

# ASM TUITION ACADEMY

## **Mother \_\_\_\_\_ any distance**

Mother, any distance greater than a single span  
requires a second pair of hands.

You come to help me measure windows, pelmets, doors,  
the acres of the walls, the prairies of the floors.

You at the zero-end, me with the spool of tape, recording  
length, reporting metres, and centimetres back to the base, then leaving  
up the stairs, the line still feeding out, unreeling  
years between us. Anchor. Kite.

I space-walk through the empty bedrooms, climb  
the ladder to the loft, to the breaking point, where something  
has to give;

two floors below your fingertips still pinch  
the last one-hundredth of an inch ... I reach  
towards a hatch that opens on an endless sky  
to fall or fly.

### **Summary of "Mother, any distance"**

In *"Mother, any Distance"*, Simon Armitage reflects on the complex relationship between a mother and her child as the child transitions to adulthood. The poem centres around the speaker measuring a new house with his mother's help. The physical act of using a tape measure becomes a metaphor for the emotional distance that grows between them as the speaker becomes more independent. The mother stands at the "zero-end," symbolizing the foundational connection she provides, while the speaker moves further away, exploring independence. The speaker feels both excitement and apprehension about this growing distance, acknowledging that while he may become independent, his bond with his mother will always remain.

### **Poetic Devices**

#### **1. Metaphor:**

- The tape measure symbolizes the connection between the mother and child, and the process of measuring becomes a metaphor for the child's increasing independence. The "zero-end" represents the mother, who remains a constant, while the speaker moves away, measuring the "acres" and "prairies" of his new life.
- The tape measure also symbolizes the stretching bond between the two. As the speaker moves further, the connection becomes strained but never entirely broken.

#### **2. Imagery:**

- The poem is rich in spatial imagery, using vast, expansive descriptions such as "acres of the walls" and "prairies of the floors." These exaggerated images suggest the overwhelming experience of growing up and navigating new,

unfamiliar territory. They also emphasize the size of the task and the speaker's growing independence.

- The "endless sky" in the final lines conveys the open possibilities and vastness of the future, filled with freedom but also uncertainty.

**3. Enjambment:**

- Armitage uses enjambment to create a sense of movement and flow, reflecting the speaker's gradual but inevitable movement away from his mother. The sentences spill over the lines, giving the poem a conversational and dynamic quality.

**4. Symbolism:**

- The "zero-end" of the tape measure represents the mother's central and unchanging role in the speaker's life. No matter how far the speaker moves away, the mother remains the point from which he measures his distance.
- The "fall or fly" at the end of the poem symbolizes the uncertain outcome of the speaker's independence. The speaker acknowledges that leaving the nest could either lead to success (flying) or failure (falling).

**5. Rhyme and Structure:**

- The poem is written in free verse, with no consistent rhyme scheme. This lack of structure mirrors the uncertainty and unpredictability of growing up and stepping into the unknown.
- The poem is divided into three stanzas, with the final stanza being shorter. The short final stanza creates a sense of closure, yet the open-ended question ("fall or fly") leaves the outcome unresolved, reflecting the ambiguity of the speaker's journey into independence.

## **Analysis**

### **Tone and Emotion:**

- The tone of the poem is a blend of nostalgia, apprehension, and hope. The speaker feels a deep connection to his mother, symbolized by the act of measuring together, but he is also eager to explore life independently. The tension between dependence and independence is at the heart of the poem, and the speaker expresses both excitement and fear at the prospect of standing on his own.

### **Theme of Independence:**

- The central theme of "*Mother, Any Distance*" is the process of growing up and becoming independent. The speaker acknowledges that he is moving away from his mother both physically and emotionally, yet there is a sense of respect and appreciation for the foundational support she provides. The poem reflects the delicate balance between the desire for freedom and the inevitable attachment to the people who have shaped us.

