

Free essay about the lesson: analyzing the plot

[Family](#), [Children](#)



" The Lesson" by Toni Cade Bambara is a story narrated from the first person perspective. Published in the year 1972, the events that unfold in the story play a crucial role in explaining the differences that existed in the society at that time. The narrative is by Sylvia, a black girl who was young and poor and who lived in the streets of Harlem. The time-frame within which the events were unfolding is unspecified, as the narrator reveals it was ' back in the days' (Cookson et al. 78). A local woman, Miss Moore, was the only person educated in that society. Because of this, she takes it as her responsibility to ensure she exposes the neighborhood's children who were unappreciative to the outside world. To her, this is the only way the children would get motivated. In the trip, Miss Moore takes the children to FAO Schwartz in Manhattan. The poor children were surprised to realize that the toys of the white children cost a lot more than their combined yearly expenses. As the children get surprised, they completely forget the trip's intended lesson. Instead of the opening up to the education offered by the trip and Miss Moore, they instead make plans on how to spend the money they stole from the lady. At the close of events, the narrator contemplates the day's events alone, turning on her friends (Cookson et al. 84).

Cade Bambara's ' The Lesson" is among the fifteen short stories collected in ' Gorilla, My Love'. Like all other stories in this book, events are narrated from a first person perspective. From the manner the narrator explains the events; she can be described as being a brave, caring and a tough young girl. During this time, the girl was living in Harlem, New York (Splawn, 274). From the details given in the narrative such as the cost of the toys, one would be right to assume that this period lasted between the late 60s,

spanning over to the early 70s. The language Sylvia uses and the observations she makes enable readers of the short story to understand the environment she grew up in (Splawn, 275). This is what determined the views she had towards the outside world. This is better explained by her shock on how expensive toys for white children could be. To her, this was ridiculous because the toys looked similar to the one she had. To her, education does not play any important role in the society, and she intends to use the trip for her personal gains.

Although it is outright that Sylvia does not value the role education plays in the society, the readers get to feel the transformation in her as a result of the education she was getting. In the beginning, readers get to understand Sylvia as a sarcastic and outspoken person. Through the education she receives; she is presented as a reserved person at the end of the narrative. This is better explained by the step she took last after the trip. She turns on her friends and reflects on the events of the day (Onesto, 82). Clearly, this shows how the exposure she received from the trip was helping her have a different view on the opportunities in the society. The impact of education cannot be underrated. Being summer time, the park, the show and the pool were filled up with alcoholic bums. Going off for a trip was, therefore, important in that she would avoid mixing with such people, giving her a better opportunity to reflect on her life.

The narration explains how the tour 'opened up' the children to understand the inequalities that exist in life. For instance, Sylvia and Sugar get realize that wealth in the American society is unevenly distributed (Onesto, 84). It is important to note that Sylvia and Sugar were not only cousins; they were

best friends. Whereas in the beginning they have a similar mindset and make foolish decisions that are similar, we get to realize that this changes depending on their appreciation of education. It is clear that after the tour, Sugar and Sylvia are two different people with different opinions, contrary to the time before they received an education. Whereas Sylvia puts the lesson learnt in use, Sugar ignores all the teachings. The effect of this is the transformation that Sylvia undergoes, different from what happens to Sugar (Onesto, 86).

In communicating how the events unfolded, the author uses a number of characters different from Sugar and Sylvia. All of these characters play a different role in developing the story. Their personal character traits are also essential in revealing the different perspectives that the unexposed children had towards the outside world. Junebug is childish and from her behavior, is probably younger than Sylvia. Through Flyboy, the reader is able to understand how the black children manipulated the white children in school in order to be sympathized with. The narrator uses Fat Butt to explain how some of the best minds are prevented from progressing because of lack of opportunities. At FAO Swartz, his main interest is in the microscope. When all other children are interested in the toys that would not change their lives, he takes a keen interest in the microscope and its roles. This explains his academic potential which is unlikely to be exploited by the inner city schools. When Mercedes tries to be better and proper than other children, Rosie gets aggressive (Murray, 110). This symbolizes the resistance ignorant societies have towards change.

On the face value, 'The Lesson' is a simple narrative about Miss Moore and

her achievement of taking the ignorant children on a trip. However, when one analyzes it keenly, it turns to be a journey full of discoveries and responsibilities, giving the children the opportunity to reinvent themselves and understand life. Coincidentally, the story begins and ends in the mailbox (Griffin et al. 230). In the real world, a mailbox is a representation where information is sent and received. The story then switches on to the taxi ride where the teacher gives the children some dollars to pay as fare. Prior to this, the children had never been to the taxi since their parents could not afford such high charges. From the events that took place, we get to learn that Sylvia was not mature enough to take responsibility (Griffin et al. 230). For instance, she fails to tip the driver after the ride. She also keeps the change instead of returning it to Miss Moore. The children only realize that they are in the Fifth Avenue because people in this place were wearing fancy clothes. This is clearly an indication of the economic difference that existed between the children's community and the outside world (Griffin et al. 230). It is clear that the children do not learn the intended lesson in time. It is at FAO Swartz that we get to see Sugar and Sylvia first understanding the manner the events were unfolding. The two hesitate to enter FAO Swartz because of the high prices of the goods, clearly out of their range. This shame is similar to the one Sylvia felt when she wanted to disturb the peace in a catholic church. This is very different from Mercedes, who has not understood anything. In the store, Sylvia is reluctant to touch anything. When Sugar touched a toy boat, Sylvia was angry and developed the urge to hit someone, without any valid reason. This is the point at which we get to understand that Sylvia has a lot to learn because responsibility does not go

hand in hand with violence.

At the end of the narrative, we get to understand the impact of the lesson. In returning from FAO Swartz, Miss Moore decides to use the subway (Savoring the salt: the legacy of Toni Cade Bambara, 57). This was important so as to give the children a chance to compare the differences between the two. It is after arriving at the mailbox that we get to realize the transformation that has taken place in the children. They express that the boat's price could easily feed a family. From this, Sugar gets to understand that there are no equal chances of pursuing happiness. Essentially, such a chance could only be equal if all people were given equal money to use in pursuing their dreams. When the two, Sylvia and Sugar Part Company, the reader gets to realize the transformation that has taken place in Sylvia. Unlike the naïve girl we are first introduced to who is irresponsible, 'The Lesson' gives her a chance to re-evaluate her life.

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