

Not Yet My Mother

Key

Pre-reading

- Are the people in the photograph related? If so, how? If not, why are they together?
- When was the picture taken?
- In which country might it have been taken?
- What time of the year was the picture taken?
- Who might have taken the photo?
- Where might this photograph be kept?
- What colours would be seen if this picture wasn't in black and white?

1. The object of the activity is to allow students to speculate and guess. There are no right or wrong answers, but the following may be useful guidelines:

- There is a family similarity which would imply that they are from the same family, most likely a mother and two sons.
- The clothes and the black and white nature of the photograph would suggest the photo was taken in the middle of the 20th century.
- The school uniforms worn by white Caucasian boys would suggest that this was a country strongly influenced by Britain, if not Britain itself.
- The woman is wearing a heavy coat, scarf and gloves which indicates cold weather so probably winter. (One might wonder why the boys are not similarly dressed)
- The photo would probably be kept in a photo album.

2. Again, the answers are open to speculation, but some guidance for the teacher might be: the title implies a time before someone's mother was actually a mother; the poet is looking at an old photograph of his mother; the poem is addressed to the poet's mother.

3. Allow a lot of latitude. Again, the students are speculating.

*of you at seventeen
the person in the picture is aged 17*

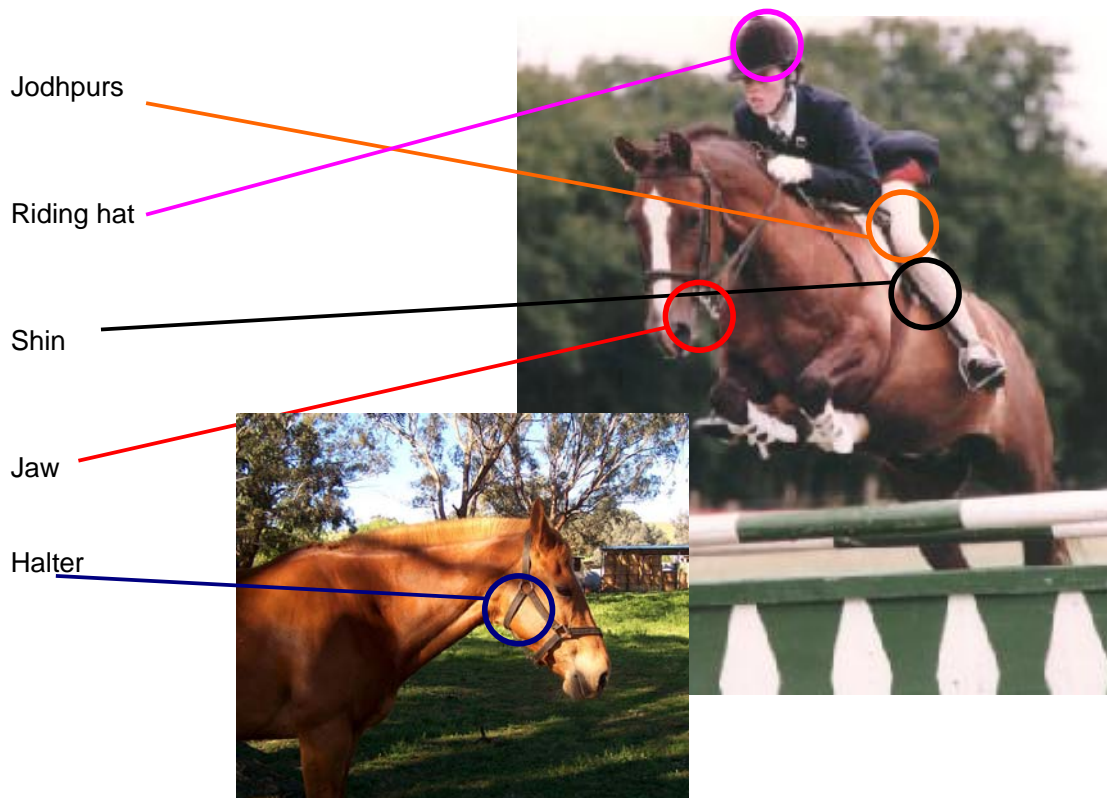
*The tight riding hat hid your hair
She is wearing a riding hat so probably riding gear*

*your hand a fist under its huge jaw
'its huge jaw' plus the information from the previous line indicates that she is holding a horse*

*and the sky grained by the old film stock
the picture is old, so taken a long time ago*

*And I thought, just for a second, that you were me.
The facial similarities between the person in the picture and the poet are striking*

*and smiling, not yet my mother,
the 17 year old in the picture is the poet's mother before he was born*



Context

In this activity students are being asked to look at family characteristics and shared features within a family group. Be sensitive to students whose family situation may not reflect the ideal family group being examined. Emphasise that the family being worked on in the second part of the activity needn't be one's own family.

- 2.1. mouth; shape of face
- 2.2. mischievous
- 2.3. nose; eye colour
- 2.4. cautious; introspective
- 2.5. sense of humour; generous; confident
- 2.6. nose; mouth; eyes

3. Encourage as much visual back up as possible to be brought by the students, especially in the form of illustrated photographs. These could be made as wall posters to be displayed in the classroom. As a homework activity the students could be asked to turn the visual representations into a written text, but make sure that behavioural aspects are well described and it is not simply a description of facial similarities. You might wish to ask them to write about things that are NOT similar between members of the family.