

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

CHECKING OUT OF MY HISTORY

Checking Out Me History (2004)

Dem tell me
Dem tell me
What dem want to tell me

Bandage up me eye with me own history
Blind me to my own identity

Dem tell me bout 1066 and all dat
dem tell me bout Dick Whittington and he cat
But Touissant L'Ouverture
no dem never tell me bout dat

*Toussaint
a slave
with vision
lick back
Napoleon
battalion
and first Black
Republic born
Toussaint de thorn
to de French
Toussaint de beacon
of the Haitian Revolution*

Dem tell me bout de man who discovers de balloon
and de cow who jump over de moon
Dem tell me bout de dish run away with de spoon
but dem never tell me bout Nanny de maroon

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*Nanny
see-far woman
of mountain dream
fire-woman struggle
hopeful stream
to freedom river*

Dem tell me bout Lord Nelson and Waterloo
but dem never tell me bout Shaka de great Zulu
Dem tell me bout Columbus and 1492
but what happen to de Caribs and de Arawaks too

Dem tell me bout Florence Nightingale and she lamp
and how Robin Hood used to camp
Dem tell me bout ole King Cole was a merry ole soul
but dem never tell me bout Mary Seacole

*From Jamaica
she travel far
to the Crimean War
she volunteer to go
and even when de British said no
she still brave the Russian snow
a healing star
among the wounded
a yellow sunrise
to the dying*

Dem tell me
Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me
But now I checking out me own history
I carving out me identity

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Check Out Me History, by John Agard is a poem that explores the themes of identity, cultural heritage, and the impact of colonialism. The speaker reflects on their journey to reclaim and assert their history, challenging the dominant narratives imposed by colonial powers. The poem uses a mix of Standard English and Caribbean Creole, as well as various structural and linguistic techniques, to convey a powerful message of empowerment and resistance.

In the poem, the speaker uses the metaphor of a "black figure" to symbolize the marginalized histories of black individuals and communities. This figure represents the speaker's quest to uncover and acknowledge their heritage, especially in the face of historical erasure and Eurocentric perspectives. The poem celebrates cultural diversity, linguistic empowerment, and the importance of recognizing and embracing one's history.

"Checking Out Me History" is a poignant and impactful exploration of the complexities of identity, the consequences of colonialism, and the speaker's journey to reclaim their history. The use of language, symbolism, and themes of resistance contributes to the poem's rich and thought-provoking narrative.

THEMES:

Themes:

1. Identity and Cultural Heritage:

- The poem delves into the exploration of one's identity and cultural heritage. The speaker seeks to uncover and embrace their history, challenging the dominant narratives imposed by colonial powers.

2. Colonialism and Oppression:

- There is a strong critique of colonial oppression and the erasure of indigenous histories. The poem highlights the impact of colonization on the understanding and appreciation of one's own cultural background.

3. Empowerment and Resistance:

- The poem suggests a theme of empowerment through resistance. The speaker rejects imposed historical narratives and takes control of their own story, emphasizing the importance of reclaiming one's history.

4. Language as Power:

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- Agard plays with language, using a mix of Standard English and Caribbean Creole. This linguistic choice serves as a powerful tool to assert cultural identity and challenge linguistic norms imposed by colonizers.

Structure:

1. Use of Repetition:

- The poem utilizes repetition, particularly in the refrains like "Dem tell me" and "Bandage up me eye," emphasizing the forceful imposition of historical narratives on the speaker.

2. Varied Line Lengths:

- The poem features varied line lengths, contributing to its rhythmic and dynamic quality. Short, abrupt lines are juxtaposed with longer, flowing lines, creating a sense of movement and intensity.

3. Enjambment:

- Enjambment, or the continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line or stanza, is employed throughout the poem. This technique adds to the poem's fluidity and propels the reader forward, mirroring the urgency of the speaker's quest for identity.