### **Parent-Child Relationship:**

- Armitage captures the bittersweet nature of the parent-child relationship, particularly the moment when a child begins to outgrow the need for constant parental support. The mother remains at the "zero-end," symbolizing the essential role parents play in grounding their children, but the poem also acknowledges that the child must

eventually let go and take flight. This tension between staying connected and seeking independence is a key element of the poem.

### Conclusion:

- "*Mother, any Distance*" is a deeply emotional and reflective poem about the transitional stage in a parent-child relationship, as the child moves toward independence. Armitage uses the metaphor of measuring distance to explore the bond between mother and child, creating a poem that is both intimate and universal. Through vivid imagery, metaphor, and symbolic language, the poem beautifully captures the feelings of both apprehension and excitement that accompany the journey into adulthood.

## COMPARISON WITH,

### 1-EDEN ROCK

### 2-FOLLOWER

Here's a comparative analysis of "*Mother, Any Distance*" by Simon Armitage, "*Eden Rock*" by Charles Causley, and "*Follower*" by Seamus Heaney, focusing on their themes, tone, structure, and use of imagery.

### Summary of the Poems

- **"Mother, any distance"**: This poem reflects the complex relationship between a mother and her child as the child moves toward independence. The speaker, measuring a new home with their mother, uses the tape measure as a metaphor for the growing distance between them as they transition into adulthood.
- **"Eden Rock"**: This poem depicts a serene, almost dreamlike scene in which the speaker imagines a reunion with their parents in an idyllic setting. The poem reflects on the speaker's memories of their parents and suggests a symbolic journey toward the afterlife, where the speaker will be reunited with them.
- **"Follower"**: This poem explores the relationship between a son and his father, a skilled farmer. The speaker looks back at his childhood, recalling his father's strength and skill in farming. As the poem progresses, the speaker reflects on the reversal of roles as the father grows older and becomes dependent on the son.

### Thematic Comparison

#### 1. Parent-Child Relationship:

- In "**Mother, any distance**", the relationship between the speaker and the mother is central. The poem portrays the emotional bond between them as the speaker grows more independent, with the mother remaining a foundational figure.
- "**Eden Rock**" focuses on the speaker's nostalgic memories of his parents. The relationship here is seen in a spiritual, almost eternal sense, with the speaker contemplating a reunion with his parents in the afterlife.

- **“Follower”** centres on the father-son relationship, with the son admiring his father’s physical strength and farming skills. The poem explores the transition from childhood admiration to the reversal of roles in adulthood, as the father becomes dependent on the son.
2. **Independence and Dependency:**
- In **“Mother, any distance”**, the speaker is on the brink of independence, moving away from their mother both physically and emotionally. The tape measure symbolizes the stretch between dependence and autonomy.
  - **“Follower”** deals with the speaker’s journey toward independence as well. As a child, the speaker follows his father, admiring his expertise. In adulthood, the roles reverse, and the father becomes the one following the son, dependent on him.
  - **“Eden Rock”** takes a different approach, focusing on reunion rather than separation. The parents are depicted as serene, waiting for the speaker to join them, perhaps in the afterlife. While the theme of separation is present, it is more about the transition between life and death than growing independence.
3. **Memory and Nostalgia:**
- **“Mother, any distance”** is more forward-looking, as the speaker anticipates future independence. The relationship with the mother is evolving, but there is no deep focus on memories of the past.
  - **“Eden Rock”** is steeped in nostalgia. The speaker reflects on a calm, idyllic scene from childhood, imagining a peaceful reunion with their parents. The poem is suffused with longing for the past.
  - **“Follower”** also contains strong elements of memory. The speaker recalls his father’s skill and strength in his younger years. However, the poem also focuses on the present, highlighting the shift in roles as the father becomes frail and dependent.
4. **Separation and Transition:**
- **“Mother, any distance”** focuses on the separation between mother and child as the speaker embarks on a new phase of life. The tape measure is stretched, symbolizing the emotional and physical distance growing between them.
  - **“Eden Rock”** hints at a more final separation: the transition between life and death. The speaker imagines crossing over to join their parents, with the stream representing the boundary between life and the afterlife.
  - In **“Follower”**, the separation is more metaphorical, as the speaker moves from being a child dependent on his father to becoming the caretaker. The roles are reversed, but the bond between them remains.

