

# Stand Up! Speak Out! Diverse Voices in Poetry



Name :



---

English Teacher

: \_\_\_\_\_

Still I Rise by Maya Angelou



You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.  
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

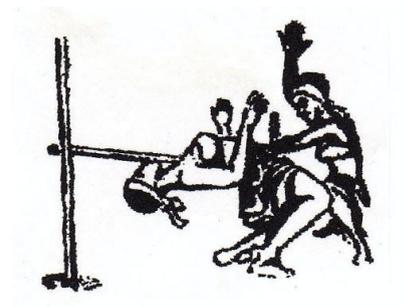
Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain

I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

**Limbo** by Kamau Brathwaite



And limbo stick is the silence in front of me  
*limbo*

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*  
*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

long dark night is the silence in front of me  
*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

stick hit sound  
and the ship like it ready

stick hit sound  
and the dark still steady

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

long dark deck and the water surrounding me  
long dark deck and the silence is over me

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

stick is the whip  
and the dark deck is slavery

stick is the whip  
and the dark deck is slavery

limbo  
limbo like me

drum stick knock  
and the darkness is over me

knees spread wide  
and the water is hiding

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

knees spread wide  
and the dark ground is under me

down  
down  
down  
and the drummer is calling me

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

sun coming up  
and the drummers are praising me

out of the dark  
and the dumb god are raising me

up  
up  
up  
and the music is saving me

hot  
slow  
step

on the burning ground.

**Not my Business** by Niyi Osundare

They picked Akanni up one morning  
Beat him soft like clay  
And stuffed him down the belly  
Of a waiting jeep.

What business of mine is it  
So long they don't take the yam  
From my savouring mouth?

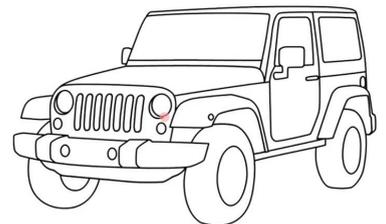
They came one night  
Booted the whole house awake  
And dragged Danladi out,  
Then off to a lengthy absence.

What business of mine is it  
So long they don't take the yam  
From my savouring mouth?

Chinwe went to work one day  
Only to find her job was gone:  
No query, no warning, no probe -  
Just one neat sack for a stainless record.

What business of mine is it  
So long they don't take the yam  
From my savouring mouth?

And then one evening  
As I sat down to eat my yam  
A knock on the door froze my hungry hand.  
The jeep was waiting on my bewildered lawn  
Waiting, waiting in its usual silence.



**First they came...** by Martin Niemöller

First they came for the Communists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a Communist

Then they came for the Socialists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a Socialist

Then they came for the trade unionists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a trade unionist

Then they came for the Jews  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me  
And there was no one left  
To speak out for me

**Thirteen** by  
Caleb Femi

**SPEAK OUT!**



You will be four minutes from home  
when you are cornered by an officer  
who will tell you of a robbery, forty  
minutes ago in the area. *You fit  
the description of a man?* - You'll laugh.  
Thirteen, you'll tell him: you're thirteen.

You'll be patted on the shoulder, then, by another fed  
whose face takes you back to Gloucester Primary School,  
a Wednesday assembly about *being little stars*.

This same officer had an horizon in the east  
of his smile when he told your class that  
you were all *supernovas*,  
*the biggest and brightest stars*.

You will show the warmth of your teeth  
praying he remembers the heat of your supernova;  
he will see you powerless – plump.  
You will watch the two men cast lots for your organs.

*Don't you remember me? you will ask.*

*You gave a talk at my primary school.*

While fear condenses on your lips,

you will remember that Wednesday, after the assembly,

your teacher speaking more about supernovas:

How they are, in fact, dying stars

on the verge of becoming black holes.

**I Want to Be a Pink Flamingo** by Dean Atta

Pink. Definitely pink.

I want my feathers to match  
the hue you imagine.

I want to blend in  
Nothing but flamingoness.

David Attenborough would say,  
'Here we see the most typical flamingo.'

Though I don't want to be the most,  
just typical. A wrapping-paper pattern.

I don't want to stand apart.

Nothing different about my parts.

My beak just a beak, my head just a head.

My neck, body, wings. Simply fit for purpose.

Standing on one leg, just like the rest.

Pink, definitely pink.



**We Went** by Hassan Fazeel

We went from nothing to everything.

But everything felt like nothing.

We went from sipping fresh water to  
sipping fake glory.

