



eduresourceza.com

Motho ke Motho Ka Batho Babang [A person is a person because of other people]

Tone

Intimate, Defiance, pride

Mood

Thoughtful, Hopeful

Themes

Resistance, Communication

Vocabulary

Wat maak hy daar? - What is he doing there?

Ubuntu - humanity towards others/showing compassion towards people

- 1 By holding my mirror out of the window I see
- 2 Clear to the end of the passage
- 3 There's a person down there
- 4 A prisoner polishing a doorhandle

Remember that the window referred to, does not lead to outside, it is a window into an inside passageway. Line 2. creates an image of space which contradicts the actual situation of the prisoners, who are in a confined cell. The other prisoners is not referred to by name. He is simply a person. This generalisation creates the possibility that the poem is about any two prisoners. The man is polishing a doorhandle which is a useless job.

- 5 In the mirror I see him see
- 6 My face in the mirror,
- 7 I see the fingertips of his free hand
- 8 Bunch together, as if to make
- 9 An object the size of a badge
- 10 Which travels up to his forehead
- 11 The place of an imaginary cap.
- 12 (This means: A warder)

Through "the mirror"s, the prisoners make eye contact. His "free hand" is **ironic** as he is not a free man. It is also **ironic** that the prisoner has been locked up in isolation in an attempt to stop them from communicating with others; however they still find a way to communicate. So his hand is still able (free) to communicate. The hand is also literally free because it is not being used to polish the handle. He creates a sign, which is 'translated' for the reader, in the brackets

- 13 Two fingers are extended in a vee
- 14 And wiggle like two antennae
- 15 (He's being watched)
- 16 A finger of his free hand makes a watch-hand's arc
- 17 On the wrist of polishing arm without
- 18 Disrupting the slow-slow rhythm of his work
- 19 (Later. Maybe, later we can speak.)

The man's fingers wiggle "like two antennae". Two interpretations:

The antennae of an old TV are moved around or an insect which uses their antennae to 'feel' their environment and gain information about their surroundings. Both of these interpretation symbolise communication and connection between the two prisoners. "slow-slow rhythm" - **repetition** indicates the rhythm and the repetitive nature of work. He is working slowly, because of the slow routine and monotony of prison. Also to have time to communicate with other prisoners.

- 20 Hey! Wat maak jy daar?
21 - a voice from around the corner.
22 No. Just polishing baas

Afrikaans - indicates the "otherness" of the guard. Prisoners call him "baas" - guards forced the prisoners to call them that as a sign of respect. It is **ironic** as it is not genuine respect. Note the direct-speech used.

- 23 He turns his back to me, now watch
24 His free hand, the talkative one,
25 Slips quietly behind
26 - Strength brother, it says,
27 In my mirror
28 A black fist,

The "talkative" hand - This is used to show that the hand is being used to communicate through sign language with the other prisoner. However, it is **ironic**, because it is not making any noise, as one would expect if someone was talkative. Also **personification** - commenting on sound by emphasising its absence. The man makes a fist behind his back. The "black fist" was a symbol of unity and of the freedom fighters. This symbol communicates "strength" to other prisoners. They encourage each other to continue the fight, even though they are not able to communicate directly, they still find a way to strengthen one another - **UBUNTU**

Form and Structure

The narrative is provided on the left, while a 'translation' is provided in brackets on the right. The first insertion in "Line 12" announces itself as an explanation. The second "Line 15" and third "Line 19" give the explanation directly. While the last insertions lose the brackets, as if the reader has now learned the poem's language and no longer needs them.