Grammatical Techniques:

1. Use of Pronouns:

- The frequent use of the first-person pronoun "me" in phrases like "Dem tell me" and "checking out me history" emphasizes the personal and individual nature of the speaker's journey of self-discovery.

2. Non-Standard English:

- Agard incorporates non-standard English, including Caribbean Creole, to convey a distinctive linguistic and cultural identity. This challenges the hegemony of Standard English and reflects the speaker's resistance to linguistic and cultural oppression.

3. Dialectal Language:

- The poem features a mix of dialects and languages, creating a rich linguistic tapestry. This choice celebrates diversity and reflects the multiplicity of cultural influences in the speaker's history.

In summary, "Checking Out Me History" is a poignant exploration of identity, resistance, and the impact of colonization. Through its thematic depth, varied structure, and innovative use of language, the poem invites readers to reconsider historical narratives and question the power dynamics inherent in the construction of personal and cultural histories.

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BLACK FIGURE IN POEM :

In "Checking Out Me History" by John Agard, the black figure is a symbolic representation of the speaker's African or Caribbean heritage, which has been historically marginalized or neglected in the broader context of world history. The black figure serves as a metaphor for the speaker's quest to reclaim and acknowledge their own history, particularly in the face of colonialism and the imposition of Eurocentric narratives.

Here's a more detailed explanation:

Symbolic Representation:

1. **Marginalized History:**

- The black figure symbolizes the histories of black individuals and communities that have been marginalized, suppressed, or deliberately omitted from mainstream historical narratives. It represents the speaker's attempt to uncover and assert the importance of this history.

2. **Colonial Legacy:**

- The black figure also represents the impact of colonialism on the speaker's identity. The historical erasure of non-European cultures and contributions is acknowledged, and the speaker seeks to rectify this by acknowledging and embracing their own heritage.

Quest for Identity:

1. **Reclaiming History:**

- The speaker's focus on the black figure reflects a personal and cultural journey to reclaim their history. By acknowledging the importance of black historical figures and events, the speaker challenges the dominant historical narratives that may have undermined or ignored their heritage.

2. **Cultural Pride:**

- The black figure embodies cultural pride and a desire to break free from the constraints imposed by colonial powers. The speaker aims to recognize the achievements, struggles, and resilience of black individuals and communities throughout history.

Resistance to Eurocentrism:

1. **Challenging Imposed Narratives:**

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- The inclusion of the black figure in the poem is an act of resistance against the Eurocentric narratives that have often dominated historical accounts. The speaker questions and rejects the one-sided perspectives that have perpetuated historical injustice.

2. Cultural Diversity:

- By highlighting the black figure, the poem celebrates the diversity of cultures and histories that contribute to the speaker's identity. It emphasizes the need for a more inclusive understanding of history that incorporates voices and stories that have been historically marginalized.

Language and Style:

1. Linguistic Empowerment:

- The use of the term "black figure" itself is linguistically empowering. It serves as a deliberate choice of words that emphasizes the agency and importance of the speaker's cultural identity.

2. Multilingual Expression:

- Throughout the poem, Agard uses a mix of languages and dialects, including Caribbean Creole. This linguistic diversity adds depth to the representation of the black figure and reinforces the speaker's commitment to expressing their identity in a language that is authentic to their heritage.

COMPARISON WITH,

1-LONDON

2-KAMIKAZE

In comparing "**London**" by William Blake and "**Kamikaze**" by Beatrice Garland, we see different treatments of the themes of power, control, and societal expectations, with each poem highlighting how these forces affect individuals and communities.

1. Themes:

- "**London**": Blake's poem explores the oppression, poverty, and corruption of urban society, focusing on how institutional power (church, monarchy, and government) causes suffering and misery. It emphasizes the lack of freedom and the dehumanizing effects of living in a controlled, oppressive city.
- "**Kamikaze**": Garland's poem addresses the conflict between personal choice and societal expectations, particularly in the context of war and honor. The poem tells the story of a Japanese pilot who, expected to die in a kamikaze mission, returns home only to be shunned by his family and society. It explores how societal pressures shape and control individuals' actions and identities.

