



# WALKING AWAY & BEFORE YOU WERE MINE: MODEL ANSWER

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## WALKING AWAY & BEFORE YOU WERE MINE: QUESTION

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*Explore How 'Walking Away' by C.D. Lewis and one other poem explore parent-child relationships.*

It is eighteen years ago, almost to the day -  
A sunny day with leaves just turning,  
The touch-lines new-ruled - since I watched you play  
Your first game of football, then, like a satellite  
Wrenched from its orbit, go drifting away

Behind a scatter of boys. I can see  
You walking away from me towards the school  
With the pathos of a half-fledged thing set free  
Into a wilderness, the gait of one  
Who finds no path where the path should be.

That hesitant figure, eddying away  
Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem,  
Has something I never quite grasp to convey  
About nature's give-and-take - the small, the scorching  
Ordeals which fire one's irresolute clay.

I have had worse partings, but none that so  
Gnaws at my mind still. Perhaps it is roughly  
Saying what God alone could perfectly show -  
How selfhood begins with a walking away,  
And love is proved in the letting go.

[30 marks]  
AO4 [4 marks]





## *MAKE SURE YOUR ESSAY CONTAINS ALL OF THESE QUALITIES*

Tick these off when you have added them to your essay

- Methods - author's techniques
- ~~Context~~
- ~~Effects of the author's methods on the audience/reader~~
- Link to another part of the text - talk about the meaning of the connection
- Symbolism
- Themes
- Author's purpose

MCELSTA





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## WALKING AWAY & BEFORE YOU WERE MINE: 100% MODEL ANSWER

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*Explore How 'Walking Away' by C.D. Lewis and one other poem explore parent-child relationships.*

'Walking Away' and 'Before You Were Mine' offer contrasting views of the relationship between a parent and a child. While 'Walking Away' is written from the perspective of a father watching his son's first steps towards independence, 'Before You Were Mine' focuses on a daughter's ironic regret that she didn't know her mother as a young woman, before her life was changed by having a child. Both poets explore the deep, loving bond between a parent and child, but also the complexities and pain involved in those relationships.

Lewis and Duffy both use form to help convey the feelings of the narrator for their parent, and the strong bond between a parent and child. 'Walking Away' uses caesurae, such as "That hesitant figure, eddying away", to slow the pace of the poem. The slow pace creates a sorrowful mood that mirrors the narrator's regret at his son growing up, as well as reflecting the son's uncertain movement as he drifts away from the safe familiarity of his father's presence. However, the regular ABACA rhyme scheme hints at the unchanging nature of the love between the two, suggesting that "letting go" will not alter the relationship as much as the narrator seems to fear. Like Day Lewis, Duffy uses caesurae and enjambment, for example "I knew you would dance / like that." This creates a conversational tone, which highlights the intimacy between the narrator and her mother. In contrast to 'Walking Away', Duffy uses no rhyme, thus giving the poem a more immediate, less reflective feel than 'Walking Away', hinting that the narrator's feelings of guilt and regret at bringing an end to her mother's "glamorous" life are still raw. This suggests that, although the narrator is close to her mother, their relationship is complicated.

Both poems use language to convey the negative aspects of parent-child relationships. In 'Walking Away', the father's anguish as his son leaves him is stressed by emotive verbs such as "Wrenched" and "Gnaws". Both of these verbs fall at the start of enjambed lines, which emphasises the shock the father feels and enables the reader to experience his pain as a physical sensation. Duffy also uses vivid verbs to illustrate the impact of having a child; the narrator pictures her mother "sparkle and waltz and laugh" as a young woman, the lively verbs mirroring the carefree, exciting life she lived before she had a child. In contrast, as a mother she has to "teach" her daughter, the monosyllabic verb implying duty rather than fun, whilst the alliterative "stamping stars" hints at the frustration the narrator imagines her mother feels at this change in her lifestyle. In this way, both poems suggest that becoming a parent involves loss — either of peace of mind or freedom.

Whereas 'Walking Away' is based solely on memory, 'Before You Were Mine' spans the border between memory and imagination. Day Lewis vividly recreates the memory of his son "walking away" by focusing on details such as the "leaves just turning", while the present tense "I can see" suggests that he is reliving the memory. This highlights how important the event was to him, perhaps because it was the start of his son's journey to adulthood — the reference to the plural "scorching / Ordeals" implies that there were other such moments. This shows that the relationship between a parent and child is not static, but is constantly evolving. In contrast to Day Lewis's vivid memory, in 'Before You Were Mine' the narrator describes her mother's imagined past more vividly than her real memories. For example, she appeals to Remember to develop each point. Integrate examples into your sentences. Suggest more than one interpretation of the poem. Your last sentence should sum up your argument, and it needs to be memorable. Different senses by referring to her mother's "shriek", "scent" and the "small bites" on her neck, suggesting that she has built up a richly detailed picture of her mother as a young woman. Conversely, the narrator's memory of the empty "relics" of her mother's "high-heeled red shoes" suggests that the mother she knew was no longer a "glamorous" young woman; the shoes were just a reminder of her former self. This hints at the vivacious personality that the mother lost, and explains why the daughter longs for a relationship with the mother of her imagination.





Both poems focus on identity, but from different perspectives. Day Lewis suggests that a child's personality is shaped by independence from its parents. He uses a metaphor to compare the child to a "half-fledged" bird and a simile to liken him to a "winged seed". This links him to the natural world and suggests that the experience of "letting go" is something that every parent must go through in order for their child to develop. In contrast, Duffy explores the restrictions that parenthood brings and the effect of these restrictions on identity. Hollywood imagery, such as "movie tomorrows", hints at the mother's "glamorous" identity before she had a child. The reference to "Marilyn" (Monroe), a movie star whose life became turbulent and unhappy, hints at her mother's exciting early life and suggests that her later life was difficult. The description of her as a "ghost" could support the interpretation that her early identity was lost through parenthood, or alternatively it could hint that the mother has recently died, explaining the narrator's tone of regret and her preoccupation with thoughts and memories of her mother. In both poems, it is clear that the relationship between parent and child isn't just about love — it is also about sacrifice.

*Walking Away* and *Before You Were Mine* portray the relationships between parents and children as close and loving, but complicated and, consequently, the parents in both poems make sacrifices for their children, and suffer because of this. While 'Walking Away' examines a father's painful decision to allow his relationship with his son to change, 'Before You Were Mine' explores the impact that a parent-child relationship has on a mother's life and identity. Despite these differences, the enduring impression from both poems is of deep attachment and love, demonstrating that the parent-child relationship is one of the strongest bonds in nature.

