Hurricane Hits England

SUMMARY

The speaker says that a hurricane was the one thing that helped her feel more connected to her new country. She was up for half the night listening to the whistling wind of the storm, which was like a huge ship. As the wind built up strength and power, it was like some dark ghost of her ancestors, at once frightening and comforting in its familiarity.

The speaker tells Huracan, god of storms, to talk to her. She tells Oya, god of wind, lightning, death, and rebirth, to talk to her. She tells Shango, god of thunder, to talk to her. She calls out to Hurricane Hattie, whom she refers to as a cousin that swept across her homeland.

The speaker asks why these gods are visiting the coast of England. She wonders what it means to hear old languages causing mayhem in new lands.

She wonders about the meaning of the storm's lightning, with its blinding brightness, even as it shuts off England's electricity and makes the world around the speaker even darker.

She wonders what it means that trees are falling over in the wind, as heavy as whales, their roots covered in crusty bark, making giant holes in the land like graves.

The speaker wonders why her heart has been set free. She declares her allegiance to the tropical weather gods, following the movement of their winds and following their mysterious storm.

The sweet mystery of the storm has arrived to break the speaker's frozen inner self, to shake up the roots of the trees within her. It has come to let me the speaker know that the earth is always the same earth, wherever she goes.

THEMES

HOME AND THE NATURAL WORLD

"Hurricane Hits England" evokes the homesickness and disconnection people can feel while living in new, unfamiliar landscapes. The poem's speaker (whom many people take to be a representation of the poet, Grace Nichols) is an immigrant living in England. The speaker is surprised when a hurricane, a familiar feature of her childhood in the West Indies, arrives at the English coast. At first, the hurricane seems to make the speaker homesick. Ultimately, though, the hurricane helps the speaker feel newly connected to England, as she finds comfort in the knowledge that the natural gods of her homeland exist even in this unfamiliar place. "The earth is the earth is the earth," the speaker concludes, suggesting that people remain connected to the natural world, and thus to their homelands, wherever they go.

The speaker acknowledges that, until the arrival of the hurricane, she felt alienated from her surroundings. She says that it "took a hurricane" to help her feel "closer / To the landscape," implying that up to this point, she has felt distanced from England—a place with vastly different climate and terrain (and, of course, culture) than the Caribbean.

And when the hurricane first arrives, it seems to make the speaker acutely aware of her longing for her home: she asks the hurricane to "[t]alk to [her]," and it makes her think of her "cousin" Hattie—the name of a massive hurricane that hit the Caribbean in 1961. Ferocious as it may be, the hurricane is also something comforting and familiar to the speaker in that it offers her a sense of connection with the world she came from.

At the same time, the hurricane makes the speaker feel like a piece of that world exists even in England. The speaker feels freed upon the storm's arrival, declaring that she is now "unchained" and "following the movement of [its] winds." The hurricane isn't tethered to one place, which seems to make the speaker realize that home itself doesn't have to be static, unmoving, or anchored; it can travel with, and within, the speaker.

The speaker thus describes the hurricane as "break[ing] the frozen lake in [her]" and "[s]haking" the "trees / Within her." If the "frozen lake" represents the speaker's disconnection from her new landscape, then this encounter with hurricane has helped to break that ice—to help her feel a deep connection to the entire earth, of which England is also a part. The poem suggests, then, that nature can both *remind* people of their homes, and *offer* them home in the earth itself.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-37

IMMIGRANT IDENTITY AND BELONGING

While the poem explores the relationship between the natural world and home, it also explores the complex ways that immigrants may struggle with their sense of identity in a new country. The hurricane can be read as a representation of the speaker's Caribbean heritage, and the poem seems to suggest, at first, the speaker feels that these aspects of her identity have no place in England. Ultimately, though, the poem suggests that the speaker's Caribbean roots are a crucial part of her identity that she carries with her wherever she goes. In fact, the poem implies that it is only by *affirming* these aspects of their identity that immigrants can find

a true sense of belonging.

When the speaker describes the hurricane, she is also talking about herself: the hurricane represents the speaker's Caribbean heritage. Yet at first, the speaker questions what the hurricane is doing in England. By extension, she seems to question what *she* is doing in England and whether these aspects of her identity have any place there.

The speaker compares the hurricane to "old tongues," suggesting that the hurricane represents *her* "old tongue," or the languages of her country of birth. And indeed, the hurricane prompts the speaker to address it in Yoruba with such words as "Oya" and "Shango." The speaker also refers to Hurricane Hattie, a real hurricane from 1961, as her "back-home cousin," implying that such storms are part of her family, roots, and heritage.

Yet the speaker describes the hurricane, at first, as causing "havoc" or chaos, and questions what it is doing there. In other words, the speaker questions what place these parts of her identity could have in England; she seems to feel that such reminders of her former home could destabilize her life in this new one.

Ultimately, though, the speaker affirms the place that both the hurricane and she have in England. While the speaker says that the hurricane is "[f]earful," she also says it is "reassuring": feeling connected to her roots is comforting. And the fact that the hurricane has shaken up the speaker's life seems to be a good thing: as the speaker is confronted with certain parts of her identity, she says that her heart has been "unchained." By declaring her allegiance to the storm—by reclaiming her roots, language, and heritage—the speaker has found a sense of freedom and liberation.

The speaker also asserts that it "took a hurricane" to "bring her closer / To the landscape" of her new country. The poem suggests, then, that by *embracing* those parts of her identity that seemed not to belong, the speaker can finally feel "closer" to this new place. The speaker seems to recognize that she is who she is *wherever* she is, and thus finds a sense of belonging in herself.

