

"my place" by sally  
morgan essay  
sample



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## **“ My Place” by Sally Morgan Essay Sample**

Sally Morgan's ' My Place' is an autobiographical account of three generations of Aboriginals, which illustrate the social history of Aboriginals from the point of view of an Aboriginal and marks its development as society evolves. Two aboriginals, Gladys and Daisy Corruna, of the Stolen Generations describe the Paternalism which led to their shame of being Aboriginal and forced them to hide the truth of their past from their children. Paternalism also led to the creation of a new identity caused by the loss of culture and heritage experienced by the Stolen Generation and the unacceptance of the white population. Another of the Stolen Generation, Arthur Corruna, tells of the hardships involved with being a half-caste and trying to get ahead in life. The fourth, Sally Morgan, the author, describes what it was like to grow up with a false sense of identity. She records the events in her life which signify the time when she knew nothing of her heritage and was struggling to understand herself and the different mannerisms of her family.

White society established their dominance over the indigenous people of Australia by exercising social and political control such as the paternalism involved with institutions. Half-caste children were sent to institutions in the hope that the ' white' part of their blood would allow them to be trained and educated as white. These children are often referred to as stolen, something of which Gladys, Sally's mother, identifies with as she was taken from her family at the age of four, to live at the Parkerville institution. " I always thought of myself as a stolen child," (pg. 246) represents the animosity with which many half-caste children felt during their stay at institutions like

Parkerville. Gladys' mother Daisy was never institutionalized but was taken into Perth under the pretext of becoming educated. " They told all the people I was goin' to school," (pg. 332) but was instead taken to serve the Drake-Brockman family and " she thought I was coming back" (pg. 332) highlights the deceit of the white people in the methods they used to separate aboriginal children from their families.

Daisy's distrust for most white people stemmed from the many lies the Drake-Brockman family had presented her with during her working years and this distrust developed into a feeling of shame, " People looked at you funny 'cause you were black. I kept my eyes down" (pg. 336). ' My Place' presented the opportunity for Sally to finally delve into the family history which her Nan had always hidden from her and her siblings and finally brought about the admission that her Nan had been ashamed. " I wanted to be white you see...It'd be the best thing" (pg. 336) represents the feelings of many older Aboriginals who experienced both the sexual assault by their bosses and the subsequent loss of their half-caste children to institutions as well as being condemned to a life of servitude.

The consequences of being taken away from their Aboriginal mothers meant the subsequent loss of language, culture and displacement from both the white and black societies. After Arthur was taken from his Station, he was forced to speak only English which brought about a loss of Aboriginal status, and prevented communication between non-English speaking parents and other Aboriginals. The status of half-caste prohibited children from entering into white society because of their black blood and the removal of half-caste children to institutions and their ability to speak English prohibited them

from taking part in initiation rights and ceremonies of the indigenous society. Sally's Nan claimed that their status as half-caste had them classified as being "too black for the whites and too white for the blacks" (pg. 336).

Arthur, Daisy's brother, was also taken to an institution, but ran away after being beaten and started a life as a farmer, determined to make a future for himself. At first, "men teased [Arthur]...they didn't want a blackfella movin' in," but he aspired to look after his family as well as any white man. After the Depression in the 1920's, he became "the first farmer in the district to have a truck and the first to buy a header" (pg. 208). Arthur recounts events of white people stealing his crops and sheep, and taking every opportunity to try and buy him out of the farm or send him in to debt. This served to give Arthur the knowledge that he was "a black man ahead of everybody else," (pg. 209) and instilled in himself the pride of being a successful black man when everything was against him.

Gladys "wondered what was wrong with being Aboriginal" (pg. 279) and remembered an instance where her mother had said, "never tell anyone what [you] are" (pg. 279). She became even more confused and, looking back, she says she didn't know much about the way Aboriginals were treated but also tells of the foretold future for any Aboriginal, no matter how white they were or how much white blood they contained, "we had no future, I'd never be accepted, never be allowed to achieve anything" (pg. 279). This suggests the white persons' fear of being overshadowed by a black person, whom they considered less human and inferior. The end of Gladys' story invokes a hope of further Aboriginal expression, "maybe other Australians will see that we are a people to be proud of" (pg. 306).

Sally must also be considered a stolen child, for she is a descendant of stolen children, whose heritage was stolen by the white Australians. Her history has been hidden because of the shame instilled in her Nan and mother because of the actions of the whites. Sally's confusion began as a child, when people at school asked her where she came from. The shortness of Gladys' answer, "tell them you're Indian," (pg. 38) implies the intensity with which her mother, Gladys, sought to end the conversation and continue to forget. As Sally became older, she became even more confused and curious about her heritage; she wasn't satisfied with her mother's claims of being Indian, and her Nan's behaviour when it came to authority. She applied for an Aboriginal scholarship when she was at University and encouraged her sister, Jill, to declare their heritage and take pride in it. Sally's pride in her heritage and her Nan's unwillingness to divulge her past lead Sally to the production of the book which, in the end, freed her mother and her Nan from the secrets and fears and sufferings they had endured over the years.

Sally confronts the injustices experienced and exposes the treatment Aboriginals have been subjected to throughout white settlement of Australia while including emotional elements of love, suffering, displacement, racism and feelings of identity crises. The removal of half-caste children by white people created an unnecessary new identity for Australia, which further isolated families and societies. Autobiographies like Morgan's create opportunities for Aboriginals who have felt oppressed to express their thoughts and feelings and gain acknowledgement for their suffering from the white population through a medium other than traditional Aboriginal art.

They also represent a site for those to record their protests and objections to past versions of colonial history which often tended to forget or distort the truth. This is similar to the Japanese, who controlled history books so they could hide the truth of World War II and their involvement. Apartheid and segregation associate themselves with the White Australia Act through the similarity of containing hegemonic views that whites are better and superior to all other races therefore they reserve the right to control inferior beings. The events of this book and now many others now available cause people to rethink the reliability of the declaration of Australia as centrally unified and the candour to which the majority of the world claims equality.

' My Place' was one of the first Aboriginal recounts of oppression under colonialism and paved the way for many more accounts of oppression and the experiences many Aboriginals had. Morgan's book confronts issues of displacement and the subsequent feelings of shame and self-loathing instilled while leading up to an Aboriginal consciousness which originated from the tentative search for knowledge of a single, determined Aboriginal woman. This woman developed a pride in her family's history and led to a spiritual and emotional pilgrimage for the entire Milroy/Corruna family which allowed to celebrate a heritage which previously had brought shame and suffering.