Sister Heart (*excerpt*)
by Sally Morgan

Here I am

curled in the corner

of a cold stone room

with no one to hug

but me

A too-high window

throws shadow lines

on the moonlit floor

Shadow lines

Hard lines

Straight lines

Barred lines

Like lines on a map

slashing hills and creeks

ridges and plains

rocks and spinifex

Old people laughed

when Mum told them

about the Boss's paper map

Grandpa Mick shook his head

Hills won't move for a line

Trees won't bend for a line

The use of line breaks is important in this verse poem given that it has almost no punctuation.

Note the uneven distribution of lines per stanza in this verse poem. Why might the author have made this decision? For example, could it allow her more freedom to create varying

Breaking a line allows the author to emphasise a word, idea, symbol or emotion. For example, breaking the fourth line of the first stanza at '*hug*' could both emphasise the word '*hug*' and create a sense of loneliness by juxtaposing it with the fragment '*but me*' placed on the line by itself.

The structure of a stanza can help to create rhythm. For example, the repetition of the word '*lines*' in the fourth stanza could create a driving rhythm for the reader, and the repetition may serve to emphasise a symbol or idea.

Note the repetition of the noun '*lines*' in the fourth and sixth stanzas; this decision could extend the rhythm established in the third stanza and may be intended to emphahsise the word and its symbolism. For example, lines may be symbolic of order, control and/ or loss of freedom.

Granny Rosy flicked her hand

Pah - inside the lines

Outside the lines

It's all our country!

Sally Morgan uses dialogue in this stanza, and '*It's all our country!*' is the only line that is end-stopped in the poem. Consider the impact of this decision. The exclamation mark might be used to emphasise a key point, for example, that Aboriginal cultures and connections to Country can't be erased or controlled by lines. Or perhaps that lines do not successfully exert ownership over the land.

But here I am

Trapped by lines

walls

window

door

shadows on the moonlit floor

Breaking a line can also affect the pace, rhythm, sound and appearance of a poem - and therefore its meaning.

Note how breaking the line with the phrase '*trapped by lines*' and placing the nouns '*walls*', '*windows*' and '*door*' on individual lines draws the eye to these three words. The combined effect may be to highlight the solid confines of imprisonment and to empasise the lack of freedom.

Fencing me in

Cutting me off

Slicing me away

Consider the author's decision to begin the second last stanza with three verbs: read the words out loud to consider how this repetition creates rhythm.

Making me cry

cry

cry

for home

Consider the empahasis created by breaking the first line of the last stanza at '*cry*', and then repeating the verb twice on individual lines. Placing a word at the beginning or end of a line can help the poet emphasise the word, symbol or idea. This decision about lineation may also affect pace (by slowing the reader down), appearance (by creating a 'silence' around the words) and help to emphasise a sense of sadness or despair.

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