As the poem describes the speaker's experience of the hurricane, then, it also describes her reckoning with her own identity. The poem implies that for the speaker, reclaiming those aspects of her identity that seem *not* to belong is a crucial part of *finding* belonging.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-37

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

It took a ...
... To the landscape

The title, "Hurricane Hits England," lets the reader know that the poem will describe a hurricane that unexpectedly arrives off the English coast. Hurricanes and other tropical storms are familiar features of the Caribbean (where the poet and, readers can reasonably assume, the speaker of the poem, is from), but are very rare in England.

The speaker says that it took this hurricane-like storm to help her feel closer to the English "landscape." In other words, the speaker has felt alienated from the English landscape up to this point, and the hurricane—a reminder of the speaker's homeland—helps her feel more connected to her new country.

These opening lines are filled with crisp consonance that adds intensity to the speaker's language: note the sharp /k/ sounds of "took," "hurricane," "closer," and "landscape."

Also note how, in this opening stanza of the poem, the speaker refers to herself in the third person, as "her" and "she." This third-person point of view suggests that the speaker is still somewhat alienated from herself and her surroundings; she describes herself as though from the outside. As the storm unfolds over the course of the poem, though, this point of view will shift, demonstrating the sense of belonging and self-identity that the speaker finds through the storm.

LINES 3-7

Half the night ...
... Fearful and reassuring:

The speaker describes how she lay awake listening to the powerful storm, the winds of which she metaphorically compares to a "howling ship." The roaring wind is like a ship carrying the storm across the water to the English coast—all the way, perhaps, from the speaker's homeland.

The speaker then goes on to subtly personify the hurricane, referring to its "gathering rage," or intense build-up of anger and strength. Yet while the storm is frightening in its power, there's more to it for the speaker: in a simile, she compares the storm to a "dark ancestral spectre," or a dark ghost of her ancestors, which makes it both "frightful" and "reassuring." Even though the storm is scary in its strength and rage, it is also comforting to the speaker because it evokes her homeland and heritage.

In describing the storm and listing its qualities, the speaker uses asyndeton: she doesn't use any conjunctions to link her descriptions together. This asyndeton speeds the poem up and conveys the overwhelming power of the storm and the speed of its winds.

Meanwhile, the sibilance of these lines brings the rushing whoosh of the wind to life:

> Like some dark ancestral spectre,
> Fearful and reassuring:

LINES 8-12

Talk to me ...
... sweeping, back-home cousin.

The speaker addresses the storm directly and asks it to speak to her (a form of apostrophe, given that the storm can't be expected to literally reply). In addressing the storm, the speaker also addresses several Yoruba gods (Yoruba being the name of an ethnic group and language native to West Africa; many members of the Yoruba diaspora live in the Caribbean): Oya, the goddess of wind and lightning, and Shango, the god of thunder. "Huracan" is the Carib Indian god of chaos and the Mayan god of wind and storms (and the source of the English word "hurricane"). The speaker feels that these gods are powerfully, vividly present even in England, so many miles away.

The speaker also alludes here to Hurricane Hattie, a powerful cyclone that hit the Caribbean in 1961. The speaker personifies Hattie as a "back-home cousin," suggesting that the storm isn't truly frightening to the speaker; it is powerful but also comforting since it is like a relative from "home."

Importantly, the speaker shifts into the first person in this stanza: she says, "Talk to **me**." This shift from the third person to the first person suggests that the storm has restored the speaker to herself in some way.

The repetition of the phrase "Talk to me" is also an example of anaphora, and it adds energy and emphasis to the speaker's address to the gods of her homeland. With the rhythm and momentum of this anaphora, the speaker addresses the storm with authority and familiarity, suggesting that, like a cousin, she knows it well.

LINES 13-18

Tell me why ...
... In new places?

The speaker asks the hurricane why it has arrived in England, bringing chaos and mayhem to this new place. She also refers to the storm's "old tongues," a metaphor suggesting that the sounds of the storm are like the old languages of her homeland, which, she implies, are out of place in England.

Despite the speaker's confusion, these questions create a sense of intimacy between the speaker and the hurricane; the storm is something familiar, something she can ask direct and probing questions of.

These questions aren't just about the storm, however: they're also about the speaker herself, given that the storm is so closely tied to the speaker's heritage and homeland. That is, the speaker also seems to wonder what *she* is doing in England—and specifically, whether she could ever belong on an "English coast." The juxtaposition of the phrases "**old** tongues and "**new** places" emphasizes this disconnect, suggesting that the speaker wonders whether the hurricane—and the speaker's "old" identity—could belong in this new place.

Interestingly, those "tongues" aren't *wreaking* havoc, as the phrase usually goes; they are "reaping" it. "Wreak" means to cause something, while "reap" means to gather, harvest, or acquire something. This twist on the phrase might suggest that the chaos created by the storm—the "havoc" it creates—is helping the speaker. In shaking up her life, it's actually offering her a sense of connection to the English landscape.

LINES 19-22

The blinding illumination, ...
... Into further darkness?

The speaker continues to address the storm and question the meaning is of its appearance in England. Here, she focuses on lightning that "illuminat[es]" the sky with light even as it downs power lines, making the night around the speaker even darker.

This juxtaposition between light and darkness is important. When the speaker says that the storm's lightning creates "blinding illumination," this is a kind of oxymoron: illumination means both literal light and figurative understanding, yet the storm's light is also "blinding." This might refer to the fact that the storm at once disrupts the speaker's vision of the world (the idea that England and her homeland are separated by a kind of impassable divide) and reveals something new to her: that the world she came from is not actually so separate from the world she now inhabits.

