

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Listener

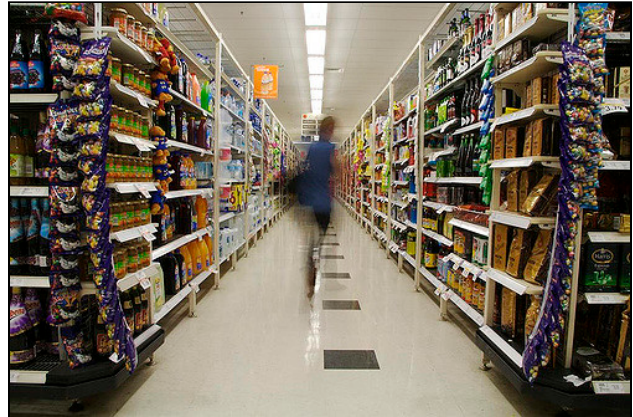
By Alan King
2017

Alan King is a Caribbean American, whose parents emigrated from Trinidad and Tobago to the U.S. In this poem, a boy reflects on his deceased aunt. As you read, take notes on how the speaker describes his aunt.

for Marilyn King, "Mops" (1949-2009)

- [1] A woman in the next aisle
laughs among the milk
and orange juice.
- Laughter stops the words in her throat,
[5] so no matter what, they won't finish the joke.
She laughs like my Aunt "Mops,"
- the one who was ready to drive
from DC to Baltimore to scorch my boss
with her fire-bottle words
- [10] when I told her what I made as a reporter
forced to work weekends.
- She got her nickname, "Mops,"
from the Mopsy biscuits she loved
as a girl back in Trinidad.¹
- [15] Every Friday, I'd snatch a stack
of newspapers from my job and race down
to her house where the aromas²
of pound cake and curry
fought each other like siblings.
- [20] I'd drop off a few copies at her salon.
She'd smile, See how my nephew all ova'
the front page, so! She'd keep a paper
to read my articles on city council corruption
and displaced³ East Baltimore residents
- [25] before she fell asleep.

If I was stressed from work, she'd always say,
*Them can't play sailor and 'fraid powder.*⁴



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1. an island in the Caribbean
2. **Aroma (noun):** a distinctive, typically pleasant smell
3. **Displace (verb):** to force someone to leave their home

When she died from cancer,
I thought I lost her forever.

[30] But she's an aisle over,
laughing
behind the spice shelf.

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4. During the annual carnival in Trinidad, masqueraders dress as sailors and throw baby powder on spectators and band members. This saying means not to get involved in something if you can't handle the work involved.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement expresses the main theme of the poem?
 - A. It's important to remain optimistic, even during difficult times.
 - B. No one will ever support you like your family does.
 - C. You never fully recover from losing a close family member.
 - D. Happy memories of a loved one can help keep them alive in your heart.

2. PART B: Which detail from the poem best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "She got her nickname, "Mops," / from the Mopsy biscuits she loved" (Lines 12-13)
 - B. "She'd smile, See how my nephew all ova' / the front page, so!" (Lines 21-22)
 - C. "When she died from cancer, / I thought I lost her forever." (Lines 28-29)
 - D. "But she's an aisle over, / laughing / behind the spice shelf" (Lines 30-32)

3. How does the following quote contribute to the reader's understanding of the speaker's aunt: "She'd smile, See how my nephew all ova' / the front page, so!" (Lines 21-22)?
 - A. She is proud of the speaker and wants to share their work with others.
 - B. She is surprised by the speaker's quality of work.
 - C. She thinks the speaker deserves to make more money for his work.
 - D. She wants to write for the newspaper like the speaker.

4. What does it mean when the speaker reveals that his aunt wanted "to scorch my boss / with her fire-bottle words" (Lines 8-9)?
 - A. She wants to physically harm the speaker's boss.
 - B. She wants to criticize the work he produces.
 - C. She wants to scold the boss for his treatment of the speaker.
 - D. She wants to frighten the speaker's boss.

5. How do the first and the last stanza of the poem contribute to its meaning?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the poem, the speaker remembers happy moments of him and his aunt. Describe an important memory you have with a member of your family. What things trigger memories of that moment?
2. In the context of the poem, how is the speaker impacted by his aunt's death? How does he continue to feel close to her after she is gone? How do you remember someone that you have lost?