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2. Tone:

- **"London"**: The tone is dark, critical, and accusatory. Blake condemns the oppressive systems in society, using language that conveys despair and hopelessness. Phrases like "mind-forged manacles" express the idea that people's suffering is both imposed by external forces and internalized.
- **"Kamikaze"**: The tone of "Kamikaze" is more reflective and sorrowful. It focuses on the inner conflict of the pilot and the sadness of his family's rejection. The poem's calm, narrative tone contrasts with the intense emotions of shame and loss that run beneath the surface.

3. Structure and Form:

- **"London"**: Blake uses a regular ABAB rhyme scheme and four quatrains, which creates a rhythmic, almost marching feel, symbolizing the rigidity and control of society. The regularity mirrors the oppression and confinement experienced by the city's inhabitants.
- **"Kamikaze"**: Garland's poem is written in free verse with six-line stanzas, allowing for a more fluid and conversational tone. The lack of rhyme or strict meter reflects the complexity of the pilot's decision and the unpredictability of human emotions and choices.

4. Portrayal of Individuals:

- **"London"**: Blake portrays the citizens of London as victims of an oppressive system. The repetition of "chartered" emphasizes how everything in the city, including the river, is controlled and restricted. The people are depicted as trapped and powerless, symbolized by images like "every face I meet, Marks of weakness, marks of woe."
- **"Kamikaze"**: The pilot in "Kamikaze" is initially depicted as someone who follows a predetermined path (his kamikaze mission), but he ultimately chooses life over duty. However, his choice leads to emotional isolation, as he is shunned by his family and society. The poem explores the devastating consequences of breaking away from societal expectations.

5. Attitudes to Power and Control:

- **"London"**: Blake is highly critical of the systems of power in society. He presents the church, monarchy, and government as corrupt institutions that contribute to the suffering of the people. There is no sense of escape or rebellion, only resignation to the oppression.
- **"Kamikaze"**: While Garland's poem does not directly criticize the structures of power, it highlights the immense pressure exerted by societal expectations of honor and sacrifice. The pilot's decision to turn back from his mission is an act of defiance, but it results in personal tragedy, showing the power of cultural expectations in controlling individual lives.

6. Imagery and Language:

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- **"London"**: Blake uses powerful and vivid imagery to convey suffering and oppression, such as "the hapless soldier's sigh" and "the youthful harlot's curse." His language is direct and accusatory, aiming to expose the injustices of the city's institutions.
- **"Kamikaze"**: Garland's imagery is more subtle and natural, focusing on the beauty of life that the pilot experiences as he flies over the ocean: "a tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous." These natural images contrast with the violent expectations of his mission, emphasizing the value of life and the internal conflict between duty and desire.

7. Message:

- **"London"**: Blake's message is one of condemnation of the oppressive forces in society. He exposes how power and control lead to widespread suffering and dehumanization, particularly in the industrial city.
- **"Kamikaze"**: Garland's message is more complex, dealing with the tension between individual choice and societal expectation. The poem shows how powerful cultural norms, especially in times of war, can dictate people's actions and lead to alienation when those norms are defied.

Conclusion:

- **"London"** presents a bleak view of a city controlled by corrupt institutions, where people are trapped in a cycle of misery. The poem critiques the power structures that cause suffering and the dehumanizing effects of life in the city.
- **"Kamikaze"** explores the personal consequences of defying societal expectations, particularly in the context of war. While the pilot chooses life, his decision leads to his emotional death, as he is ostracized by his community and family.

Both poems examine how power, control, and societal expectations shape and limit individual freedom, but while **"London"** focuses on the external systems of power, **"Kamikaze"** highlights the internal conflict that arises when an individual resists those expectations.