

Detailed Analysis of Broken English by Rupi Kaur
Assignment Two

Part I- The Selected Poem

Broken English - Poem by Rupi Kaur

I think about the way my father pulled the family out of poverty
without knowing what a vowel was.
And my mother raised 4 children
without being able to construct a perfect sentence in English
A discombobulated couple that landed in the new world
with hopes that left the bitter taste of rejection in their mouth.
No family no friends, just man and wife,
Two university degrees that meant nothing,
one mother tongue that was broken now,
one swollen belly with a baby inside.
A father worried about jobs and rent
coz no matter what this baby was coming.

And they thought to themselves for a split second
was it worth it to put all of our money
into the dream of a country that is swallowing us whole.
And papa looks at his woman's eyes
and sees the loneliness living where the iris was.
Wants to give her a home in a country
that looks at her with the word visitor wrapped around their tongue.
On their wedding day she left an entire village to be his wife
and now she left an entire country to be a warrior.
And when the winter came they had nothing,
but the heat of their own bodies to keep the coldness out.
And like 2 brackets they face one another
to hold the dearest parts of them,
their children close.

They turned a suitcase full of clothes
into a life and regular paychecks
to make sure that children of immigrants
wouldn't hate them for being the children of immigrants
They worked too hard - you can tell by their hands,
their eyes are begging for sleep
but our mouths were begging to be fed
and that is the most artistic thing I have ever seen.

It is poetry to these ears that has never heard
what passion sounds like
and my mouth is full of likes and uhms
when I look at their masterpiece
'coz there are no words in the English language
that can articulate that kind of beauty.

I can't compact their existence into 26 letters and call it a description
I tried once but the adjectives needed to describe them don't even exist
so I ended up with pages and pages full of words
followed with commas and more words and more commas
only to realize that there are some things in the world
so infinite that they can never use a full stop.

So how dare you mock your mother
when she opens her mouth
and broken English spills out.
Her accent is thick like honey,
hold it with your life,
it's the only thing she has left from home.
Don't stomp on that richness,
instead hang it up on the walls
of museums next to Dali and Van Gogh
Her life is brilliant and tragic.
Kiss the side of her tender cheek.
She already knows what it sounds like
to have an entire nation laugh when she speaks.
She's more than our punctuation and language.
We might be able to take pictures and write stories,
but she made an entire world for herself.
How's that for art

[Rupi Kaur](#)

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/broken-english-4/>

Part II- Detailed Analysis

Broken Down Interpretation of Each Stanza For Myself To Reference Later

- **Stanza 1:** Despite having broken English, parents with invalidated university degrees and away from their mother tongue still raised four children. They still had a baby, although they worried about the rent.
- **Stanza 2:** This country is swallowing us, so is it even worth it? He (her father) wants to make a home in a country where they are visitors, and she (her mother) is now leaving her country as his wife to be a warrior. As winter came they had nothing, but the family to hold close.
- **Stanza 3:** They turned their clothes into paychecks, and worked hard so we (the children) could be fed. No words in English that can explain this kind of beauty.
- **Stanza 4:** Can't explain the experience in words, because some things never use a full stop.
- **Stanza 5:** Do not mock your mother's broken English because she has already been mocked by the nation, but treat it as richness, as this is art.

Rupi Kaur, wrote the poem, "Broken English," as a gift to her mother for mother's day in which she spoke about her parent's immigration experience. There were a number of things to examine, but among the first things to do was to establish the tone of the poem. Upon the first reading the tone displayed both brilliance and tragedy (as mentioned in the 5th/last stanza). This tone can be discussed through Kaur's usage of words. For example, Kaur uses large complex words, such as "discombobulated," in the first stanza, but then counters that with slang, such as "coz" (1st stanza). This could be said to display both the fortunate outcome of Kaur's parents immigrating to another country in which she was able to obtain an education in the language of English, but also the unfortunate occurrence of her parent's degrees not affording any recognition, but instead a broken language with broken words. Other instances of this dual tone emerge with Kaur's use of imagery. For instance, when speaking to showing warmth and acceptance of her parents, Kaur speaks to kissing her mother's tender cheek (5th stanza), but when referring to the tragic experiences she makes reference to images of eyes begging for sleep and overworked hands (3rd stanza). Words like visitor and warrior are also used in the same stanza (2nd) to counterbalance the themes of both struggling, and overcoming.