The speaker also emphasizes the power of the storm to cut off *conventional* sources of modern light, as it "short- / Circuit[s]" the speaker and others into a power outage. The enjambment between "short-" and "[c]ircuit" heightens this sense of the power being abruptly cut off, with the speaker plunged into "further darkness." Additionally, the sharp consonance in "[c]ircuit" and "dar**k**ness" reinforce the harsh, abrupt loss of electrical light.

All these descriptions emphasize the mysterious power of the hurricane and the fact that it brings darkness and chaos, as well as understanding and revelation.

LINES 23-26

What is the ...
... Their cratered graves?

The speaker continues to question what it means that a hurricane has made it all the way to England, here focusing on the storm's powers of natural destruction: the way its fierce winds uproot huge trees, leaving enormous holes in the ground that look to the speaker like "graves."

The speaker uses a simile to compare the trees to whales, which are enormous creatures. This, in turn, emphasizes the sheer force of the storm, which is strong enough to knock those trees over, to tear their "crusted roots" from the ground. Those roots are also symbolic, representing the speaker's own history and heritage—the way her sense of self and belonging has been totally "uprooted" by the arrival of the storm. By the end of the poem, the speaker will no longer feel like her sense of self is tied to just one specific place, and this image of roots being torn from the ground reflects that.

The sharp alliteration and consonance of "crusted roots" and "cratered graves," meanwhile, adds intensity to the speaker's description of the storm.

LINES 27-31

O why is ...
... of your storm.

In the sixth stanza, the poem switches gears. Here, the speaker reveals that the hurricane has "unchained" her "heart," or set her free. The poem suggests, then, that the storm has shaken up both the landscape and the speaker. The speaker no longer feels tethered to one place but realizes that she carries her identity—her history and heritage—with her.

The speaker continues to address the hurricane directly (via apostrophe). No longer questioning what the hurricane is doing in England, she now declares her allegiance to Oya, the Yoruba goddess of weather, wind, and storms. She also says that she is "riding the mystery" of the hurricane itself, perhaps evoking the way someone would ride a horse. The speaker, the poem implies, now accepts and honors the hurricane, in all of its powerful presence.

The poem uses more striking anaphora here, in the repetition of "I am." Where before the speaker repeated the phrase "Talk to me" anaphorically, the anaphora in these lines emphasizes the authority and sense of self the speaker has gained through the hurricane. "I am," she says over and over, addressing the storm and "aligning" herself with it. The poem suggests that the speaker has chosen to accept and praise the mystery of the storm, and even the destabilization that it brings, since it has also brought her into contact with crucial parts of herself.

LINES 32-37

Ah, sweet mystery, ...
... is the earth.

The speaker praises the hurricane as a "sweet mystery" and expresses gratitude for it. She says that the storm has "[c]ome to break the frozen lake" within her, allowing her to reconnect with herself. She also says that the hurricane has shaken the roots of the "very trees" in her. Finally, she says that the hurricane has come to "let [her] know / "That the earth is the earth is the earth"—that she can feel at home wherever she is.

The poem incorporates layers of imagery and meaning in these closing lines. First, the speaker describes her inner, emotional world through natural imagery of a "frozen laker" and "trees." The speaker, then, implies that the natural world and the earth live *within* her, not only outside her.

The image of the frozen lake evokes the weather in England, which is of course much colder than that of the Caribbean. This image of ice is also symbolic, representing the disconnection and alienation the speaker has felt up to this point and suggesting that she felt alienated not only from her new country but also from herself.

Yet the speaker praises the storm for *breaking* that ice, implying that the hurricane has restored her to herself and even helped her to connect to this new place. She says that the hurricane has profoundly shaken her, since it has shaken "the foundations of the very trees / Within her." Yet she implies that in doing so, the hurricane has reminded her of the vital power and presence of her identity and her home.

The assonant long /a/ sounds in "break" and "shaking" emphasize the power of the hurricane to shake up the speaker's life. The alliterative /f/ sounds in "frozen" and "foundations," meanwhile, reinforce what the hurricane has transformed, since it has broken what was "frozen" in the speaker and shaken her "foundations."

The speaker concludes by saying that the hurricane has offered her a new sense of understanding and belonging. "[T]he earth is the earth is the earth," she says. In other words, if a hurricane—and the natural gods of the speaker's home in the Caribbean—can appear in England, then the speaker *too* can be at home in England, since she is at home in the earth itself. The poem's ending suggests that the speaker also has realized she is who she is, *wherever* she is, and that she carries her home within her.

SYMBOLS

THE HURRICANE

The most important symbol in the poem is the hurricane itself. Hurricanes and storms often symbolize powerful change and transformation, and they can also represent struggle and conflict.

The hurricane in the poem builds on all these associations. When the storm unexpectedly arrives in England, it seems to transform the entire landscape, and its disruptive power reflects the speaker's internal reckoning with her identity. At first, the speaker suggests that the "old tongues" or old languages of the hurricane—and by extension, *her* old languages, ancestry, and heritage—would only cause "havoc" or chaos in this "new place[]." Yet ultimately, the speaker comes to embrace the hurricane and the "havoc" it causes. That chaos

allows her to reconsider her place in the world. Just as the storm upends giant trees, it upends the speaker's understanding of both home and herself.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-37

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

Light often symbolizes inner awakening, understanding, consciousness, and hope. Darkness, by contrast, often symbolizes a state of despair or confusion. Part of the hurricane's mystery is that it can bring about both at once: it creates a state of darkness and confusion, but also a new kind of understanding and "light" for the speaker.

