Armitage uses juxtaposition at the very end of the poem with ‘fall or fly’ which links to the juxtaposed theme/content of the poem as a whole. The poem looks at moving from dependence to independence and the antonyms ‘fall’ and ‘fly’ portray the idea that the future is uncertain now the speaker has moved away from home, but that he has accepted letting go.
Further activities

Focus on language in the poem

Choose five words or phrases from the poem and explain why Armitage has used them. There is an example below to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word/phrase</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unreeling</td>
<td>He is getting further away from his mother but is still connected. A fishing line unreels but is not always connected to anything (and has a hook on the end). The idea of a kite line is better as the connection remains; it is always connected to something on both ends even though the kite gets further away (and being higher is seen as a good thing).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The poem’s message

Which of these statements best sums up the poem and why?

- The poem is about moving from **dependence** to **independence**.
- The poem depicts a move from **present** to **future**.
- The poem focuses on a relationship moving from **being close** to **being apart**.
- The poem portrays a shift from **security** to **risk**.
Exam style question

*How does Armitage present a mother/son relationship in his poem?*

Choose from one of the main points below:

- Armitage presents a mother/son relationship which is moving from **dependence** to **independence**.
- Armitage presents a mother/son relationship which goes from **being close** to **being apart**.
- Armitage uses a mother/son relationship to show the anxiety surrounding moving from feelings of **security** to feelings of **risk**.

Next, choose a technique to comment on: **juxtaposition, extended metaphor, structure** or **semantic field**.

Remember to include evidence to support your analysis. You could use this wording:

‘which is **depicted/portrayed/presented** in the line ‘ ... ’

To develop your explanation and analysis, you could use one or more of these sentence starts:

Here, Armitage is **showing** that ...

His use of the **word** ... tells us that ...

This is **significant** because ...

**Alternatively**, Armitage could be saying ...

**Furthermore**, we also see this idea in the line ...

Overall, Armitage is **presenting the relationship** as ...