

“Do Now” Work

How does Agard present his ideas in 'Checking out me history'?

Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Task:

Complete your PETERCETER paragraph from last lesson.

Highlight your comparison(s).

In Silence Please



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John Agard explains why he wrote his poem:

 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/clips/z3bjxnb>

Agard says the first line of his history book said: 'West Indian History begins in 1492 with the arrival of Columbus'. It's that very eurocentric view. Nothing exists until the European enters the arena. The retelling of history depends on who is telling the story.

The poem has a celebratory side.

There are two voices - one voice is the nursery rhymes contrasted with a celebration of historical characters.

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In the poem, the speaker suggests that because Black history and experience has been forgotten or ignored, what was taught to him was irrelevant. More importantly, it 'Blind me to me own identity'. Only by finding out for himself about the historical and social achievements of Black people can he develop a personal identity that reflects his cultural and racial roots.

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Power of language

Agard uses a dialect (Creole) in this poem shown by the phonetic spelling, making clear that language is part of identity - his linguistic heritage. He does not bow to the conventions of using Standard English, which is often seen as a symbol of colonisation.

'Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me'

Power of history

The speaker lists significant British figures and events from history and folklore that he has learnt about. He also lists the black leaders and campaigners who were omitted from his formal education. He shows that manipulating history is a powerful tool for affecting people's view of themselves and their potential power.

'but dem never tell me bout Mary Seacole'

Oppression

The poem has a rebellious tone to it with its persistent refrain of 'Dem tell me'. The speaker suggests that education has been used as a form of oppression, selecting certain elements of history and rejecting others. He is searching for the truth and in doing so, pushing against oppressive forces to find his own identity.

'I checking out me own history / I carving out me identity'

How does Agard present his ideas in 'Checking out me history'?

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- Until 1966 Guyana was a British Colony and was known as British Guiana.
- Toussaint L'Ouverture was a Haitian revolutionary.
- Nanny de Maroon was a rebel leader who fought against the British.
- Shaka was a Zulu leader.
- Mary Seacole provided care for soldiers in the Crimean War.

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Key Words

- 1066 – the year of the Battle of Hastings, a turning point in English history
- battalion – a military unit
- beacon – a light or visible object that acts as a warning or a celebration
- 1492 - the year when Christopher Columbus reached the New World
- Toussaint L'Ouverture - a ruler who led the slaves to victory in the Haitian revolution
- Nanny de Maroon - leader of runaway slaves who led Jamaican resistance against the British Lord Nelson
- Shaka - Zulu leader and warrior
- Caribs and Arawaks - Caribbean people whose islands were invaded by Europeans
- Mary Seacole - Jamaican nurse who helped the sick in the Crimean War

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Checking Out Me History

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/clips/z7fjmp3>

Dem tell me
Dem tell me
Wha dem want to tell me

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

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

childish.

mixed stanza forms.

breaks confining rules of language.

Focuses our attention on them

Serious tone

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

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

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

JOHN AGARD

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JOHN AGARD

Handwritten Notes:

- phonetic spelling
- power
- metaphors
- rejects Standard English - linguistic identity
- 'us and them'
- separation
- repetition
- anger
- power
- intentionally hidden from him.
- doesn't know his identity.
- assumes reader knows or dismissing it as unimportant to him.
- mixes fact + fiction
- British history seems trivial.
- contrast with 'blind'
- metaphor - image of light.
- positive imagery
- celebrating achievement
- contrast with 'blind' in stanza 1
- brave, strong.
- rhyme shows he thinks it should have been part of his education
- metaphors
- light
- hope, warmth.
- power
- no full stop.
- verb - intentional permanent

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Comprehension Questions

1. What form does this poem use?
2. Which phrase is repeated through the poem?
3. What does the speaker complain he has been blinded to?
4. Which dates are mentioned in the poem?
5. Which fictional and nursery rhyme characters are mentioned or referred to?
6. How does Agard highlight the importance of the black historical figures he describes?
7. Which people from black history does he name?
8. How is the speaker reclaiming his past?

Deeper Thinking Questions

1. Do you think the history curriculum in schools is balanced? What is missing?
2. How important is history to personal identity?
3. How has Agard used poetic form to support his message?

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Compare the ways poets present ideas about identity in 'Checking out me history' and in one other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

'Checking out me history' Agard

Context:

Agard moved to Britain in the late 70s. He uses phonetic spelling in his poetry to represent his own accent. Agard is angry that he wasn't taught 'black history' at school; he was only taught 'white European history'.

Themes:

Anger
Power of humans
Identity

S Agard uses mixed stanza forms to suggest that he is breaking the confining rules of language. The stanzas about white history have a childish tone whereas the stanzas about black history have a more serious tone and use short lines to encourage the reader to focus on the words.

P 'Dem tell me' - this phrase is repeated to create a sense of separation between Agard and his teachers. The use of phonetic spelling shows he is rejecting Standard English and finding his linguistic identity.

L 'bandage up me eye with me own history' - metaphor which suggests his history was hidden from him. It implies this was done deliberately.

I 'a beacon', 'a yellow sunrise' - positive metaphors of light are used to describe the people from black history. These contrast with the word 'blind' in stanza two.

T 'I carving out me identity' - Agard implies that he will create his identity. The verb 'carving' suggests he wants it to last, and the use of the first person implies he is going to create it himself..

