

# Summary and analysis of breaking out by marge piercy essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Marge Piercy who was born in Detroit, is known as a feminist writer. Her poem, ' Breaking Out' was first published in the Harbor Review in 1984. The poem portrays the double oppression faced by a girl, for being a girl child and a child, at the same time. The poem depicts how the girl wants to ' break out' from the conventional norms of the society which is responsible for the oppression. SUMMARY:

Lines 1-7: These lines describe the first political act led by a girl who is subjected to endless humiliation and domestic chores. She asks the readers if they want her to tell them about her first political act. There she describes the circumstances that led her to take her first act that is to break free from the conventional norms of a patriarchal society. She mentions about two doors which are usually open and leaning against each other in a way that seems like they are gossiping and whispering secrets into each other's ears. The two doors are of two opinions for her- one to maintain the status quo and endure all the humiliation and exploitation; two, to break away from the traditional rules of a biased society where a woman is ill-treated and is put through limitless mortifications and thankless domestic chores. She looks on the different household objects used for carrying out different chores.

First, there is a laundry machine used to wring out or iron damp clothes. It is used to iron even those clothes which require no ironing like bed sheets, towels and her father's undergarments. Lines 8-14: She looks at an old style vacuum cleaner standing vertical on the ground with its filter bag stuffed with dust. She recalls the roaring and loud sound made by the vacuum cleaner when its bag is deflated. She compares her life to that of the cleaner,

she says the sound made by the cleaner shows as if it is tired of dust-suction as she is. This makes her swear that she would not dust or sweep when she would grow up. She despicably watches her mother remove the filth each day, accumulated daily due to the emissions from the factory.

The laundry machine and the vacuum cleaner are symbols of the endless plodding which is a part of a woman's life. Lines 15-21: When the girl reads about Sisyphus in school, she was reminded of her mother. Sisyphus was a Greek King, who was punished because of showing disrespect to Zeus and had to toll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down the hill and had to repeat the action forever. The girl compares Sisyphus to her mom. Her mom, as a housewife is allocated the duty of many household chores. She has to kneel down on bare knees to broom and mop out the filth emitted by factories. The poet then looks at the yardstick, poor in texture and quality. The yardstick has become dusty with chalk marks used to her mother to measure the length of the hem of clothes to tailor them.

Lines 22-32: The yardstick is also used to punish the girl by her parents when they find her mischievous. The girl is brutally beaten up by her parents and she howls and screams like a railway engine as if the screams would lessen her pain. She says her mother's blows are fierce while her father's are longer and harder. There is an irony in this, because the girl's mother who herself is a victim of the patriarchal society is also the reason of her daughter's oppression. After the beatings, she turns her head towards the mirror to investigate her lashes. The lashes look like mountain ranges on a map, showing her an escape route. On the other hand, the arteries and veins on

her back remind her of the ridges in the mountains, makes her believe that she would travel one day to gain independence. Lines 33-42:

She describes the incident that signaled her entry into adolescence. She talks about the incident that took place when she was eleven. One day after the beatings from her parents, she broke the stick which was used for punishing her. She stared at the broken pieces of the stick and could not believe that it was she who gathered courage to break it. She wondered how the stick was weaker than her. She says that it was not that after breaking the stick, she was not beaten by her parents but by destroying the instrument of her oppression, she has led herself into adolescence. Though, biologically she was still a child. She realized that there are some things that should be broken, like old conventions, restrictions put on women. The poet tells us that this story of the girl looks like the story of someone who lost her innocence, who gained power- the power to 'break out' from the confinements of the narrow domestic walls and customs. It the power which makes her promise that she would not be another Sisyphus like her mother.

#### ANALYSIS:

Form and structure:

Marge Piercy has used free flowing verse to compose the poem 'Breaking Out.' The free verse allows her enough freedom to say without interruption. Even free verse depicts the irony that women are not free individuals; they are oppressed and tied to the conventions of a biased and patriarchal society. The poem is written in narrative style. She has described day to day occurrences like ironing, mopping, cleaning, and dusting which suggest the

endless humiliations and domestic chores which a woman is subjected to.

Imagery:

The poet has skillfully depicted the plight of a girl-child through imagery.

Following are the imagery are used in the poem, ' Breaking Out'- 1. Visual

Imagery:

\*I am seeing/ two doors that usually stood open

\*to see my mother removing daily/ the sludge the air lay down like a snail's track \*I'd twist my head in the mirror to inspect

2. Sound Imagery:

\* .... I bellowed like a locomotive/ as if noise could ward off blows 3. Tactile

Imagery:

\* fingering the splinters I could not believe.

4. Internal Sensation:

\*My mother wielded it more fiercely/ but my father far longer and harder

Poetical Devices:

Poetical devices are effectively used in the poem. They are as follows,- 1.

Simile:

\*...I bellowed like a locomotive

\*the sludge the air lay down like a snail's track

2. Metaphor:

\*factories rained ash

\*I'd study those red and blue mountains/ ranges as on a map that offered escape 3. Personification:

\* two doors that usually stood open/ leaning together like gossips \*sausage

bag that deflated with a gusty/ sigh as if weary of housework as I Allusion:

The speaker in the poem the girl-child compares her mother's endless chores of mopping and cleaning to a legendary Greek King, Sisyphus.