The storm literally cuts off the electrical power, plunging the speaker and others into "further darkness." This suggests that the storm is profoundly destabilizing for the speaker, bringing a sense of mystery and confusion. At the same time, the speaker emphasizes the storm's "blinding illumination," conjuring an image of incredibly bright lighting. Symbolically, this suggests that the storm has illuminated something for the speaker—that she's had a sort of lightbulb moment and now understands that "the eart is the earth."

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 19:** "blinding illumination"
- **Line 22:** "further darkness"

THE FROZEN LAKE

The "frozen lake" in the poem symbolizes the speaker's past sense of disconnection and alienation from England—and from herself. Ice is a traditional symbol of emotional coldness or a lack of connection. (And, of course, ice and frozen lakes are far more common in an English landscape than in that of the Caribbean.)

When the speaker praises the hurricane for "break[ing] the frozen lake in [her]," then, this is also symbolic. The speaker suggests that the hurricane has restored the speaker to herself and to her own life. By breaking the ice of her alienation, the hurricane has allowed the speaker to reconnect to herself and the world around her.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 33:** "the frozen lake"

TREES AND ROOTS

Trees and roots symbolize ancestry and belonging. For example, when someone refers to their "roots" they are usually referring to their family and home—where they come from.

In the poem, the speaker emphasizes the way the hurricane *shakes* the trees and even uproots them. She describes this happening both *externally*, in the heavy trees that are uprooted and fall to the ground, and *internally*, when she says the storm has shaken the trees in her to their "foundations."

Drawing on the symbolic meanings of trees, this suggests that the hurricane has shaken the speaker's sense of her roots and belonging. At the same time, this shaking up is a good thing: the speaker realizes that she doesn't need to be physically rooted in her home to feel a deep connection to it; she realizes that she can maintain this sense of self, wherever she is.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 23-26:** "What is the meaning of trees / Falling heavy as whales / Their crusted roots / Their cratered graves?"
- **Lines 34-35:** "Shaking the foundations of the very trees / within me,"

POETIC DEVICES

APOSTROPHE

Throughout much of the poem, the speaker addresses the hurricane directly. She also addresses various gods of weather and storms (Huracan, Oya, and Shango), implying that these gods are present within the storm. Since the hurricane can't be expected to reply to the speaker, this direct address is an example of apostrophe.

This apostrophe creates a sense of intimacy and familiarity between the speaker and the storm. Even if the hurricane doesn't *literally* reply, the poem suggests that the speaker and the storm are communicating in some way. She feels like she knows this hurricane; while it seems out of place in England, it's a reminder of the world the speaker came from. (In fact, she even calls Hurricane Hattie, a reference to a real-world storm, her "cousin.")

As she addresses the hurricane, the speaker also asks it several rhetorical questions. These rhetorical questions help to illustrate the speaker's own inner struggle over the course of the storm. At first, she asks what the storm is doing in England, implying that she is also asking what *she* is doing in England, and suggesting that neither can truly belong. Ultimately, though, the speaker's questions change. She finally asks why her "heart" has been "unchained" by the storm, suggesting that the storm has set her free.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- Lines 8-37

ALLUSION

The poem makes several allusions. For example, the speaker addresses "Huracan," "Oya," and "Shango," all of whom are natural gods in some West Indian cultures. Huracan refers to the god or spirit of chaos or evil in the Carib Indian tradition (as well as the Mayan god of wind and storms; it's also the source of the Spanish word "huracan" and the English "hurricane"). Oya is the goddess of wind, lightning, death, and rebirth. Shango is the god of thunder. Both Oya and Shango are Yoruba words (Yoruba being the name of an ethnic group in western Africa as well as their language; there are people of Yoruba descent living in the West Indies as well).

Through these allusions, the speaker shows her lasting connection to her language and culture, even though she is living in England. The hurricane brings her into contact with her ancestry and with these natural gods of her homeland, reminding her of the vitality and power of both. When she addresses these natural gods by name, she also seems to reconnect with the languages or "old tongues" of her home—and this reconnection ultimately brings the speaker to a new sense of identity and belonging.

The speaker also alludes to "Hattie," or Hurricane Hattie, a powerful cyclone that hit the Caribbean in 1961. By alluding to this past powerful storm, the speaker demonstrates how familiar hurricanes are to her. In fact, she addresses this hurricane as her "back-home cousin," suggesting that despite its frighteningly powerful presence, it is also comforting to her.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "Huracan"
- **Line 9:** "Oya"
- **Line 10:** "Shango"
- **Line 11:** "Hattie"
- **Line 28:** "Oya"

SIMILE

The speaker uses two similes to brings the hurricane's powerful presence to life on the page—and how that presence makes her feel. First, she says that the storm is "[l]ike some dark ancestral spectre," or a dark ghost of her ancestors.

This simile makes it clear that for the speaker, the hurricane is not just a storm: it is also a reminder of and a visitor from her past, something that brings her into contact with her Caribbean ancestry, identity, and sense of home. The fact that the speaker compares the storm to a "spectre," or ghost, might also suggest that, at first, she finds it frightening—perhaps that she fears this reminder of her heritage, which seems to have no place in England.

Later, the speaker uses another simile to depict the heavy trees being uprooted in the wind: she says that the trees are "[f]alling heavy as whales." This simile helps the reader to imagine the immense size and weight of the trees falling over, like whales leaping and then crashing back into the ocean. If the trees are like whales, it follows that the storm itself must be incredibly powerful.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "Like some dark ancestral spectre"
- **Lines 23-24:** "trees / Falling heavy as whales"

METAPHOR

The speaker uses metaphors to depict the hurricane and its powerful presence. For example, she metaphorically compares its wind to a "howling ship." This metaphor conjures an image of a ship being tossed around on the sea, conveying the storm's strength. This metaphor also illustrates the hurricane's movement, implying that it has sailed all the way from the Caribbean to the coast of England.

