



WALKING AWAY KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER



Context – *Walking Away* was written by Cecil Day-Lewis and was published in 1956.

Cecil Day-Lewis – Cecil Day-Lewis (1904-1972) was an Anglo-Irish poet and the poet laureate of the United Kingdom between 1968 and 1972. His poetry is often romantic and includes nature and personal, emotional experiences amongst its themes. Day-Lewis was married twice and had four children, including the famous actor Sir Daniel Day-Lewis. *Walking Away* is dedicated to Day-Lewis' son from his first marriage, Sean, and was influenced by Sean's departure for boarding school.



Romanticism – Romanticism (in literature) was a literary movement that originated in Europe in the latter half of the 18th Century. In most areas it peaked in the early 19th Century. Romanticism is characterised by its emphasis on emotions, as well as nature and past events – memories and settings are often colourfully described, in response to the scientific rationalisation of nature of the era. Day-Lewis was influenced by the romantic poets, and used romantic features in his poetry.



Boarding School – A boarding school provides education for children who live on the premises. Boarding schools are often highly-established and esteemed independent schools that have strong historical ties with the wealthy and aristocratic. Debate has previously ensued about the emotional and psychological effects of children leaving their parents to board for extended periods of time. Both Cecil-Lewis and his son, Sean, were educated at boarding schools.



Parental Bond – A parental bond is the bond between a parent and child, often referred to as either the maternal bond (mother/child) or the paternal bond (father/child). Research suggests that both bonds have a biological basis, with changes taking place in the brains and hormones of mothers and fathers before and after the birth of their child. Further studies have shown that children who grow up to happy and stable often develop strong bonds as infants with their parents.



Language/Structural Devices

Nature Imagery – Day-Lewis gets across his key meanings about severance and separation through strong imagery from different aspects of nature. For example, in stanza 1, the speaker compares the disconnection to a satellite leaving its planet's orbit. In stanza 2, the boy is compared to a young bird, and in stanza 3, the son is portrayed as some form of 'winged seed.' Finally, in stanza 4, the speaker considers the creator of nature and what they intended in devising these separations.

Similes – Day-Lewis uses a number of similes to compare the separation of father and son to various separations in the natural world. For example, in stanza 1, the speaker describes the initial feeling of his son being pulled away as 'like a satellite/wrenched from its orbit.' This suggests that the force between them was exceptionally strong. Later, in stanza 3, the boy leaving is described as 'like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem' – demonstrating the boy's uncertainty.

Quote: "Your first game of football, then, like a satellite Wrenched from its orbit, go drifting away"

Quote: "That hesitant figure, eddying away Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem,"

Personification – In addition to several aspects of nature being partially personified throughout, Day-Lewis personifies the pain that the speaker feels through the detachment with his son. The pain is personified as 'gnawing' at his mind – suggesting that the pain is causing some kind of calculated agitation for the speaker. It adequately shows how the parting has played on the parent's mind ever since.

Specific Verbs – Day-Lewis employs a number of specific verbs, which all contain connotations relating to both connections and separations. Examples of these verbs are 'grasp', 'wrenched', 'eddy', 'give', 'take', and 'loosened.' These verbs work in unison to enable the reader to observe the slow and gradual separation between the parent and child over the course of the poem.

Quote: "I have had worse partings, but none that so Gnaws at my mind still. Perhaps it is roughly..."

Quote: "Has something I never quite grasp to convey About nature's give-and-take – the small, the scorching"

Form – The poem is conventional in the sense that it has four equal stanzas of five lines. Rhyme is used throughout in an ABACA rhyme scheme. The rhyme is often monosyllabic (e.g. so, show, go) making it appear childlike and uncomplicated by nature – reflecting the content of the poem. The pace is slow-paced, showing the slow separation.

Structure – A first person voice is used, but addresses the son with the personal pronoun 'you.' The opening stanza deals with the first raw memory of the son being 'wrenched away.' Stanzas 2 and 3 deal depict emotions of the gradual separation. The final stanza portrays the speaker's gradual acceptance, through their willingness to let go.

Quote: "Saying what God alone could perfectly show... ..And love is proved in letting go."

Quote: "How selfhood begins with a walking away, And love is proved in letting go."

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Parental Love – The predominant idea across the poem is that the speaker feels pain upon realising that he needs to let the child go – thus demonstrating his love for the child. Whilst he uses a range of imaginative language choices to show the pain that this causes him, the last line demonstrates his acceptance that this must happen.



