

Title: Behind The Scenes

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Genre: Poetry (Poverty, danger, crime and punishment, necessities of life)

Level: Intermediate (Adult content)

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Behind The Scenes

Today, an old lady came to me
begging for some food.
In return,
she told me her story.

"Food is a daily necessity,
but to me, it was a luxury.
My children cried,
not for new **shoes**,
but just for a **meal**.
School was out of the question.

I **searched** for a safe place,
but I couldn't give them
a home free from danger.
Not even a simple **shelter**.

My girls reached their teens.
They were good looking.

Queenly, in fact.

But I was just a poor mom,
couldn't give them food,
couldn't give them shelter.
Not even the **shade** of a father's
protection.

My children never asked for **education**.
They cried for love and **comfort**.
A place in the world
of their own.

Every night at midnight
someone used to come.
Every night I couldn't sleep.
I kept a **knife**
beside my bed.

It offered us no safety.
In the end,
One of my girls took her own life.
The other was raped.
And I was thrown in jail for **murder"**

A soft, **sad** smile crosses her face.

"Do you know what?
Today I got my release certificate.
Now I'm as free as a bird
they say. I can go home. Hah!
Where is that?

Where, now, is home
for one such as I?"

Learning Activities

Vocabulary

Words from the second 1000 high frequency General Service Word List (GSL)

begging comfort education knife meal murder sad searched shade shelter shoes

Words from the high frequency Academic Word List AWL

release

Off list words. These are less common words. Do not learn these unless you already know all the words in lists 1 and 2 above.

certificate jail luxury queenly raped teens

Comprehension Questions

1. *Remembering:* What were the three things the old woman said she was unable to give her children?
2. *Understanding:* What do you think the writer means by ‘*a place in the world of their own*’?
3. *Understanding:* What does ‘*free as a bird*’ mean?
4. *Inferring:* Who do you think the old woman murdered? Why do you think she did this?
5. *Inferring:* Why do you think the writer called this poem “*Behind the Scenes*”?

Critical Thinking Questions

1. *Applying:* Have you ever given food or money to someone who has begged you for it? If you have, why did you decide to give? If you haven’t, what were your reasons?
2. *Analysing:* Look at the poem again. Using the ideas in the poem, and writing these in your own words, make two lists...

Things that would have helped make the old woman feel safe	Things that made the old woman feel unsafe

3. *Evaluating*: If the old woman was protecting her daughters from danger when she murdered someone, do you think it was fair that she ended up going to jail? If you think it was unfair, what might have been a better way to deal with her?
4. *Creating*: Work in a group. Design a plan that will help provide some of the poorer families in your city, town or community, with some (or all) the following...
 - a) a safe place to live
 - b) regular healthy meals
 - c) clothing and shoes

You may like to use what you wrote in number 2 above to give you some ideas. How can you make your plan a reality? Who might be able to help you?

Make sure you use English as you discuss all of these questions. Write your ideas in English too.