The speaker then goes on to describe the hurricane as bringing "old tongues," or old languages, to "new places." Of course, a storm doesn't have a literal "tongue," so here the speaker uses the metaphor to illustrate the way the storm exerts its presence in the landscape. These movements, or "languages," of the storm are familiar to the speaker, but unfamiliar in the UK. Through this metaphor, the speaker connects the storm to the languages of her homeland, suggesting that the storm represents her Caribbean identity and ancestry.

Later, when the speaker describes trees uprooted in the high winds and falling like "whales," she metaphorically describes the holes they make in the ground as "graves." This metaphor subtly personifies the trees/whales. It also conveys the hurricane's powerful capacity for destruction.

Finally, the speaker uses metaphors to illustrate her own emotional experience of the storm. She says that the storm has "unchained" her heart, using the metaphor of chains to describe her previous feeling entrapment. Now, she implies, the hurricane has allowed her to feel free and liberated. Similarly, the speaker says that the hurricane has broken "the frozen lake" within her. This frozen lake is a metaphor for the speaker's inner state of disconnection. Now, though, the storm has *broken* that ice, meaning that the speaker can reconnect with herself and her surroundings.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "The howling ship of the wind"
- **Line 16:** "old tongues"
- **Line 26:** "Their cratered graves"

- **Line 27:** "heart unchained"
- **Line 33:** "the frozen lake in me"

PERSONIFICATION

The speaker personifies the hurricane throughout the poem. This personification helps to illustrate how the speaker experiences the storm: as a living presence with its own will and agency. The speaker's personification of the hurricane also makes it seem more familiar, their relationship more intimate: the storm is like a living relative from "back-home" with whom she can communicate.

The speaker first subtly personifies the storm when she compares it to an "ancestral spectre," or the ghost of her ancestors. This personification implies that the hurricane has a human-like presence (if a ghostly one), in that it reminds the speaker of her heritage.

Then, as the speaker addresses the storm directly, she personifies it by invoking the natural gods and spirits Huracan, Oya, and Shango. This personification (or deification, in a sense) speaks to the storm's power and to the idea that it is the same storm wherever it lands: the gods of the West Indies can exist alongside the speaker on an "English coast." Likewise, the speaker carries her own parts of the West Indies—her own heritage—with her wherever she goes. When the speaker calls Hurricane Hattie her "back-home cousin," she makes this link between the storm and her homeland even more explicit: hurricanes feel like relatives to the speaker, making their presence somewhat comforting.

The speaker continues to personify the hurricane through the rest of the poem, including when she concludes that the storm has "[c]ome to let [her] know" that "the earth is the earth is the earth." Through this, the speaker implies that the hurricane has a human- or god-like presence and that it offers the speaker wisdom and understanding.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "Like some dark ancestral spectre"
- **Lines 8-12:** "Talk to me Huracan / Talk to me Oya / Talk to me Shango / And Hattie / My sweeping, back-home cousin."
- **Lines 13-14:** "Tell me why you visit / An English coast?"
- **Lines 20-22:** "as you short- / Circuit us / Into further darkness?"
- **Lines 28-29:** "Tropical Oya of the Weather, / I am aligning myself to you,"
- **Lines 33-37:** "Come to break the frozen lake in me, / Shaking the foundations of the very trees / within me, / Come to let me know / That the earth is the earth is the earth."

IMAGERY

The poem is full of vivid imagery that helps the reader envision the storm and the way in which it completely transforms the English landscape. For example, when the speaker describes the storm's wind as a "howling ship" (which is also a metaphor), she conjures an image of a ship being tossed on the open sea, surrounded by loudly wailing wind. She also compares the storm to a "dark [...] spectre" or ghost, making it seem spooky and haunting—an image from her past come to see her in the present.

Later, the speaker uses imagery to depict the hurricane's impact on the coast. She describes the "blinding illumination" of its lightning and also emphasizes the surrounding "darkness" when the storm causes a power outage. The speaker then depicts the "crusted roots" of uprooted trees crashing to the ground. The imagery of these huge, deeply-rooted trees falling to the earth, leaving gaping holes like "graves" in their wake, speaks to the immense strength of the storm.

Finally, the speaker uses natural imagery to depict her own inner world. She describes a "frozen lake" and "trees" as living within her. This closing, metaphorical imagery helps the reader understand how the hurricane has affected the speaker, since it has broken the ice of that "lake" and shaken "the foundations," or roots, of these trees; in other words, the storm has shaken the speaker herself down to her very "foundations." This imagery also unifies the poem, suggesting that the natural world—including the speaker's own home—is not just *outside* her. It is also *within* her, meaning that she is at home wherever she is on "earth."

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "The howling ship of the wind"
- **Line 6:** "some dark ancestral spectre"
- **Lines 19-22:** "The blinding illumination, / Even as you short- / Circuit us / Into further darkness"
- **Lines 23-26:** "trees / Falling heavy as whales / Their crusted roots / Their cratered graves"
- **Lines 33-35:** "Come to break the frozen lake in me, / Shaking the foundations of the very trees / within me"

ANAPHORA

The speaker first uses anaphora when she addresses the hurricane directly, repeatedly telling the storm: "Talk to me." This anaphora creates rhythm and momentum, a sort of building up of insistence that reveals the speaker's immense desire to communicate with the storm—an emissary from her homeland. Mixed in with this anaphora is the speaker's direct address to several natural gods: Huracan, Oya, and Shango. The anaphora of "Talk to me" makes the speaker's address to these gods sound almost prayer- or chant-like.

