The Poetry Object

LINEBREAK OR LINEATION ACTIVITY

Mid-Autumn Mooncakes: Eileen Chong

Background to the poem

Eileen Chong's poem Mid-Autumn Mooncakes is about the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival or 'Zong Qiu Jie' Festival. Mooncakes are traditionally eaten to celebrate this festival.

Mooncakes are a type of pastry or little cake that contain lotus bean paste. They have a thin layer of pastry on the outside and contain a sweet thick filling. Mooncakes are often made with the yolks of salted duck eggs.

Traditional mooncakes have an imprint or a type of pattern on the top. These imprints or patterns are often the Chinese characters for "longevity" or "harmony". This wishes a long life to the person who eats the cake. The imprint often tells the buyer the name of the baker and the ingredients contained in the mooncake.

The imprint on the top of the mooncake might also include the following symbols

a rabbit which represents the moon
a picture of the Chang'e woman, who lives on the moon
flowers and vines which represent long life

Mooncakes are so popular that the Mid-Autumn Festival is sometimes known as the Mooncake Festival.

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You can read the full text of Eileen Chong's poem Mid-Autumn Mooncakes on the Poems and Poets page of The Red Room Company website.

Click on the link below:
http://redroomcompany.org/poem/eileen-chong/mid-autumn-mooncakes/

Write a definition of line break or lineation on the board. Explain that this is also known as enjambment.

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT LINEBREAK OR LINEATION

Etymology: the word line comes from the Latin word linea, meaning thread.
Line breaks literally break up the poem into units called lines. The number or length of lines can be important in particular types or forms of poetry. Sometimes it is also called enjambment. Breaking the line can occur before the punctuation or end of the sentence used to write the poem. Line breaks are particularly important in poems that do not use punctuation. Breaking the line can affect the pace, rhythm, sound, appearance and meaning of poetry.
A line break might emphasize or introduce a pause or a silence

Placing a word at the end or beginning of a line can help the poet emphasize a particular word, symbol or idea.
Discuss why a poet might break the line in a poem before the punctuation to start a new line or stanza. Talk about the effect of lineation.

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Give students a copy of Eileen Chong's poem Mid-Autumn Mooncakes with the lineation removed (see below). You might give them the copy that also has the capitals and punctuation removed from the poem. Explain that the lineation has been removed and their task is to add lineation to the version they have been given.

Read over this version. This is a useful point to discuss the differences between poetry and prose. Perhaps divide the whiteboard into two and brainstorm the differences between poetry and prose.

Poetry	Prose

Ask them to rewrite the poem on a lined sheet and to insert their own lineation and stanza breaks. This task works well in pairs as the students then have to justify their choices to a partner.

Ask each pair to give an example of a choice they made and to explain WHY they made it.

Post their lineated versions up around the room for the students to read. Let them walk around and see the different choices their peers have made.

Then get them to read the original version of Eileen Chong's poem and consider the choices she made with line break or lineation.

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UNLINEATED VERSION OF MID-AUTUMN MOONCAKES WITH CAPITALS AND PUNCTUATION

It's nearly mid-autumn. I spy the tins at the Asian grocer's - gaudy red peonies unchanged for forty years. Of course I buy the mooncakes with double yolks: here in Australia, yolk or no yolk, they cost the same. I should wait for you, wait for the full moon, light some lanterns and try to make out the lunar rabbit, the Chinese fairy, but I don't. I cut the mooncake into quarters and spoon out the deep orange yolks, leaving half-round cavities in the sweet lotus paste. Eaten on their own,the yolks are creamy, almost too salty. A continent away, I imagine my mother in her kitchen, slicing through shell and briny white, remember my father scraping the duck eggs into rice porridge. They always saved me the yolks. My bowl, a cradle of bright congee full of the gold of the mid-autumn moon.

VERSION OF MID-AUTUMN MOONCAKES WITHOUT LINEATION, CAPITALS OR PUNCTUATION

its nearly mid autumn i spy the tins at the asian grocers gaudy red peonies unchanged for forty years of course I buy the mooncakes with double yolks here in australia yolk or no yolk they cost the same i should wait for you wait for the full moon light some lanterns and try to make out the lunar rabbit the chinese fairy but i don't i cut the mooncake into quarters and spoon out the deep orange yolks leaving halfround cavities in the sweet lotus paste eaten on their own the yolks are creamy almost too salty a continent away i imagine my mother in her kitchen slicing through shell and briny white remember my father scraping the duck eggs into rice porridge they always saved me the yolks my bowl a cradle of bright congee full of the gold of the mid autumn moon