The second thing to examine would be the type of poem that Kaur presents, in that it is a free verse. A close reading of the 3rd stanza states, "pages and pages full of words followed with commas and more words and more commas," which is much like the poem. Kaur's poem goes logically from one sentence to the next without stopping. In fact, Kaur's poem is an example of what she states, a thing that is infinitive without a stop (4th stanza).

Literary devices can also be extracted from the poem. For example, in the last stanza there is some usage of a simile in which Kaur says that her mother's accent is "thick like honey." There is also some usage of personification, such as implying that a country could swallow people (2nd stanza). Several themes also emerge that could be discussed in depth, such as starting over, not belonging, isolation, looking for warmth and something familiar, struggling, and finding a life despite all struggles. Reference is also made to Canada as a land of immigrants who then makes fun of newer immigrants, which could lead to an interesting discussion on are we all immigrants (3rd stanza)?

Part III- Visual Aid:

1) YouTube Spoken Word Performance

Linked below is the spoken word performance of the poem, “Broken English,” by Rupi Kaur herself. The intent is to use this performance after going over the analysis of the poem, so students can revisit the poem through Rupi’s own voice, and gain a better understanding and/or connection to the meaning behind the words, as Rupi herself intended for the poem to be read. A conversation about tone, can once again arise, with student’s recognizing the strength in Rupi’s voice as she recites the poem, and emulates a great deal of pride.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDGWcCUgtw>

<https://m.facebook.com/rupikaurpoetry/posts/846769518750659>

2) Picture Comparison of Rupi versus Her Mother

After breaking down the poem together as a class and watching the YouTube video, as an activity it would be interesting to put these pictures up on the overhead and see how the students were able to grasp, and digest the information in the poem. Questions such as, how does Rupi look the same or different from her mother, could be asked. The hope would be that students recognize that Rupi’s mother represents tired while Rupi herself represents strength and courage (tone). Students would be expected to use Rupi’s poems and her mother’s experiences in the poem to speak to the images.





Part V- Other Poems

1. The Immigrant's Song -By Tishani Doshi

Let us not speak of those days
when coffee beans filled the morning
with hope, when our mothers' headscarves
hung like white flags on washing lines.
Let us not speak of the long arms of sky
that used to cradle us at dusk.
And the baobabs—let us not trace
the shape of their leaves in our dreams,
or yearn for the noise of those nameless birds
that sang and died in the church's eaves.
Let us not speak of men,
stolen from their beds at night.
Let us not say the word

disappeared.

Let us not remember the first smell of rain.
Instead, let us speak of our lives now—
the gates and bridges and stores.
And when we break bread
in cafés and at kitchen tables
with our new brothers,
let us not burden them with stories
of war or abandonment.
Let us not name our old friends

who are unravelling like fairy tales
in the forests of the dead.
Naming them will not bring them back.
Let us stay here, and wait for the future
to arrive, for grandchildren to speak
in forked tongues about the country
we once came from.

Tell us about it, they might ask.
And you might consider telling them
of the sky and the coffee beans,
the small white houses and dusty streets.
You might set your memory afloat
like a paper boat down a river.
You might pray that the paper
whispers your story to the water,
that the water sings it to the trees,
that the trees howl and howl
it to the leaves. If you keep still
and do not speak, you might hear
your whole life fill the world
until the wind is the only word.

2. Immigrant - Poem by Jay P Narain

He has lived here longer than in his motherland,
He has learnt all the slangs and can bade hi and bye well,
Still when he pronounces birthday as birdday with an accent,
I guess he must be an immigrant.

He watches all the games on the tube,
He can bet on the fantasy footballs and make money on Texas hold 'em,
But when he calls the soccer as the football game,
I guess he must be an immigrant.

He has told his stories so many times,
The struggle he had to wage to survive in his native land,
Miles he had to walk barefoot to attend his school,
Although he struggled here as much to earn a living,
He at least enjoys the freedom he always cherished,
I guess he must be an immigrant.

He works harder than everyone around,
Making his ends meet is his motive divine,
His efforts don't get much attention,
As he is unable to draw any vocal attention,
I guess he must be an immigrant.

He does not wear a polo shirt with flag on is chest,
He does not furl the flags of his heritage and the adopted land,
He feels at home with people and culture of his land,
I guess he must be an immigrant.