Later, the speaker uses anaphora again when describing the

way the powerful wind uproots enormous trees:

> **Their** crusted roots
> **Their** cratered graves?

These lines also feature alliteration, assonance, and consonance ("**c**ru**s**te**d** **r**oo**ts**"/"**cr**a**t**e**r**e**d** **gr**a**v**es"). Altogether, these devices add emphasis and intensity to the imagery of these massive fallen trees—in turn emphasizing the power of the storm.

Later, the speaker anaphorically repeats the phrase "I am" as she praises the hurricane and says that she is "aligning" herself with it and "following the movement" of its wind. Here, the speaker's use of anaphora emphasizes her acceptance of and allegiance to the storm. The repetition of the phrase "I am" also demonstrates the sense of renewed identity and selfhood that the speaker has gained through the hurricane, as she addresses the storm and asserts her own presence as well.

Finally, the speaker repeats the phrase "Come to" anaphorically at the end of the poem, as she asserts that the hurricane has "[c]ome to break the frozen lake" in her and to "let [her] know / That the earth is the earth is the earth." This anaphora creates rhythm and emphasis in the poem's closing lines.

In each of these instances, parallelism heightens the effect of the anaphora. For example, when the speaker says, "Talk to me," she ends each line with the name of a natural god of West Indian culture ("Huracan," "Oya," "Shango"). In the second instance of anaphora, when the speaker repeats "I am," she goes on to describe what she is doing in relationship to the storm, through a gerund verb ("aligning," "following," "riding"). Finally, when the speaker says what the hurricane has "[c]ome to" do, she follows each moment anaphora with a verb, "break" and then "let." This parallelism builds on the rhythm of the anaphora, creating music and intensity in the poem at these moments.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "Talk to me"
- **Line 9:** "Talk to me"
- **Line 10:** "Talk to me"
- **Line 25:** "Their"
- **Line 26:** "Their"
- **Line 29:** "I am"
- **Line 30:** "I am"
- **Line 31:** "I am"
- **Line 33:** "Come to"
- **Line 36:** "Come to"

REPETITION

In addition to its use of anaphora, the poem also repeats other important words and phrases to create a sense of building rhythm and emphasis.

For example, the speaker uses the word "mystery" in line 31 and then again in line 32—an example of diacope:

> I am riding the **mystery** of your storm.
> Ah, sweet **mystery**,

This repetition heightens the mysteriousness of the storm. The speaker doesn't entirely understand this powerful force but is aligning herself with it nonetheless.

The speaker also uses more parallelism (and epistrophe) with the repetition of "**your** winds" and "**your** storm" at the ends of lines 30 and 31. This creates the sense of the speaker entirely giving herself over to the storm—entrusting herself to her own heritage (represented by this hurricane). This repetition also sets up an interesting contrast with the next stanza, where the speaker says "in me" at the end of line 33 and then "within me" in line 35:

> [...] the frozen lake **in me**,
> Shaking the foundations of the very trees
> **within me**,

This repetition echoes that of the prior stanza, and illustrates how embracing the hurricane (that "you") has allowed the speaker to embrace who she is ("me").

Finally, the poem closes with a strong, rhythmic moment of repetition as the speaker asserts that "the earth is the earth is the earth." This epizeuxis reinforces the speaker's point: that the earth is the same earth all across the globe. And since the speaker feels deeply connected to the earth, she can feel at home wherever she is on the planet.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 30:** "your winds"
- **Line 31:** "mystery," "your storm"
- **Line 32:** "mystery"
- **Line 33:** "in me"
- **Line 35:** "within me"
- **Line 37:** "the earth is the earth is the earth"

ALLITERATION

The poem uses alliteration now and then to add emphasis to certain words. For example, in the opening lines, /h/ sounds repeat alliteratively in "[h]alf" and "**h**owling." These breathy, huffing sounds subtly evoke a powerful wind, bringing the storm to life.

Similarly, when the speaker depicts huge trees being uprooted in the storm, she describes their "crusted roots" and "cratered graves." The sharp, growling /cr/ sounds in "**cr**usted" and "**cr**atered" add intensity this image.

Finally, in the penultimate and closing stanzas, /m/ sounds repeat alliteratively in "myself," "movement" and "mystery." This alliteration reinforces the fact that the hurricane is both mysterious and incredibly strong, and that the speaker is aligning herself with it. The alliteration of "frozen" and "foundations," meanwhile, emphasizes the hurricane's impact on the speaker, since it has broken the "frozen lake" in her and shaken her to her "foundations."

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "Half"
- **Line 4:** "howling"
- **Line 25:** "crusted"
- **Line 26:** "cratered"
- **Line 30:** "movement"
- **Line 31:** "mystery"
- **Line 32:** "mystery"
- **Line 33:** "frozen"
- **Line 34:** "foundations"

CONSONANCE

Consonance works much like alliteration in the poem, adding emphasis to words and helping to bring the imagery of the storm to life on the page.

Much of this consonance is more specifically sibilance, which makes sense: lots of swishing /s/ and /sh/ sounds evoke the fierce, "howling" wind of the hurricane itself. Take line 6, which combines sibilance, assonance (of the short /eh/ sound), and consonance of the sharp /k/ sound:

> Like some dark ancestral spectre,

All these sounds make the line, and the ghostly image it describes, feel all the more intense.

