

### Group 1 – Stanza 1

- Female Pacific Identity has changed over the years. Here we begin with the most familiar image of the contemporary female pacific- islander. She is educated, has a good job (hence the “business suit” and “degrees up their sleeves”), and reflects her pacific roots through the tell-tale accessory of the flower in her hair. She carries with her aspects of the pacific culture such as the traditional typical religious upbringing, but she is definitely not as devout in her religious beliefs as the first generation of nz-born islanders before her. The reference to prayers “in pockets”, implies that she has not internalised these religious beliefs or practices; she carries them with her, much like an accessory. This ‘accessory’ is still an important facet to her ‘pacific identity’. Along with these prayers, she carries the expectations of her ancestors (and more directly her parents). These expectations are often lofty and it is all too common for the female members of any pacific family to carry the weight of parental expectations. Despite the fact that we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and in western countries, women are still the burden bearers striving to meet the high and often unrealistic expectations of the family. In earlier years they would have done so through marrying well. In this contemporary setting, it is done through gaining education resulting in highly paid, typically corporate jobs. (Hence the reference to “business suits” and “high heels”). This contemporary pacific island female is a hybrid of nz and pacific values. She is therefore “pushing boundaries” whenever she attempts to move away from a purely ‘island’ way of living or being. In this sense, she is making connections (“building bridges”) between the old and the new (traditional and the contemporary) and brings change to all who surround her. (“Change falling like rain around us”)

### Group 2 – stanza 2

- Respect for elders, and in particular the women who have gone before us is a major theme in this poem. Mila refers to them as “mother-of-pearl women with wisdom teeth smiles”. The description is connotative of the beauty of these women both in the physical and intrinsic sense. Respect is given to these women for their sacrifice and service to their families. This respect is conveyed through the use of rhetorical questions. They are characterised as women of the land who “walk a mile” “climb those mountains” in their “jandals”. They stand in stark contrast to the contemporary pacific women in Auckland who traipse around in their “high heels”.

### Group 3 – stanza 3

- This stanza is an extension of the earlier stanza where the identity of these “mother-of-pearl” women is unravelled. They are women of nobility, grace and poise (“walk like taupou”), they speak with the authority and presence of a talking chief who represents a noble or the King (“talk like a matapule”). They command and rule their domain with such power that one feels it in the tone of their voice (“delegate with a broom in their voice”). They are not only disciplinarians and rulers, but they have a great capacity to enjoy life, to love and to laugh (“laugh like waves on the Hihifo side power to turn reefs into the silk stockings of sand”)

### Group 4 – stanza 4

- In the fourth stanza the intricacies of political manoeuvring (politicking) are likened to the careful and premeditated execution of dance moves in the traditional dance of the “ta’olunga”. This comparison highlights the “mother-of-pearl’s” ability to negotiate a path to her desired destination (to get the things that she wants) without overstepping the boundaries of accepted social and cultural norms. (E.g. island women are not meant to be seen as demanding or to usurp the position of the male, which is traditionally, the head of the household). To do this takes great skill because you are pushing the boundaries of what is socially acceptable and still remain in those same boundaries. In a way, you are moving “without moving”. The final statement, “ hips making all the decisions” carries nuances of double entendre. In the physical sense, much island dancing is dependent on the movement of the hips. However, the “decisions” referred to in this context can go beyond the physical sense to the realm of life changing decisions e.g. whether to let your daughter study in another city. The reference therefore to the “hips” is also suggestive of the sexual power that women possess, and the power of female sexuality to affect the decision making process, a process carried out usually by the male head of the house.

#### Group 5 – stanza 5

- In the fifth stanza we see more of what the “mother-of-pearl” women have to teach the contemporary female pacific islander. These women impart the knowledge that the most precious part of the female is within her. The importance of family is reiterated and reinforced as an integral part of one’s pacific identity, even more so because she/we are no longer living in the islands. The attributes of patience and faithfulness, commitment to the family are highly esteemed as characteristics of the female pacific identity. Our siapo/tapa cloth reveal the wealth of our culture, each symbol and sign representing so much more than mere geometrical shapes. They represent our history, our stories and our experiences throughout the generations.

#### Group 6 – stanzas 6 and 7

- In the sixth stanza’s the mother’s “of-pearl” are now referred to as “flowers”. These flowers are noted by pacific islanders for their visual beauty and aromatic qualities. The beauty of the women is further enhanced by the use of this metaphor which appeals to pacific and non-pacific readers alike. The adjectives used to describe the flowers also act as apt descriptors of the personal qualities of these women, e.g. “bold...spirited...elegant..delicious”)
- The last stanza acts as a link back to the beginning of the poem. In terms of setting we have been led back to Auckland. There is a reminiscent and poignant description of how the “flowers” from the previous stanza act as reminders of a paradise beyond the reality of Auckland and her traffic.