

*This poem contains many references to things unique to the city of Manchester, UK. Each of these things has been placed in **italics** and you can find out more about them in the footnotes. A few more unusual words in the poem have been underlined and descriptions are also given to help you.*

Watch Nicole read her poem here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaTL0umF3IQ>

A Rucksack and a Journey

by Nicole May

We are fragile fragments of ash
learning to accept change
like hearing the news and not despairing,

It's watching lives survive and leave wards¹,
and finding laughter in new eyes
surviving in the grey,
placing naivety in a box
shelving it as unwanted

It's allowing yourself to be guided in tunnels,
surrendering to the abundance of spring
meditating; jahwening* in a hammock in Málaga
knowing winter is not far behind
on *Great Ancoats Street*²
we remain defiant through decline
while drawing strength from each other

It's raving to *Levelz*³ just off the *curry mile*⁴,
in your red bra and big knickers
under a full moon
believing in nana's⁵ knowledge,
of what she called 'science',
while understanding lonely,
and the beauty of solitude.

It's 86 bus journeys from *Piccadilly Gardens*⁶
saying sorry just after swapping bodies
and text messages saying 'I love you'



¹ ward, a room in a hospital

² *Great Ancoats Street*, one of Manchester's large, iconic streets on the east side of the city

³ *Levelz*, a local band with a big student following who put on pop-up raves and nights around the city

⁴ *the curry mile*, the nickname for a street in Manchester which has a large number of restaurants and kebab houses specialising in food from South Asia

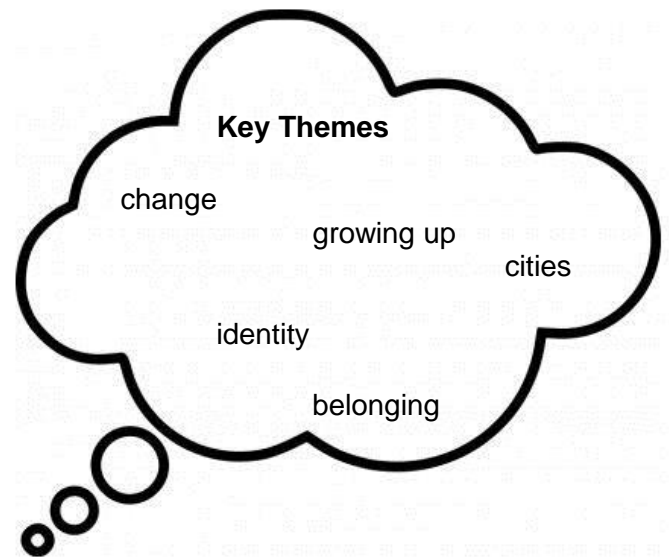
⁵ nana, informal name for grandma

⁶ *Piccadilly Gardens*, a green space in Manchester city centre, and a hub of the city's public transport system

it's the *Rain Man uncle G*⁷ on the same bus home
he counts us carbon spirits⁸ after a night out.

It's Friday prayers filled with hope
Karaoke Saturdays at *The Angel Pub*⁹
it's lazy days and *Yorkshire pudding*¹⁰ Sundays
it's no endings, it's new beginnings
it's constant cranes on *Mancunian*¹¹ skylines
as we embrace our differences

It's age and memory loss
we are fragile fragments of ash
let's marshal¹² our minds
fight the invisible
let's not lament¹³ about the past
as we embrace the change



*jahwen (v): To find peace in a hammock

About the Poet: Nicole May

Nicole is a spoken word artist and workshop facilitator, she has performed and taught spoken word and performance both nationally and internationally, as part of Young Identity, Inna Voice and as a solo performer and practitioner.

Chosen as one of twelve poets commissioned by the BBC, she wrote the North-West Poem for National Poetry Day. In April, she performed at the Schaubühne in Berlin, where the production received a standing ovation at FIND18.

She has worked and performed with writers such as: Kate Tempest, Saul Williams, Amiri Baraka, Jean "Blinta" Breeze, Lemn Sissay, The Last Poets and Linton Kwesi Johnson. In 2016, Nicole received a fellowship to start AndWhat TV which is an online spoken word channel. Nicole is a Director of Young Identity, a hugely successful creative writing and performance organisation.

⁷ *Rain Man uncle G*, There is an elderly man in Manchester who often rides the 86 bus and counts the number of people who get on and off. A lot of the community in Manchester know this man. 'Rain Man' refers to the idea of counting. 'uncle G' is a term of endearment towards the man.

⁸ carbon spirits, human beings. Referring to the human body which is partly made up of carbon. 'Spirit' has a double meaning here: a human 'soul', a person, or an 'alcoholic drink' – referring to people who travel home drunk after going out in the city with friends

⁹ *The Angel Pub*, a pub in Manchester which specialises in beer from small independent breweries

¹⁰ *Yorkshire pudding*, a typically English savoury side-dish made of eggs, flour, milk or water, often eaten with sausages

¹¹ *Mancunian*, an adjective meaning 'relating to Manchester'

¹² marshal, arrange people (mostly soldiers) in order

¹³ lament, express sadness about something