

"the lesson" and
"where are you going,
where have you
been?" essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The short stories "The Lesson" by Toni Cade Bambara and "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" by Joyce Carol Oates disclose the sudden realization of facts about life by two young female characters. When people encounter incredibly horrifying or disturbing situations or face facts about their conditions, and especially when the outcomes posed by the sudden realizations are not predictable, they tend to change greatly viewing life from different perspectives.

The paper compares and contrasts the epiphanies of the major characters in the two short stories giving an account of what triggers the epiphanies in each of them and further addressing the insights that the characters arrive at about themselves, human conditions and the world at large.

In Toni Cade Bambara's "The Lesson", although she does not admit it, the main character Sylvia, a young girl learns a lesson about how life really is after the trip to the Toy store sponsored by Miss Moore, the young girl's neighbor. Earlier on in her life, the young girl is just as cheeky as other little girls are and never stops to wonder about her situation.

Her experiences of the trip to Toy store where Miss Moore takes them changes her perception about the society they are living in. Her friend Sugar seems to echo her thoughts when she says, "Imagine for a minute what kind of society it is in which some people can spend on a toy what it would cost to feed a family of six or seven. What do you think?" (Bambara 5). Through this trip, that she realizes that the society is not as fair as she thinks and that something is worth doing as Miss Moore always says.

This shapes her epiphany and motivation to working hard and taking Miss Moore's advice seriously. The epiphany experienced by the main character Connie in the story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been" is somehow different from this in that Connie has got no way out, hence the force into giving in to the rapist Arnold Friend's demands since her fate seems completely determined.

The freedom provided to her by her parents lands her into the hands of the rapist and a potential serial killer. She reflects back on her previous and current living style and wonders whether it will ever take after the life of her dreams. She comes to the realization of declaring the shape of her as determined by the rapist. Her epiphany seems different from that of Sylvia in "The Lesson" in that she resigns into her fate by herself face whatever that may happen.

The epiphany of the character Sylvia in "The Lesson" comes because of the challenge that she gets when Miss Moore her neighbor takes her for window-shopping together with kid friends in the neighborhood. This challenge shapes the perception of the kids towards life since they do not put much thinking into it.

Their childish nature has blocked their sight in that they do not experience things evident in the society such as class differences. After the encounter at the toyshop, the kids come into the realization that life is much more than just kidding around and not taking things seriously.

The epiphany shows the fact that the kids now realize how their lives seem different from that of others that of others and that they should not behave

<https://assignbuster.com/the-lesson-and-where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been-essay/>

as they do. In the short story ' Where are you Going and Where Have You been", Connie's epiphany is not really an epiphany considering the fact it seems motivated by regrets of the freedom she receives from her parents and which she misuses.

Rather than reciprocating on her parents, trusting effectively and going where she claims: to the movies, she takes the advantage to go to clubs where people like the rapist and the serial killer Arnold's friend identifies and targets her. She falls prey of her misfortunes because of her deviant behavior and neglect.

One can attribute the conditions that lead to the epiphany of the young character Sylvia in the short story " The Lesson" by Bambara to her behavior and too the manner in which the society organizes itself. Sugar who is her friend echoes her thoughts when she says, " I think... that this is not much of a democracy if you ask me.

Equal chance to pursue happiness means an equal crack at the dough, doesn't it?"(Bambara 5) implying the fact that the kid comes to realize the unfairness of the society after all as she does, though earlier on in her life.

Though she still has four dollars that belongs to Miss Moore, she does not feel good after this realization of how the society seems so unfair. On the other hand, the teenage Connie succumbs to her fate because of her own defiant behavior. Had she taken heed to her mother's concern, as the case appears with her elder sister, she would have avoided the misfortunes that befall her. Further, should she have gone to the movies avoiding the club, she would have not met Arnold's friend.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-lesson-and-where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been-essay/>

Therefore, on that eventful Sunday, she would have accompanied her parents and sister to the barbecue avoiding the encounter with the rapist. Anyway, experience, as people say, passes for the best teacher and fortune knocks at least once to every person's door.

The seemingly trivial fact of the prize of a toy triggers Sylvia's epiphany giving her the realization that her freedoms have a limit economic wise and that she cannot get everything that she wishes. Even the cheapest toy in the toy store, which goes for thirty-five dollars is worth the rent that the family pays for the house that they live in.

The realization provokes more thoughts in her head to the extent that she starts experiencing headache. Connie's world on the other hand seems to flow as she wishes it to until the unexpected happens. A stranger who seems to know everything about her shows up and starts demanding that they go out for a ride. At first, she does not take him seriously until he reminds her that she can do nothing to stop him from doing whatever he wants to do with her.

The realization induces to her a feeling of hopeless that leads Connie to start reflecting upon her life seeing how it has been like and how different it will be after her encounter with Arnold ' s Friend. The case appears more different considering her lack of certainty of her fate as the case seems with Sylvia in " The Lesson". The aforementioned epiphanies too feature some striking similarities.

The two characters from the different stories come to the realization that they have been viewing life differently from how it actually is and that their

<https://assignbuster.com/the-lesson-and-where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been-essay/>

futures would not be the same again. In addition, the two as portrayed in the stories, have lived a life of carelessness blinded by their youth.

For instance, in the story "The Lesson", the character Sylvia and her friends never look at life from the perspective of what it holds for them neither do they consider what their future would be like. Instead, they think that their childish adventures will shape their life. For instance, they never imagine of things such as having a desk for doing homework as important (Bambara 3).

Similarly, in the story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been" Connie's life is never inclusive of any serious considerations prior to the appearance of the rapist Arnold Friend. Life seems characterized by girlish adventures, boys, clothes, as well as her looks. She really portrays so little sense such that she only values her deviance. Therefore, her encounter opens her eyes about the other things that can happen to her despite the tragic and suspended ending of the story without hinting on what happens to her next.

The two girls come to the realization that what has earlier on formed their world is a mirage. What they cared for was themselves and nothing more. Sylvia in "The Lesson" has never thought of the existence of any limits to her freedom since that is the level of her exposure before Miss Moore takes her out, together with her friends. Certain realities such as the existence of social classes seemed unclear to her before.

She says, "So we heading down the street and she's boring us silly about what things cost and what our parents make and how much goes for rent and how money...the part about we all poor and live in the slums, which I <https://assignbuster.com/the-lesson-and-where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been-essay/>

don't feature"(Bambara 2). Connie on the other hand never thought of the existence of any bad people in her world. She had trusted any one to the extent that the night when she first encounters Arnold's Friend, she never considers seriously the threats that he issues to her.

The epiphanies of the two characters in the short stories have more differences than similarities because the short story by Joyce Carol Oates lacks a proper ending leaving the reader to speculate on what happens next to the character Connie who falls in the hands of a rapist and a potential serial killer. There is no clarity whether Connie survives the encounter to experience the change as per the epiphany.

Bambara, Tony. *Black Woman: An Anthology*. Washington: Washington Square Press, 2005.