Woman and Children First

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South-African poet who often writes about human rights. Especially the rights of women and children.

1. **It’s always been so.** A
2. **This makes it worse.** B. It is custom for women and
3. **Women and children first.** B children to be put first
4. **First to be hurt** B
5. **Last to be nursed.** B Enjambment
6. **It’s always been so.** B - repetition
7. **When rumour stalks** C
8. **First to be cursed** B Enjambment
9. **And worse.** B
10. **Turned out, inside out.** D
11. **Only safe in a hearse.** B – vehicle that transports the dead.
12. **Women and children first.** B - repetition - Women and children are treated badly, assaulted,   
     beaten, and killed by the people who are supposed to   
     keep them safe

**Notes on the poem:**

**Title:** The saying “women and children first” comes from the shipwreck of Birkenhead in 1852. Ships did not carry enough lifeboats, because they were too heavy and cluttered the deck. If there was a disaster, the captain had to choose who would survive. When the Birkenhead sank, the captain ordered the wives and children aboard into the only small lifeboat. They were saved, while the men stayed on board. About a quarter of the men survived the wreck, but none of the senior officers did.

**About the poem:**  The poet took the saying “women and children first” and twisted it to mean the opposite: instead of women and children being protected in South Africa, they are attacked and treated badly.

**Theme:**  The most vulnerable or weakest members of society are the ones who should be protected. Instead they are hunted and abused.

**Rhyme scheme**: The repetition of the “-ur” sound at the end of most lines, copies the stuttering for excuses people and the government make when they think about how badly the women and children are treated in the country. The rhyme scheme also makes it easier to remember the poem and the message that it carries.

**Questions**

1.1 According to the poem, have South Africans always treated women and children badly?  
 Quote one line from the poem to prove your answer. (2)

1.2 If the rhyme scheme for stanza 1 is A B B, what will the rhyme scheme for stanza 2 be? (1)

1.3 Give two reasons why the poet repeats the “ur” sound at the end of most lines. (2)

1.4 Why would women and children only be safe in a hearse (line 11)? (1)

1.5 Explain the difference between the words “Women and children first” as used in the title  
 and the last line. (2)

1.6 Do you think the message of this poem is only relevant for South Africans or does it have  
 international relevance? Give a reason for your answer. (2)

**Total: 10**