A Mother in a Refugee Camp by Chinua Achebe

1. What is the poem about?
2. What are the main themes of the poem?
3. Who does the poet compare the sight of the mother and her dying son with in the opening line, and why? What picture does it create?
4. Select shocking quotations relating to the senses that show the disease, poverty and starvation in the surrounding camp. Explain for each the image created and its effect.
5. How is the mother in the poem different from the other mothers there?
6. What does the poet mean by the metaphor ‘a ghost-smile’ do you think, and how is she able to smile at all at such a terrible time?
7. What words suggest that she has few possessions left?
8. Why might his hair be rust coloured?
9. How does she lovingly prepare her dying son for his grave?
10. What do you think the metaphor ‘humming in her eyes’ means?
11. What is significant about this ritual in their past lives and now? Explain, including the simile in the final lines of the poem.
12. What is the tone of the poem?
13. What is your reaction to the poem and what emotions does it make you feel?