‘Up the Wall’

What’s the poem about:
‘Up the Wall’ written by Bruce Dawe depicts the life of a housewife whose life is consumed by everyday consistent stress by being constricted to stay at home and look after the children. Bruce Dawe shows clearly that the woman is not happy with her life and is at her wits’ ends. It distinguishes between the role of men and the role of women.

What is he trying to say?
In the first stanza of the poem Dawe creates images for the reader to grasp the life of this woman. In the first sentence Dawe opens the poem with “the kettle’s plainsong rises to a shriek” this shows that something has been boiling for a while. Bruce Dawe makes it obvious that there are a lot of babies mouths to feed “saucepan of milk is always on the boil” it is clear the woman has no life to herself as well as no breaks “no weekend comes to mark of any week”. The woman’s life appears to be depressing. Dawe emphasizes this when he says “something always goes wrong, something’s sure to spoil” In the 6th sentence of the 1st stanza Dawe shows that the woman is experiencing dark feelings. “Spiel, like the horizon, closes in palming like a hidden menace” the darkness represents the bad parts of her life or it could represent depression. In the 1st stanza Dawe introduces the theme of belonging. He shows the readers that the woman is clearly living on the fringe of society.

In the 2nd stanza the poem is expressed from the woman’s perspective. She appears to be talking with her husband, complaining him of her daily activities with the children. “They nearly drove me up the wall” “I could have screamed” The 3rd line of the 2nd stanza Dawe indicates that the housewife is isolated and that she doesn’t like living where she is. “If something should go wrong, I’m so alone”

In the 3rd stanza Dawe finishes the poem in the perspective of the husband. “It’s a quite neighborhood” “Too quite almost” This shows that the husband is ignorant and doesn’t understand the day to day stresses his wife goes through. He doesn’t realize how hard it is for her. “They laugh. The matter ends” Dawe tells us that the man brushes his wife’s complaints under the rug because he simply doesn’t care.

Devices and techniques-
:Alliteration “Something’s sure to spoil”

How does it fit into the theme-
Up the wall fits into the theme of identity and belonging as Dawe depicts the life of a woman and her everyday stressful motherly duties. He shows that the woman is obviously unhappy with her life and hints that she may be heading
down the path to depression. Even though her attempts to inform her husband that she is unhappy, he dismisses her cries. Dawe shows us that this woman is living on the fringe as she is craving a different life, she is unhappy the way her life has panned out. Even when you belong (in this to a family unit or the identity of a ‘mother’) it impacts on your personal identity. Does she see herself as just a ‘mother’?

Suggestions-
Imagination Piece: You can write a short story focusing on the theme identity and belonging by highlighting the sufferings of the housewife.
A personal letter to a member of her family expressing her feelings.
Diary entry of the woman.
A piece of post natal depression- newspaper or Yr 12 Psychology student Depression