

POEM BY - TITILOPE SONUGA

I Am

ANALYSIS BY - KATERINA VINK



LITERAL MEANING

The poet is a black woman, living in a western, English-speaking society. The poet describes her younger self writing poetry in school instead of studying, and her growing up juggling the Yoruba of her ancestors and the English of her surroundings. The poet describes dancing and storytelling, honoring one's predecessors and being true to oneself.



IMAGERY

"I am / gap tooth black girl / back corner of class / scribbling left-handed" (Sonuga 1-4). The poet is describing a memory of when she was younger, it conveys her as an outcast, secluded from others.

"I am / overflowing tales by moonlight / trickling off the tip / of my grandmothers tongue" (Sonuga 8-11). The poet paints a picture of her adolescence, where her grandmother recited fairytales and cultural stories in Yoruba before going to bed.

"wear our stories around our necks / and from our ears / so we never forget / the voices of our ancestors" (Sonuga 41-44). The poet conveys how every garment and jewel she wears is a symbol of her culture and her appreciation of those that came before.

LYRICAL DEVICES

Rhyme Scheme -- "poetry on blank paper / save the school's / curriculum for later" (Sonuga 5-7). These lines stand out most among all the other non-rhyming lines, catching the reader's attention and highlighting the fact that the poet ignored schoolwork in favor of practicing poetry, because her own words were more important to her.

Repetition -- "I am" (Sonuga 1), "this is who / I am" (Sonuga 55-56). The repetition of the poet declaring that they know who they are drives home this poem's theme of identity.

Alliteration -- "the beautiful and the broken / the struggling and the surviving" (Sonuga 51-52). The poet is highlighting the dualities of her ancestors, how they were not perfect, but she was proud of them nevertheless.

FIGURATIVE DEVICES

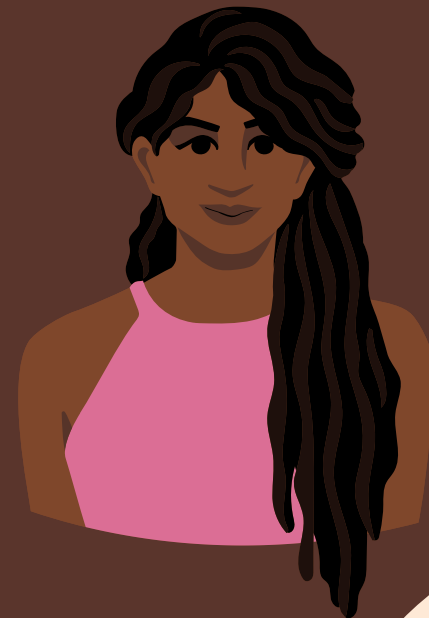
Metaphor -- "I am / what they never / taught you in history books" (Sonuga 45-47). The poet is comparing herself to the black voices that have been overlooked and silenced throughout history without using like or as, and in her appreciation of her culture, in her identity, she is honouring them.

Personification -- "you can hear our voices / pulsing beneath the skin / of a talking drum" (Sonuga 26-28). The poet is giving human qualities to a drum, like the ability to talk. She is describing the powerful way stories and music can reflect reality and history.

Symbolism -- "trickling off the tip / of my grandmothers tongue / you will find my mother / tongue here" (Sonuga 10-13). The poet is using the symbol of the tongue, often indicative of the voice of the gods, to symbolize generations of her ancestors passing down their wisdom and gospel to her through storytelling.

THEME

- The Power of Language, Words and Stories
- Identity, Black Pride, Preserving Culture



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The End