A similar thing happens in lines 19-22, when the speaker describes the hurricane's bright lighting and the loss of electrical power. Here, sibilance and soft /l/ sounds create a tense, somewhat sinister atmosphere that reflects the darkness surrounding the speaker:

> The blinding illumination,
> Even as you short-
> Circuit us
> Into further darkness?

Throughout the poem, the speaker plays with sound like this to make the storm feel all the more mysterious and powerful.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "Half"
- **Line 4:** "howling"
- **Line 6:** "Like," "some," "dark," "ancestral," "spectre"
- **Line 7:** "reassuring"
- **Line 19:** "blinding illumination"
- **Line 20:** "short"
- **Line 21:** "Circuit," "us"
- **Line 22:** "darkness"
- **Line 25:** "crusted," "roots"
- **Line 26:** "cratered," "graves"
- **Line 30:** "movement"
- **Line 31:** "mystery," "storm"
- **Line 32:** "mystery"
- **Line 33:** "break," "frozen," "lake"
- **Line 34:** "Shaking," "foundations"

ASSONANCE

The poem is filled with assonance, creating strong music and rhythm throughout.

For example, in the opening stanza note the quick, short /ih/ sounds of "howling ship of the wind" and the short /eh/ sounds of "ancestral spectre." The rhythmic sounds add intensity to the speaker's description of the storm's arrival.

Later, the assonance in phrases like "meaning of trees" and "cratered graves" calls attention to the images at hand, again building up the poem's intensity and power. And in the poem's final stanza, assonance and consonance combine to create an internal rhyme between "break" and "lake." That long /ay/ sound echoes in the next line too, with "[s]haking the foundations," while long /ee/ sounds appear in "very trees / within me." All this assonance creates powerful music at the poem's ending, emphasizing the storm's power to transform the speaker and her surroundings.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "howling ship," "wind"
- **Line 6:** "ancestral spectre"
- **Line 23:** "meaning," "trees"
- **Line 26:** "cratered graves"
- **Line 27:** "unchained"
- **Line 29:** "to you"
- **Line 30:** "movement"
- **Line 31:** "your storm"
- **Line 32:** "sweet," "mystery"
- **Line 33:** "break," "lake," "me"
- **Line 34:** "Shaking," "foundations," "very," "trees"
- **Line 35:** "me"

VOCABULARY

Ancestral spectre (Line 6) - "Ancestral" means something that

has to do with one's ancestors. A "spectre" is a ghost. The speaker means, then, that the hurricane is like a ghost of her ancestors.

Huracan, Oya, and Shango (Line 8, Line 9, Line 10, Line 28) - Natural gods of weather, storms, and chaos in Yoruba and some West Indian cultures.

Hattie (Line 11) - "Hattie" refers to Hurricane Hattie, a powerful and destructive cyclone that hit the Caribbean in 1961.

Old tongues (Line 16) - "Old tongues" is another way of saying "old languages." The speaker suggests that the hurricane speaks in the "old languages" of her home in the West Indies.

Reaping havoc (Line 17) - "Reaping" literally means harvesting, and "havoc" means chaos. The speaker means that the hurricane is creating chaos in this new landscape of England.

Illumination (Line 19) - Illumination means light. Importantly, though, the word also refers to *inner* light, or understanding. The poem suggests that the hurricane's lightning is incredibly bright. At the same time, though, the speaker also suggests that the hurricane brings her a new kind of "illumination" or insight.

Short-circuit (Lines 20-21) - "Short-circuit" is an electrical term meaning that something (usually electrical power) malfunctions or fails. The speaker means that the hurricane has caused the power to go out.

Cratered (Line 26) - A crater is an enormous hole in the ground. The speaker means that the hurricane has uprooted huge trees, which create holes as big as craters as they fall.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Hurricane Hits England" has 37 lines broken up into seven stanzas of varying length. The first stanza is the longest (at seven lines) and the rest of the stanzas range from four lines to six lines each.

Beyond that, there's no standard or predictable form to the poem, which instead feels fluid and organic. A tightly woven structure would probably feel too stiff for a poem about the "havoc" and chaos of a powerful storm! The poem's formal variation also helps to create an immediate, spoken, quality, as though the speaker is addressing the reader—and the hurricane itself—directly.

METER

"Hurricane Hits England" is a free verse poem, meaning that it has no set meter. Instead, the rhythm of the poem is natural and unpredictable, evoking the wildness and unpredictability of the storm itself. The lack of a strict meter also makes the poem sound immediate and intimate. This makes sense, given that the speaker feels connected to the hurricane—like she's talking to her ancestors or a relative from "back-home."

At the same time, the poem does have some distinctly rhythmic moments that create momentum and emphasis. For example, the anaphoric repetition of "Talk to me" in stanza two and "I am" in stanza 6 create a distinct, powerful rhythm. This rhythm propels the poem forward, demonstrating the hurricane's energy.

The last line of the poem also has a steady rhythm. The repetition in this line makes for an insistent pattern of anapests (poetic feet with a da-da-DUM rhythm):

> That the earth is the earth is the earth.

These stresses emphasize the speaker's declaration, calling attention to the fact that the earth is the earth—no matter where on it she is.

RHYME SCHEME

As a free verse poem, "Hurricane Hits England" has no set rhyme scheme. As with its lack of meter, this lack of a steady rhyme scheme keeps the poem feeling unpredictable, natural, and organic. This feeling, in turn, helps to communicate the wild, untamed movements of the hurricane. The speaker embraces the freedom of the storm, and seems to be "following the movement" of the hurricane within the poem itself.

