

By the end of studying Half Caste I need to know:

**Ideas:** Conflict, Race, Ethnicity, Discrimination, Prejudice

<b>Vocabulary</b>	<p>Picasso - A famous Spanish painter, sculptor and printmaker</p> <p>Ah rass - West Indian slang to communicate anger (meaning - My arse!)</p> <p>Tchaikovsky - A famous Russian composer of the Romantic period. His music made a lasting impression internationally,</p> <p>Symphony - An elaborate musical composition for full orchestra,</p>
<b>Context (To inform interpretation)</b>	<p>John Agard (born 1949) is an Afro-Guyanese poet and playwright who now lives in the UK. When he first moved to the UK in the 1970s, he began teaching people about Caribbean culture and worked in a library. He often conveys his Caribbean voice in his poems, using non-standard spelling to represent his accent. His poems are often rebellious in nature, challenging common ways of thinking and confronting discriminatory behaviour.</p> <p>Racism in the UK - The United Kingdom is now a multi-cultural society. Racism was fueled by attitudes linked to the class system. The UK has never implemented any laws that officially discriminate against or segregate people of minorities - however, it was only in the 1960s that the first laws were introduced to actively oppose racist attitudes and behaviour.</p> <p>The Term 'Half-Caste' - is a term used to describe people of mixed race or ethnicity. In a number of countries across the world, it is seen as a deeply offensive term, due to the fact that it implies that someone is 'half-pure' (with the white half being the 'pure' half).</p>
<b>Themes</b>	<p>Racism - The poem is about the racist attitudes that held by people in the British society in which the speaker lives. It is demonstrated that many of these stereotypes and prejudices are so deeply engrained in people's minds that they do not even realise their racism. The speaker reveals how he longs to be recognised as a whole person - not 'half caste.'</p> <p>Division &amp; Prejudice - The speaker presents a society that is divided, and in which there is animosity towards one another from two opposing sides. By juxtaposing white and black language and ideas together throughout the poem, the poet is able to highlight the division that people create between themselves and others in society purely based on race and the colour of their skin.</p>
<b>Deeper understanding</b>	<p>Lines 1-3: The speaker begins his satirical attack on those that label him 'half-caste' by suggesting that he is half a person. By standing on one leg, he is using only half of his body, suggesting that he is only half of a man.</p> <p>Lines 4-10: The speaker is assertive in lines 3-6, using the personal pronoun 'yu' (using his dialect) to challenge the reader directly. Agard begins to show how two colours mixed together can create something beautiful - such as a Picasso painting. The rhetorical question forces the reader to think about the offence that the name can cause people.</p> <p>Lines 11-22: Agard shows that describing weather as half-caste would seem bizarre, so questions why people say something so derogatory about people. He juxtaposes the words 'half-caste' and 'over-caste' - when the weather is overcast, the clouds block out the sun &amp; in labelling someone 'half-caste', people block out their humanity.</p> <p>Lines 23-27: The speaker begins to show his frustration towards the situation in the next few lines ('ah rass' is West Indian slang to communicate anger). He again asks the same questions of the listener/ reader, creating a refrain - this repetition reinforces Agard's key message.</p> <p>Lines 28-32: 'Tchaikovsky' is not capitalised, perhaps acts as a criticism towards iconic white males. Once again, an example of something beautiful (a symphony) made from mixing colours is used to show how strange the term is.</p> <p>Lines 33-41: The stanza break adds extra emphasis to the refrain, which once again use the imperative verb 'explain' to show the challenging, assertive nature of the speaker. The next part of the poem labels several body parts as 'half' on the half-caste man. When people ask him why he only gives them part of his attention, it is actually because of their use of the derogatory term towards him. He doesn't want to give them his 'full' recognition.</p>

**Form/structure:**

Form - The poem is a monologue read by a single character - it appears to be the voice of Agard himself. There are four stanzas, with a refrain that breaks the poem up into sections. The poem does not adopt a strict rhyme scheme, but occasional rhymes add to the Caribbean-style rhythm, which is emphasised by a heavily-stressed rhythm throughout.

Structure - The poem appears to be split into two main halves. In the opening half of the poem, Agard uses a range of humorous analogies to show that the word 'half-caste' has no meaning. In the second half of the poem, the speaker sarcastically discusses being half a person. He ends by asking the reader to use their 'whole mind' before addressing him.

**Links across other poems:**

No Problem can be compared and contrasted with the theme of racism.

The Class Game can be compared and contrasted with the theme of prejudice and division.

	<p>Lines 42-45: The idea of the speaker sleeping with 'half-a-eye' open is a commonly use metaphor for being nervous and wary - feeling insecure. The speaker here has given the reader a small glimpse of the inner hurt and divisions that the term creates. The adverb 'consequently' reminds the reader that words and actions have consequences: the speaker is unable to fully 'dream' because of the prejudiced nature of the society around him.</p> <p>Lines 46-48: 'Cast' a shadow is another pun (play on words) - again experimenting with the multiple meanings of 'caste.' These lines again return to the idea that he is seen as half a man.</p> <p>Lines 49-55: The last 7 lines of the poem are hard-hitting - a complete message in themselves. The idea of being 'whole' is subverted onto the reader: only when they commit to using all of their senses to perceive him will he tell them his full story.</p>
<p><b>Quotes and references</b></p>	<p>"Sit down at dah piano And mix a black key"  "Yu mean when light an shadow Mix in de sky"  "Explain yusef Wha yu mean"  "I half-caste human being Cast half-a-shadow"  "An mix a black key Wid a white key"  "An de whole of yu ear And de whole of yu mind"</p>
<p><b>Terminology</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alliteration, Sibilance and 'Beat' - Alliteration is used in several places across the poem, particularly of heavy 'p', 'b' and 'd' sounds. This helps to add a beat throughout the poem, creating a more pronounced rhythm and flow - this helps the poem to mirror popular Caribbean music.</li> <li>• Colloquial Language, Accent and Slang - Agard utilises his own 'voice' - that of a black man of Caribbean heritage raised in the UK. These features also helps to bring the speaker's voice to life, giving the poem its power and authenticity.</li> <li>• Refrain - The speaker repeats the phrase 'Explain yusef/ wha yu mean/When you say half caste' at several points throughout the poem. This assertive demand (using an imperative verb) forces the reader to reflect on the meaning of the term that they use towards the speaker. In the final refrain, the speaker drops the final line - suggesting an increase in his aggression - his patience towards those who use the term appears to be wearing thin.</li> <li>• Puns - Agard uses several puns throughout the poem to show his wit and intelligence - thus offering the perfect retaliation to those who imply (through their use of the term) that he is in some way 'half.' One example is between lines 12 and 21, in which the speaker plays with the word 'caste' to mock the 'overcast' British weather. Later in the poem, the speaker uses the word 'cast' once more to describe how the shadows are projected by a 'half-caste human being.'</li> </ul>