## Poetic Devices and Imagery

1. **Nature Imagery:**
- **“Mother, any distance”** uses the imagery of vast landscapes such as “acres” and “prairies” to symbolize the overwhelming experience of growing up and moving into the adult world. The “endless sky” at the poem’s conclusion reflects the open possibilities and uncertainty of independence.
  - **“Eden Rock”** presents an idyllic natural setting, with the parents positioned by a stream, surrounded by light and peaceful imagery. The calm, serene landscape symbolizes the tranquillity of the afterlife and the comfort of family memories.
  - **“Follower”** relies heavily on agricultural and natural imagery. The father is depicted as a strong farmer, with the “sod” and “furrow” representing the

physical labour of farming. The speaker's admiration for his father's expertise in working the land is central to the poem's imagery.

## 2. Symbolism:

- In "**Mother, any distance**", the tape measure is the key symbol, representing the bond between mother and child. As the speaker moves further away, the tape stretches, symbolizing the emotional and physical distance growing between them. The "zero-end" represents the mother's grounding presence, while the speaker moves toward independence.
- "**Eden Rock**" uses the stream as a symbolic boundary between life and death. The peaceful setting symbolizes the speaker's memories of family, and the stream represents the crossing into the afterlife.
- In "**Follower**", the act of plowing and farming serves as a metaphor for the father-son relationship. The father's dominance over the land reflects his authority and skill, while the son's struggle to follow in his footsteps symbolizes the child's efforts to meet parental expectations.

## 3. Structure and Form:

- "**Mother, any distance**" is written in free verse, with enjambment creating a sense of movement and flow that mirrors the speaker's gradual separation from the mother. The irregular form reflects the uncertainty of the speaker's transition to independence.
- "**Eden Rock**" follows a more structured form with regular quatrains, reflecting the calm, serene tone of the poem. The even structure complements the peaceful, nostalgic nature of the speaker's reflections.
- "**Follower**" is written in six quatrains with a regular ABAB rhyme scheme. The steady structure mirrors the rhythm of plowing and the father's consistent, reliable strength. The final stanza, in which the father becomes dependent, creates a jarring shift, reflecting the reversal of roles.

## Tone and Mood

### 1. Bittersweet and Reflective:

- In "**Mother, any distance**", the tone is bittersweet. The speaker feels both excitement and apprehension as they move toward independence, knowing that the bond with their mother will change but never fully disappear. The final image of "fall or fly" encapsulates the uncertainty of this transition.
- "**Eden Rock**" has a serene, nostalgic tone. The speaker's memories of their parents are idealized, with the poem creating a sense of peace and calm as the speaker imagines reuniting with them in the afterlife.
- "**Follower**" begins with a tone of admiration as the speaker looks back on his father's strength and skill, but it shifts to one of melancholy as the roles reverse and the father becomes dependent on the son. The poem reflects the passage of time and the inevitable decline of strength.

## Conclusion

While "*Mother, any distance*", "*Eden Rock*", and "*Follower*" all explore relationships between parents and children, they approach these relationships from different perspectives. "*Mother, any distance*" focuses on the transition to independence, portraying the emotional stretch between mother and child as the speaker grows up. "*Eden Rock*" is more nostalgic, reflecting on the peaceful memory of a family reunion and hinting at the speaker's contemplation of death. "*Follower*" examines the relationship between father and son, reflecting on the reversal of roles that come with age. All three poems use vivid imagery and

symbolism to explore the complexities of parent-child relationships, focusing on themes of connection, separation, and transition.

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