We went from climbing coconut trees to  
climbing roofs of our perpetrators.

We went from swimming in seas of cane  
and plantain to drowning in a 'mother-land'  
of nationalist fabricators.

They forged an empire of unity, whilst our  
wind rush winsome melanin was an  
exception to this ideology.

We went from humid Caribbean heat that  
alleviated our caliginous glow to winter  
nights.

Where bone chilling breeze grasped  
its bite on our clothes as we spoke with  
smoke.

We went from a canopy of blue whilst  
our naked feet were buried in white sand

to washing grime off our hands.

Timeless labour made our bodies ache  
more with every choke.

We wrote history using pens inked with our  
pigmentation, rich with cocoa.

We went from building wooden homes strong  
with our intangible strength to rebuilding a  
broken economy with lost stability and our  
happiness was a false reality.

We spent the entirety of our lives rebuilding  
yet our citizenship denied.

Loss of files.

These judges put our patience on a trial.

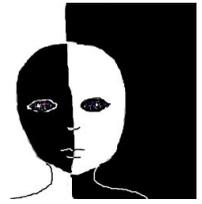
Our future left without discussing.

We went from nothing to everything.

But everything felt like nothing.



## Half-Caste by John Agard



Excuse me  
standing on one leg  
I'm half-caste

Explain yusef  
wha yu mean  
when yu say half-caste  
yu mean when Picasso  
mix red an green  
is a half-caste canvas/  
explain yusef  
wha yu mean  
when yu say half-caste  
yu mean when light an shadow  
mix in de sky  
is a half-caste weather/  
well in dat case  
england weather  
nearly always half-caste  
in fact some o dem cloud  
half-caste till dem overcast  
so spiteful dem don't want de  
sun pass  
ah rass/  
explain yusef  
wha yu mean  
when yu say half-caste  
yu mean when tchaikovsky  
sit down at dah

**The Fat Black Woman**

piano  
an mix a black key  
wid a white key  
is a half-caste symphony/

Explain yusef  
wha yu mean  
Ah listening to yu wid de keen  
half of mih ear  
Ah looking at yu wid de keen  
half of mih eye  
an when I'm introduced to you  
I'm sure you'll understand  
why I offer yu half-a-hand  
an when I sleep at night  
I close half-a-eye  
consequently when I dream  
I dream half-a-dream  
an when moon begin  
to glow  
I half-caste human being  
cast half-a-shadow  
but yu must come back tomorrow

wid de whole of yu eye  
an de whole of yu ear  
an de whole of yu mind.

an I will tell yu  
de other half  
of my story

**Composes a Black Poem...**

by Grace Nichols

Black as the intrusion  
of a rude wet tongue

Black as the boldness  
of a quick home run

Black as the blackness  
of a rolling ship

Black as the sweetness  
of black orchid milk

Black as the token  
of my ancestors bread

Black as the beauty  
of the nappy head

Black as the blueness  
of a swift backlash

Black as the spraying  
of a reggae sunsplash

## ... And a Fat Poem

by Grace Nichols

Fat is  
as fat is  
as fat is

Fat does  
as fat thinks

Fat feels  
as fat please

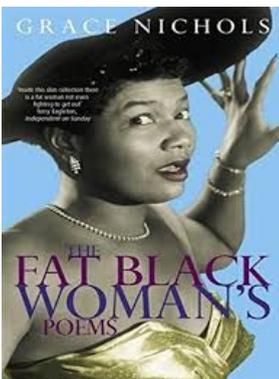
Fat believes

Fat is to butter  
as milk is to cream  
fat is to sugar  
as pud is to steam

Fat is a dream  
in terms of lean

fat is a darling  
a dumpling  
a squeeze  
fat is cuddles  
up a baby's sleeve

and fat speaks for itself



**The Fat Black Woman Goes Shopping** by Grace Nichols

Shopping in London in winter  
is a real drag for the fat black woman  
going from store to store  
in search of accommodating clothes  
and de weather so cold

Look at the frozen thin mannequins  
fixing her with grin  
and de pretty face salesgals  
exchanging slimming glances  
thinking she don't notice

Lord is aggravating

Nothing soft and bright and billowing  
to flow like breezy sunlight  
when she walking

The fat black woman curses in Swahili/Yoruba  
and nation language under her breathing  
all this journeying and journeying

The fat black woman could only conclude  
that when it come to fashion  
the choice is lean

Nothing much beyond size 14