Nature – The ideas of separation, movement, and change are all vividly represented through elements of nature. For example, Day-Lewis considers the idea of a 'half-fledged thing set free/ Into the wilderness.' This makes the reader consider how nature also separates offspring from their parents as they mature.



Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA	LINE	POEM	ANALYSIS
1	1	It is eighteen years ago, almost to the day –	The speaker informs us that the <u>memory</u> is 18 years old – the reader is immediately aware that it must have been a particularly <u>important/emotional</u> memory for it to remain so vivid: he still remembers the weather on that day. Leaves ' <u>just turning</u> ' in colour means they are beginning to get ready to leave the tree – <u>metaphor</u> for the son leaving the father. The speaker addresses his son in the second person ('you') presenting relationship between father and son. The <u>simile</u> in lines 4 and 5 shows the <u>pain</u> of the son 'drifting away' from him – use of ' <u>wrenched</u> ' makes this seem painful.
	2	A sunny day with leaves just turning,	
	3	The touch-lines new-ruled – since I watched you play	
	4	Your first game of football, then, like a satellite	
	5	Wrenched from its orbit, go drifting away	
2	6	Behind a scatter of boys. I can see	The speaker returns to the <u>memory of the past</u> – a 'scatter' of boys makes them seem <u>disorganised</u> , representing the <u>speaker's anxieties</u> regarding no longer keeping order over the boy's life. ' <u>Pathos</u> ' evokes a feeling of <u>poignancy/sadness</u> . The comparison with a ' <u>half-fledged thing</u> ' gives the image of young bird, barely ready to leave, and the 'wilderness' suggests something <u>wide open and dangerous</u> – the speaker's angst is coming to the fore at this point. Lines 9-10 suggest the child is unsure and lost, using the <u>metaphorical 'path.'</u>
	7	You walking away from me towards the school	
	8	With the pathos of a half-fledged thing set free	
	9	Into a wilderness, the gait of one	
	10	Who finds no path where the path should be.	
3	11	That hesitant figure, eddying away	'Hesitant' and 'eddy' implies that the child is <u>unsure – tentative</u> about where to go. The simile in line 12 further highlights this point through the use of a <u>comparison with nature</u> – just as nature gives children, it also eventually takes them away. Line 13 demonstrates just how much this has affected the speaker – they are <u>unable to adequately articulate</u> how they feel about the child leaving. The <u>alliteration</u> used in 'small', ' <u>scorching</u> ' echoes the sound of searing heat – pain associated with the experiences that take the child away, helping to shape the parent as a person.
	12	Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem,	
	13	Has something I never quite grasp to convey	
	14	About nature's give-and-take – the small, the scorching	
	15	Ordeals which fire one's irresolute clay.	
4	16	I have had worse partings, but none that so	The speaker explains that he has had ' <u>worse partings</u> ' in terms of <u>acute pain</u> (e.g. 'loss through death') but none that affect him as much still. <u>Personification</u> is used to depict the pain 'gnawing' at his mind. He suggests that only God would be able to 'perfectly show' how to handle this experience (perhaps he did so when sending his son to earth) – <u>imperfect humans</u> have to work at these emotions. The last two lines tie the poem together – a key message of <u>acceptance from the speaker.</u>
	17	Gnaws at my mind still. Perhaps it is roughly	
	18	Saying what God alone could perfectly show –	
	19	How selfhood begins with a walking away,	
	20	And love is proved in letting go.	

Poems for Comparison

Mother, Any Distance	<i>Walking Away</i> can be contrasted with this poem in relation to the theme of <u>Parental Love</u>
Neutral Tones/ Love's Philosophy	<i>Walking Away</i> can be compared with these poems in relation to the theme of <u>Nature</u> .

Influences on the Poet

It can be argued that much of his poetry, now well out of fashion, belonged to its time. But this poem is very much for all times. It is a memory poem, looking back to my nervous first day at school in 1938. But it was published, some while after he walked away from my mother into a second marriage, in his 1962 volume of verse *The Gate*. Believe it or not, society of 1962 was much like that of 2018. It is the craziness of our governance that has changed. *Walking Away* is addressed to all caring parents at all times as they watch their offspring leaving for new lives at school and whatever education and work that may follow. – Interview with Sean Day-Lewis – www.theguardian.co.uk – 12th Jan 2018

