**OBJECTIVES: 11.RL.5** Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, or the style of writing) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Selections from “Half-Hanged Mary”  
by Margaret Atwood

7pm

Rumour was loose in the air

hunting for some neck to land on.

I was milking the cow,

the barn door open to the sunset.

I didn't feel the aimed word hit

and go in like a soft bullet.

I didn't feel the smashed flesh

closing over it like water

over a thrown stone.

I was hanged for living alone

for having blue eyes and a sunburned skin,

tattered skirts, few buttons,

a weedy farm in my own name,

and a surefire cure for warts;

Oh yes, and breasts,

and a sweet pear hidden in my body.

Whenever there's talk of demons

these come in handy.

9pm

The bonnets come to stare,

the dark skirts also,

the upturned faces in between,

mouths closed so tight they're lipless.

I can see down into their eyeholes

and nostrils. I can see their fear.

You were my friend, you too.

I cured your baby, Mrs.,

Help me down? You don't dare.

I might rub off on you,

like soot or gossip. Birds

of a feather burn together,

though as a rule ravens are singular.

In a gathering like this one

the safe place is the background,

pretending you can't dance,

the safe stance pointing a finger.

I understand. You can't spare

anything, a hand, a piece of bread, a shawl

against the cold,

a good word. Lord

knows there isn't much

to go around. You need it all.

3am

wind seethes in the leaves around

me the tree exude night

birds night birds yell inside

my ears like stabbed hearts my heart

stutters in my fluttering cloth

body I dangle with strength

going out of me the wind seethes

in my body tattering

the words I clench

my fists hold no

talisman or silver disc my lungs

flail as if drowning I call

on you as witness I did

no crime I was born I have borne I

bear I will be born this is

a crime I will not

acknowledge leaves and wind

hold onto me

I will not give in

8am

When they came to harvest my corpse

(open your mouth, close your eyes)

cut my body from the rope,

surprise, surprise:

I was still alive.

Tough luck, folks,

I know the law:

you can't execute me twice

for the same thing. How nice.

I fell to the clover, breathed it in,

and bared my teeth at them

in a filthy grin.

You can imagine how that went over.

Now I only need to look

out at them through my sky-blue eyes.

They see their own ill will

staring then in the forehead

and turn tail

Before, I was not a witch.

But now I am one.

NAME:

PERIOD:

**Effect of form and style of writing on readers**

Margaret Atwood is holy amazing at writing and she’s got a whole lot going on in this poem, but you are focusing on only two items, diction and syntax. Don’t worry. I’ll help with any confusing bits of the poem when you meet with me.

DEFINITIONS: **Diction** = choice of words, **Syntax** = arrangement of words

**Station 1 (Individual): How to Hunt Witches**

• What evidence will be used to prove they are guilty? \_

• What will the suspect go through? \_

• Brainstorm possible ways the suspect would react: \_

• CONNECTION: Who might have been some possible targets of witch hunts? Why might they have been singled out?

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**Station 2 (Group): Diction in “Half Hanged Mary”**

* After reading “Half-Hanged Mary,” your task is to examine one (or two if you have time) of the stanzas and come up with a list of the way the **diction** and **syntax** reflect the narrator’s experience in the stanza titled “3am.”
* Each member of your group will select what they think is the most important word of that stanza.
* Write your word on a sticky note as well as right here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Arrange the words your group selected as the most important terms and arrange them in a meaningful way creating a group poem of your own. Title your group poem.
* Then, discuss with your group:
  1. What kind of words does Attwood use in her poem and why do you think she chose those ones in particular?
  2. What effect does her choice of words (diction) have on a reader?
  3. Now consider your own poem’s arrangement. Why does the arrangement of words make sense?
* It might help to look up at least 3 synonyms for the word you chose and then contemplate why Atwood picked the one she did:   
    
  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Station 3 (Mr. Restad):**

* Discussing meanings, questions, interests, disgusts about the poem.
* Chatting about how/why syntax matters.
  + EXAMPLES:
  + Hemmingway: *They left me alone and I lay in bed and read the papers awhile, the news from the front, and the list of dead officers with their decorations and then reached down and brought up the bottle of Cinzano and held it straight up on my stomach, the cool glass against my stomach, and took little drinks making rings on my stomach from holding the bottle there between drinks, and watched it get dark outside over the roofs of the town.  
    VS*
  + Tan*: That night I sat on Tyan-yu’s bed and waited for him to touch me. But he didn’t. I was relieved.*
  + *sdfsdfs*