

## Island Man-Grace Nichols

### MATCHES:

Two Scavengers in a Truck, Nothing's Changed-Two Cultures  
Vultures, Limbo-Contrasting Views

### GRACE NICHOLS (Black female poet):

1. Grace Nichols was born in Guyana, West Indies in 1950. She attended university and worked in the Caribbean as a journalist and reporter.
2. In 1977 she moved to Britain and now lives and writes in Sussex with her family.
3. She describes herself as a "*head in the clouds-feet on the ground sort of person*".
4. This parallels with the Island Man's experience of soothing dreams of an idyllic island and the harsh reality of life in London.
5. She identifies with the Island Man as she remembers the sound of the surf compared to the roar of the urban traffic in London.

### SETTING AND CONTEXT:

1. A man who lives in England for a long time who still wakes up with the sound of the sea in his ears.
2. The poem is dedicated to and inspired by a specific person.
3. The dedication at the start of the poem, beneath the title immediately links the poem with other traditions and cultures, before we get to read any of the actual poem.
4. It is a simple contrast between life in London and life in the Caribbean.

### FORM AND TECHNIQUES:

1. The poem takes the form of **free verse** with varied line lengths used to create the rhythm and some rhyme.
2. Capital letters are used but no punctuation is used throughout the poem in order to allow it to flow freely.
3. The dedication at the start of the poem shows there is a clear link with another culture or tradition.
4. Stanzas one and two describe the man imagining he is waking on a Caribbean island.
5. The sound of the surf is reflected in the irregular rhythm of the poem.
6. Line 3 and 8-**sound...surf/sun...surfacing**-alliteration of 's' suggests the hiss of the sea on the sand.
7. Line 5 is onomatopoeic **breaking...wombing**
8. Line 5-**wombing**-has many associations, the main one here is of comfort and security as well as the place of birth.
9. Line 3, 10 and 13-**blue...emerald...grey**-note the change in colours. It is also like the gradual change in colours in the sea as we come closer to England as we would normally associate blue seas with somewhere like the Caribbean and grey seas with the dull weather of England.
10. Line 8-**sun surfacing defiantly...**The vigour and strength of the sun is emphasised by means of personification. This is a positive image as if the sun is rising against all odds.

11. Line 10-**emerald island**-this image indicates the precious island from which he came rather than a comparison with Ireland.
12. Line 11-**he always comes back**            **groggily groggily** The gap here in the sentence is like a break in the island man's consciousness and the return to life in London.
13. Lines 11-12-**comes back.....groggily groggily...comes back**-repetition here emphasises the island man's struggle against returning to the reality of London. It is as if he cannot believe it or is reluctant to return to London.
14. Lines 13-London is not described as a jewel-it is **grey, metallic and dull**.
15. Line 15-**North Circular road**-this is a busy road in North London.
16. Line 16-London's sounds are **muffling**-again the repetition of muffling emphasises this.
17. Line 17-**his crumpled pillow waves**-only his crumpled pillow are left to remind him of the waves he left behind.
18. Line 18-**island man heaves himself**-there is a suggestion of the island man heaving himself onto an island as he struggles to continue another day here.
19. Line 19-**Another London day**-stark last line, it is physically isolated from the rest of the poem. There is no preposition or verb in this last line, as if it's a struggle to go on.
20. Line 19-**Another London day**-this final line is isolated from the rest of the poem, much like the island man himself. It is a return to his normal reality in London but it is cut off from the rest of the poem just as the Island man has been cut off from his inner life on his Caribbean island.

### **THEME AND INTERPRETATION:**

1. The poem contrasts two different atmospheres: the brightly coloured Caribbean, full of human and natural activity, and the dull, grey mechanical life in London.
2. The poem is dedicated to one individual but it reflects and speaks to any people who have made a major change in where they live, leaving behind the place where their roots lie.

### **LIFE IN THE CARIBBEAN:**

1. The Caribbean is located within the tropics. The weather/climate is generally the same over the whole area, i.e., year round sunshine as well as looking like an idyllic paradise/dream world due to the beautiful scenery.
2. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sugar plantations dominated agriculture and fuelled the slave trade.
3. The poet wishes to emphasise how the 'Island Man' longs to return to his native home. LOOK AT THE DESCRIPTIONS in the poem that stress the beauty of the Caribbean in comparison to London.