

Chinua Achebe
Refugee Mother and Child
More challenging questions!

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1. "No Madonna and Child could touch
that picture of a mother's tenderness
for a son she soon will have to forget."
 - Explain the significance of the title of this poem "Refugee Mother and Child" in connection with the opening line. (4)
 - Comment on the rich imagery in these opening three lines. (4)
2. "The air was heavy with odours
of diarrhoea of unwashed children."
 - Why does the poet go into such detail with this description? (4)
3. "Unwashed children
with washed-out ribs and dried-up
bottoms struggling in laboured
steps behind blown empty bellies."
 - Explain the paradox of "unwashed children" with "washed-out ribs". (4)
4. "She held
a ghost smile between her teeth
and in her eyes the ghost of a mother's
pride as she combed the rust-coloured
hair left on his skull."
 - Why does the poet use "ghost" on two occasions in these lines? (4)
 - Why is the mother's pride "in her eyes" and not on her lips or in her voice? (4)
5. "In another life
this would have been a little daily
act of no consequence before his
breakfast and school; now she
did it like putting flowers
on a tiny grave."
 - Explain the significance of the poet's words "before his breakfast and school". (4)
 - Comment on the simile "now she did it like putting flowers on a tiny grave". (2)

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

6. Chinua Achebe is a believer that all literature "should have a message, should have a purpose".
 - In view of this, what message and purpose exists in "Refugee Mother and Child"? (4)
7. "Refugee Mother and Child" portrays people approaching death.
 - Explain fully whether the poet has been successful. You should include the poet's description and feelings of death, and his use language. (10)

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