

Living Space – Imtiaz Dharker

Learning Outcomes

1. You will be able to explain what the poem is about
2. You will be able to comment on the themes and ideas in the poem
3. You will show your understanding of the context of the poem.
4. You will analyse the language and structure of the poem
5. You will discuss your personal response to the poem.

What does the phrase 'living space'
mean to you?

Which kind of 'living space' is this poem about?



What impression do you get of the slums from this poem?

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgkgOPLgB1Y>
- Does this poem give you a positive or negative impression of the slums? Why?

Context of 'Living Space'

- Imtiaz Dharker's knowledge of Mumbai is evident in this poem
- Imtiaz Dharker is a contemporary poet who was born in Pakistan and grew up in Scotland. She has written five collections of poetry and often deals with themes of identity, the role of women in contemporary society and the search for meaning. She draws on her multi-cultural experience in her work.
- She is also a film director and has scripted a number of documentaries in India, supporting work with women and children. Dharker's intimate knowledge of Mumbai is evident in this poem. She works to raise awareness of issues in other countries.

Living Space

There are just not enough
straight lines. That
is the problem.
nothing is flat
or parallel. Beams
balance crookedly on supports
thrust off the vertical.
nails clutch at open seams.
the whole structure leans dangerously
towards the miraculous.

Into this rough frame,
someone has squeezed
a living space.

and even dared to place
these eggs in a wire basket,
fragile curves of white
hung out over the dark edge
of a slanted universe,
gathering the light
into themselves,
as if they were
the bright, thin walls of faith.

Themes and ideas

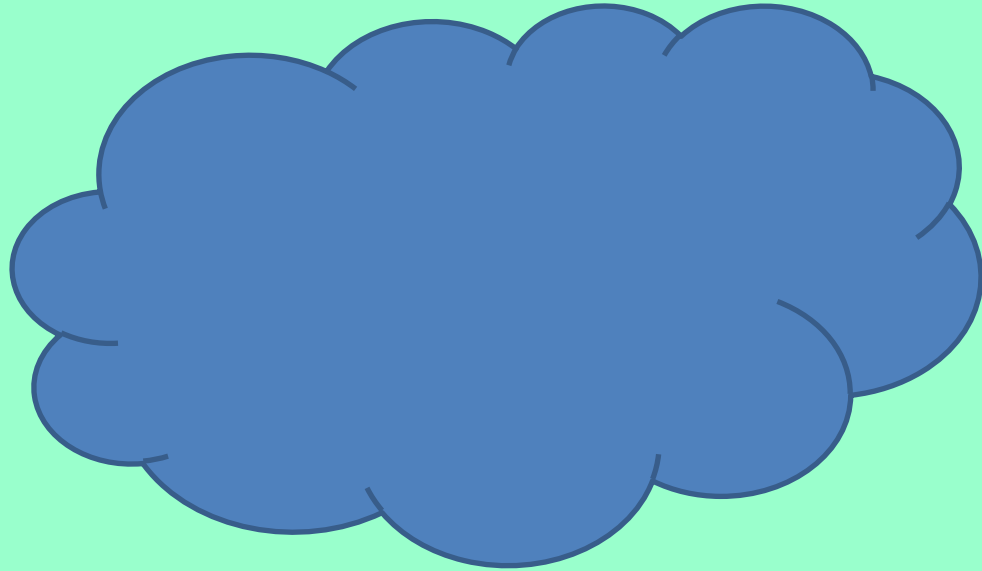
How does the poet present people in this poem?

Idea	Evidence	Explanation
Fragile		
Faithful		
Bold		

Language and structure

Language	Structure
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The poet presents us with an image, like a snapshot or photograph of a moment in time. The language used is simple and focuses on the shape of the structure. Words like 'crookedly', 'balance', 'leans' and 'slanted' emphasise the instability of the living space.<li>2. There is a contrast between dark and light with the bright image of the curved smooth eggs standing out against the darkness of the 'slanted universe'.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Living Space is written in one long thin stanza with 22 short lines. Each line varies in length. The longest, 'The whole structure leans dangerously', appears considerably longer on the page than the others, perhaps echoing the fact the whole structure is leaning over. The effect of this is to create a poem that appears as precarious as the physical structures it describes. The lines of different lengths seem to jut out into the page like some of the crooked beams the poet presents.<li>2. Dharker uses enjambment throughout this poem with lines spilling over into one another. This reflects the way the slum structures lean over and on top of each other.

What does this poem make you think
about?



Example question

How does Imtiaz Dharker present **place** in this poem?

Introduction: (What it's about)

the poem describes the slums of Mumbai and the instability of the structures, 'balanced crookedly on supports.'

The structure: (How it's set out)

'nails clutch' and 'The whole structure leans dangerously' - enjambment between this line and the next which changes to 'miraculous'

Language: (How the writer uses language)

Balance: images of balance in this poem - the beams, balance between light and dark, the balance between danger and miracle

Faith: eggs offer a symbol of fragility and faith - comparing it to human life

Conclusion: (What the poet wants you to think about)

place and people's adaptation to their circumstances is presented in the poem as an act of faith.

How would you plan for this question?

- How does Imtiaz Dharker present people in the poem *Living Space*?