

# Granny Is

## Valerie Bloom

### Objectives

- To discuss the way the poem uses simple metaphors to describe the character and personality of 'Granny'
- To make a poem using metaphorical descriptions of a family member

### Introduction

One of the things Valerie Bloom excels at is renewing our view of the world by describing it freshly through the technique of metaphor. Anyone who has spent time with young children will know that they are natural users of metaphor, perhaps because their vocabulary is still limited and therefore need to find ways of expressing themselves inventively. Poets seek actively to replicate this experimental use of language, finding, in Robert Frost's phrase 'a fresh look and a fresh listen'.

### Resources needed

- Poetry Archive recording of Valerie Bloom reading '[Granny Is](#)' (Scan QR code)



## Teaching sequence of activities

### Starter

Play recording of the poem to the class once. Take responses. What did you notice about the poem? What did it remind you of? Play the poem a second time. Ask children to focus on what Granny is doing in the poem. What does the speaker of the poem feel about her? How can you tell? What kind of visual image of Granny do we have from the poem?

### Development

Explore the way each stanza paints a different picture of what Granny is doing. Draw attention to the use of metaphor, and how Granny not only does these actions but *is* them. Notice the way the poem pulls the reader in by using sensory detail and concrete language such as 'loadin' and 'scrubbin''. What does this tell us about Granny and the life she leads?

Next, ask the children to choose a family member and write down the exact name that they call them by. It could be Mum, Dad, Auntie, Gran or something more personal. Then get the class to write down a list of elements such as: something their relation cooks for them; something they buy from the shops; something they do (perhaps they go to work, or do things with their hands like knitting) and something they say or sing.

The idea is that each of the items in the list acts as a starting point for a separate stanza about their family member. Each stanza should start with 'Granny/Dad/Auntie (etc) is'. For some children the list that they have made will be enough writing, and will only need this insertion between ideas to make it into a poem. Other children will want to extend their lines by adding two or three more examples for each idea. Stress that it is more important for the details of the poems to be honest and accurate than it is for them to rhyme.

### Plenary

What has each group learned about using metaphor as a way of describing people and making them come alive?

Children from each group to share work and comment on each other's work.

## Extension activities

### Reading/discussion:

Discuss the way the poem uses rhyme to close each stanza and the effects of this.

Discuss the way the poem moves in and out of Standard English, with attention to the choices the writer has made about vocabulary and syntax.

## Further reading and listening

Play other poems by [Valerie Bloom](#). For poems which deepen and extend the use of metaphor listen to '[The River](#)' and '[Time](#)'. These could be contrasted (are they in Standard English or Creole?) with 'Granny Is'.

If the class are familiar with the technique of Kennings they could listen to Philip Gross's poem '[Daughter of the Sea](#)', which is a nice contrast with Valerie's own metaphorical river poem.

For more poems about family members, listen to '[Dad](#)' and '[Mum \[Polly Peters\]](#)' by Andrew Fusek Peters or '[Dad](#)' by Bernie Doherty. All of these poems are available at [www.poetryarchive.org](http://www.poetryarchive.org)