

**Once Upon a Time**  
by GABRIEL OKARA

Once upon a time, son,  
they used to laugh with their hearts  
and laugh with their eyes;  
but now they only laugh with their teeth,  
while their ice-block-cold eyes  
search behind my shadow.

There was a time indeed  
they used to shake hands with their hearts;  
but that's gone, son.  
Now they shake hands without hearts:  
while their left hands search  
my empty pockets.

'Feel at home!' 'Come again':  
they say, and when I come  
again and feel  
at home, once, twice,  
there will be no thrice –  
for then I find doors shut on me.

So I have learned many things, son.  
I have learned to wear many faces  
like dresses – homeface,  
officeface, streetface, hostface,  
cocktailface, with all their conforming smiles  
like a fixed portrait smile.  
And I have learned too  
to laugh with only my teeth  
and shake hands without my heart.  
I have also learned to say, 'Goodbye',  
when I mean 'Good-riddance';  
to say 'Glad to meet you',  
without being glad; and to say 'It's been  
nice talking to you', after being bored.

But believe me, son.  
I want to be what I used to be  
when I was like you. I want  
to unlearn all these muting things.  
Most of all, I want to relearn  
how to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror  
shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs!

So show me, son,  
how to laugh; show me how  
I used to laugh and smile  
once upon a time when I was like you.

**Comment [C1]:** Connotations of a fairytale, Possibly such a long time ago that it seems as if it almost never happened.

**Comment [C2]:** Family member talking to another family member, Most likely father-son.

**Comment [C3]:** Plural, small groups perhaps, a group of others. It's vague – as if they are all the same.

**Comment [C4]:** Past tense, to show this has happened but doesn't anymore.

**Comment [C5]:** A joyful word, connotations of happy.

**Comment [C6]:** Connotations of love, this shows that when they laugh it is meaningful.

**Comment [C7]:** You use your eyes to see, so to laugh with their eyes relates to the visibility to see that it is meaningful.

**Comment [C8]:** The words 'but' and 'only' represent a presence of disappointment, it's not good enough, been let down. Sinister.

**Comment [C9]:** Shows it is fake and emotionless. Has connotations of eating and tearing apart. They're solid, cold, hard, sharp and vicious. The 'T' is a harsh consonant.

**Comment [C11]:** Represents lost.

**Comment [C12]:** Connotations of hiding and perhaps sneaking around.

**Comment [C13]:** Blank, no characteristics. Looks like every other shadow. Probe for weakness.

**Comment [C10]:** Opposite of personification, use adjectives which are opposite to warm, unwelcoming and unfeeling. Harsh consonants present to create a sinister atmosphere.

**Comment [C14]:** Sure of it. A fact.

**Comment [C15]:** No names used, cold, no characteristics.

**Comment [C16]:** Repetitive.

**Comment [C17]:** Connotations of vanishing, has no explanation.

**Comment [C18]:** A big use of time words to show the contrast between now and then.

**Comment [C19]:** In-human, can't breathe. Therefore it contrasts with live. Perhaps fake and unreal.

**Comment [C21]:** To steal? Connotations of being poor and having nothing, suggests lonely, emotionally bankrupt.

**Comment [C20]:** Again repetitive, emphasizes the connotations of being lost.

**Comment [C22]:** Recognizable, fake, clichéd.

**Comment [C24]:** Imagery.

**Comment [C23]:** Foreshadowing, assertive and perhaps represents anger within him.

**Comment [C25]:** Rhythmic, being same as everybody else. Rules to fit in- like masks with dresses, like a costume or an outfit.

**Comment [C26]:** Fake, 'fixed' connotations of unchangeable, painted on smile.

**Comment [C27]:** False, he's learned to do it, to fit in.

**Comment [C28]:** Even though he doesn't like it he still takes part in it. He turned himself into one of them.

**Comment [C29]:** This is a big 'but'. has a great importance.

**Comment [C30]:** A lot of 'I' like he's broken away from everybody else, a plea to change. Repetitive- loses its meaning --> dull emphasizes what he wants to get back.

**Comment [C31]:** Opposites. Desperate to go back and undo things.

**Comment [C32]:** Fricative sound to highlight the connotations of evil. Vampiric.

**Comment [C33]:** Society destroys you. 'snake' connotations of evil, poisoness, sinister, dehumanising, lost natural human traits.

**Comment [C34]:** It's now the son's turn.

**Comment [C35]:** Only at beginning and end, this helps create the atmosphere of a story and highlights the connotations of a fairytale.

**Comment [C36]:** Ends with the word 'you', a reversal of what's usual. Remind son of individuality, now it's up to him.