SPEAKER

The poem's speaker is someone who is living in England but who is from the West Indies (a place with much more frequent hurricanes). This person sees the hurricane coming to England as a sign of her own heritage and ancestors reaching her even in this distant, unfamiliar place. While she at first feels disconnected from the English "landscape," the arrival of this storm helps her feel more at ease in her current surroundings.

Many readers take the speaker of the poem to be a representation of the poet, Grace Nichols, who was born in Guyana but moved to England in 1977. That said, the poem's exploration of identity, belonging, and homesickness will likely be familiar to many immigrants.

Also note how the speaker's relationship to herself shifts throughout the poem. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker refers to herself using third-person pronouns ("she" and "her"), implying that she has felt alienated from herself. Once she begins addressing the hurricane, however, she shifts into first-person pronouns ("me" and "I"). The hurricane reminds the speaker of her homeland and who she is, and the poem ends with the sense that the speaker feels more at ease in her identity.

SETTING

The poem is set in England during a powerful hurricane. (Contextual clues suggest that the poem is set during the Great Storm, an extremely strong cyclone that hit the coast of the UK and France in October of 1987.)

The poem highlights the immense power of the storm through its imagery of heavy trees being uprooted and the power going out. The storm seems to take over the entire landscape and transform it: for example, the trees become whale-like and the wind "howl[s]" like a "ship" on the open sea.

Hurricanes are familiar features of the West Indies, where the poet was born, but highly unusual in the UK. Even though England is thousands of miles away from the West Indies, then, the hurricane seems to bring a part of that world to this new place. The arrival of the storm makes the speaker feel more connected to both her homeland and to the earth itself.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Grace Nichols first published "Hurricane Hits England" in her 1996 poetry collection *Sunris*, which won the Guyana Poetry Prize. Prior to this collection, Nichols had already published numerous well-known books, including the poetry collections *I is a Long-Memoried Woman* (1983), which won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, and *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (1984). Her 1986 novel, *Whole of a Morning Sky*, explores Guyana's struggle for independence from England. More recent books include *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* (2009), and *Passport to Here and There* (2020), as well as poetry collections for children.

Nichols was born in Guyana, and Caribbean culture, folklore, and oral traditions inform her work. Like "Hurricane Hits England," a number of her other poems (such as "Island Man") explore experiences of Caribbean immigrants living in the UK. When she moved to England in 1977, Nichols was part of a generation of West Indian poets whose work explored race, culture, and belonging at a time of intense xenophobia in the UK. Other poets of this movement include John Agard (to whom Nichols is married) and Linton Kwesi Johnson.

Today, Nichols is recognized as a major English poet. When former Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy created a poetry contest in UK schools, Nichols led the first panel of judges. She was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in the UK in 2007, and her work is taught in British schools as part of the English Literature IGCSE anthologies.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Two layers of historical context are important to the poem.

First, contextual clues suggest that the poem refers to an actual storm that hit the coast of England and France in October 1987. This event, known as the Great Storm, was destructive and deadly. Although the Great Storm wasn't technically a hurricane (the term "hurricane" refers to cyclones in the North Atlantic and North Pacific oceans), it had hurricane-force winds reaching as high as 137 miles per hour and caused immense damage throughout the UK and France. Storms of this kind are extremely unusual in England, but familiar features of the Caribbean.

The larger backdrop to the poem is that of British colonialism and slavery in the West Indies, and of Caribbean migration to the UK. Guyana (where Grace Nichols was born) was colonized by various European nations and under British rule until 1966. When Britain colonized the Caribbean, they forcibly brought over and enslaved three million Africans to work the region. Many of these enslaved people came from West Africa, and their Yoruba culture and language—including the natural Orishas or gods to whom the speaker alludes in the poem—remain crucial parts of some West Indian cultures.

Between 1948 and 1971, a wave of Caribbean immigrants came to England, partly due to a labor shortage in the UK following the Second World War. Known as the Windrush generation, these immigrants played a major role in rebuilding England after World War II.

Although Nichols herself came to England slightly later (in 1977), the poem can be read within the larger context of the Caribbean diaspora who emigrated from former British colonies to the United Kingdom. The speaker of the poem explores questions of home, belonging, and identity recognizable to many immigrants, including many of the poet's generation.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Poem Out Loud — Listen to Grace Nichols read "Hurricane Hits England," along with several other of her poems, at the Poetry Archive of the English Arts Council. This website also includes a brief biography of Nichols. (https://poetryarchive.org/poet/grace-nichols/)
- Biography of Grace Nichols — Learn more about the poet's life and work in this biographical article from the British Council. This page also includes a bibliography of Nicholss' books and a critical essay on her work. (https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/grace-nichols)
- An Interview with Grace Nichols — Read this interview with Grace Nichols, along with interviews with other leading Black poets in the UK, about race, justice, and "the power of poetry." (https://www.theguardian.com/books/

2020/jun/28/black-british-poets-black-lives-matter-linton-kwesi-johnson-grace-nichols-raymond-antrobus-kayo-chingonyi-malika-booker-vanessa-kisuule)

- The Great Storm — Read about the Great Storm, the cyclone that hit the English coast in 1987 and inspired this poem. (https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/oct/15/british-woodlands-30-years-after-great-storm)
- Caribbean Immigration to the UK — Learn more about Caribbean immigration to the UK, particularly in the period following World War II. This article also explores how Caribbean immigrants played a major role in rebuilding England after the war. (https://www.bl.uk/windrush/articles/how-caribbean-migrants-rebuilt-britain#)

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