



GCSE

English Literature

Origin Story (Eve L Ewing)

The poet (contextual information about the poet relevant to the poem) (AO3)

- Dr. Eve Louise Ewing is an American writer and academic.
- She was born in Chicago, in 1986, where she still lives and works.
- Ewing is an associate professor at the University of Chicago, where she teaches courses on education and racial inequality.
- She worked as a middle school language arts teacher and continues to engage with young people in literature on a regular basis.
- As well as her poetry and academic writing, Ewing has authored a number of Marvel comic books, including *Exceptional X-Men*, *Black Panther* and *Ironheart*.
- *Origin Story* was part of Ewing's 2017 award-winning poetry collection, *Electric Arches*. This was her debut collection and a hybrid work that encompasses poems, short stories and visual images.
- In *Electric Arches* and other published works, Ewing explores what it means to be a Black woman in today's society.

Connections and contrasts (AO3) (This list is not exhaustive; other connections and comparisons may be valid)

- ***The Schoolboy* by William Blake:** Both poems express strong emotions of youth through strong imagery.
- ***Cousin Kate* by Christina Rossetti:** Both poems use a strong female voice to express broken love and children born in relationships that don't last.
- ***Remains* by Simon Armitage:** Both poems explore specific times and places through a story of the past and how events of the past effect things in the present.
- ***Kamikaze* by Beatrice Garland:** Both poems reflect on parents and their relationship.
- ***Dusting the Phone* by Jackie Kay:** Both poems detail a love relationship and explore ways in which relationships can be handled by the participants.

The poem (content and context)

What is the poem about? (AO1)

The poem is about the poet's own *Origin Story* in terms of her parents' relationship. Given Eve L Ewing's personal context and the nature of the collection the poem comes from, it can generally be agreed that the thoughts are autobiographical and the speaker in the poem is the poet herself.

Ewing recounts various aspects of her mother and father's lives as young adults and how they met. She goes on to explore the nature of love and, more specifically, her parents' love, comparing this to a comic book that is enjoyed at the time but thought of as disposable and not meant to last.

Deeper meaning (AO1)

- **Love:** Perhaps the main idea in the poem is that the speaker feels love is something that is easily lost and needs to be carefully considered and preserved if it is to endure. Although specifically referencing her parents' relationship, much of the discussion of love is universal.
- **Youth:** Another theme of the poem centres around notions of being young. She depicts a sense of new-found freedom in her parents, experimenting with ideas and of them living in the moment in a casual way and not worrying or thinking of the future.
- **Memories of the past:** There is a sense of nostalgia in the poem. References to the fashions and details of the past add to the idea of the poem being a conduit for shared memories.
- **Family:** There is a sense of pride in the poet's family history. Ewing implies her own existence by recounting the 'good ending'. There is a pride in who her parents are and the relationship they shared and the lives they led.

Context of the poem (AO3)

The poem was published in 2017 at a time of a growing understanding of the need to celebrate and record the lived experiences of Black people in a way that was not always the case in the past.

Right from their outset, comics were cheaply bought and widely disposed of once they had been read. Even those that weren't thrown away were easily damaged because of the fragile nature of the paper they were printed on. When comics started to become valuable, collectors understood the need to preserve comics so they would last into the future. The poem details several ways this can be done.

Eve L Ewing has written for several Marvel comic book titles. In the comic superhero world, an 'origin story' refers to the backstory of how a superhero gained their powers. This immediately implies a pride in herself and her own talents and 'powers' as a modern Black woman.

Specific contextual references in *Origin Story* include:

- Chaka Khan – a pop star from Chicago, known as the 'Queen of Funk'
- Greyhound – an American bus company
- afro puff – a type of hairstyle worn by some black people
- communist – someone who believes in communism, where everyone shares wealth equally in society.



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Structure and form (AO2)

- The form of the poem is free verse.
- Two separate stanzas give each section of the poem a different focus.
- Elements of a 'true' story are used – characters, back story, events and ending.
- Punctuation is used unconventionally, with no capital letters used at the starts of sentences. This gives it a modern, casual feel and separates the past events with the present.
- Parallel structure and anaphora are used to connect the parents.
- A recurring motif of comics is used.

Language and imagery (AO2)

- **Vignettes** are used to detail the speaker's mother and father's appearance and activities when they were young. The use of past tense creates a nostalgic feel.
- An **extended simile** compares love to a comic book.
- An **extended metaphor** compares her parents' love as a comic book, treated casually and disposable.
- **Listing** is used to emphasise the intensity and enjoyment they got out of the relationship.
- **First-person perspective** and the **possessive pronoun** 'my' are both used to connect the content with the autobiographical nature of the poem.
- A **declarative tone** is used to assert the poet's belief in the truth and details of events and opinions in the poem.
- **Assonance** and **alliteration** are used to create the feeling of a strong connection between the parents.

10 key questions to ask about the poem

1. Who is the speaker in the poem, and what is their link to the 'story' of the poem? (AO1)
2. What vignettes does Eve L Ewing use to describe her parents in the poem? (AO1)
3. How does the poet convey nostalgia in the poem? (AO1)
4. What is the significance of the key extended simile, 'love is like a comic book'? (AO2)
5. How does the poem develop the idea that her parents did not 'protect' their love? (AO1/AO2)
6. How does the structure contribute to the meaning of the poem? (AO2)
7. Do you think the poem depicts a strong female speaker? Justify your answer. (AO1/AO2)
8. What is the significance of the ending of the poem? (AO2)
9. Why might Ewing have used a strong declarative tone? (AO2)
10. How might the poem reflect the life and times of the poet? (AO3)

Key quotations (AO1)

1. 'This is true.'
2. 'met at the Greyhound bus station in the mid-eighties in Chicago.'
3. 'my mother, all thick glass and afro puff'
4. 'my father, all sleeveless and soft eye'
5. 'my mother bought one.'
6. 'love is like a comic book. it's fragile'
7. 'love is paper.'
8. 'my parents' love...never saw polyvinyl, never felt a backing'
9. 'memorized, mishandled, worn thin'
10. 'a love like that doesn't last but it has a good ending.'

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Links for further research

- [Find out more about Eve L Ewing on her official website.](#)
- [Read an interview with Eve L Ewing talking about her poetry collection, *Electric Arches*.](#)
- [Listen to Eve L Ewing being interviewed.](#)
- [Read an interview with Eve L Ewing about her background and context.](#)
- [Watch and listen to Eve L Ewing discussing her work and interest in comic books.](#)
- You can follow Eve L Ewing on Instagram: @eve.ewing

