

A matter of taste essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the short story "A Matter of Taste" by Alex La Guma, several political issues are addressed. Race, socioeconomic status, education and experience, are all factors that are somehow brought up throughout this story. The thing that stands out the most, and really brings all of these factors together, is the idea that "more is left unsaid than said." More is left unsaid than said; what does the statement really mean? To begin with, this idea is the theme to the structure of a lot of fictional writing, including this story. A good author is one who doesn't have to say or spell out what he wants the reader to know.

With description and detail, one should be given the opportunity in reading a story to imagine and infer what happened. One should be able to paint a picture in his or her head of what the author is describing, without the author stating exactly what he or she is talking about. A very simple example of this is determining the race of the characters in A Matter of Taste. Using context clues (kinky hair, dark oriental ovals, "china" boy), the reader can infer that Chinaboy is of some kind of Asian descent as well as colored and Whitey is Caucasian.

In relation to this story, more is definitely left unsaid than said. The role of poverty is one of the main examples of this. The most obvious clue that all of these men are poor is the description of their physical appearances, Whitey's description being especially clear. Dark lines around his mouth, eyes, and neck, uncut and ragged hair, dirty and faded jeans, a torn leather coat and grimy hands tell the audience that he is living a pretty rough lifestyle. The men also start talking about food, particularly American food and how fancy it is on page 76.

Chinaboy makes a few comments about how much food Americans and people in the “ big caffies” eat, which leads the audience to believe that he doesn’t eat much food himself. This conversation between the three characters not only includes clues to the role of poverty in the story, but also contains the information that allows the reader to infer where the title came from. On page 77, Whitey says, “ Hell, it’s all a matter of taste. Some people like chicken and other’s eat sheep’s heads and beans! ” Chinaboy responds by saying, “ A matter of taste, bull, it’s a matter of money, pal.

I worked six months in that caffy and I never heard nobody order sheep’s head and beans! ” Chinaboy is saying that it is not a matter of taste in what kind of food you prefer, but in what kind of food you can afford. Nobody who can afford to eat well is going to order the plain, basic kind of food that these men are probably used to eating. The audience can see that Chinaboy is aware of the reality of the level of poverty that he lives in, while Whitey is still somewhat naive and inexperienced. While he may know that he is poor, he isn’t seeing the bigger picture that Chinaboy is talking about.

Not only are these people in the “ caffy” much wealthier than the characters, but they have a completely different mindset, which seems to be more of what Chinaboy is referring to throughout the story. As the men’s conversation continues, Whitey tells another story on page 77 that adds a lot of meaning to this story. “ He sits down at a table and takes out a packet of sandwiches and puts it down. Then he calls the waiter and orders a glass of water. When the waiter brings the water, this fellow says: ‘ Why ain’t the band playing? ” A lot more is left unsaid than said here.

The fact that this man came into a restaurant with his own food, and proceeded to order nothing but water is not only incredibly rude but also just goes to show the behavior difference between those in poverty and those with money. This man expects to be waited on and have a fancy dining experience, yet he isn't even ordering anything from the restaurant. The customer could also be joking about the quality of the restaurant by making this statement, which would prove the level of ignorance that these wealthier people had.

The jokes between the men continue when Chinaboy says, " Another John goes into a caffy and orders sausage and mash. When the waiter bring him the stuff he take a look and say: ' My dear man, you've brought me a cracked plate. ' ' Hell,' says the waiter. ' That's no crack. That's the sausage. '" More is left unsaid than said here as well. The waiter is responding to the snobbiness of the customer who is apparently expecting some sort of elaborate plate of food and hasn't realized that this restaurant is clearly not trying to provide the " fine dining experience.

The statement " why ain't the band playing" comes up again at the end of the story, allowing the reader to conclude that La Guma was definitely trying to make a point by it. On page 78 Chinaboy shouts to Whitey, " Why ain't the band playing? Hell! " as he jumps on a train with hopes of reaching America. Chinaboy makes this remark in an almost sarcastic way, as if poking fun at Whitey for thinking he is going to do big things by hopping on the back of a train car and hoping he makes it to the States.

In the paragraph before this, Chinaboy coaches Whitey on how to get on the train, which reveals that he has had experience doing this before. By making the statement “ why ain’t the band playing” in the following paragraph, Chinaboy is revealing that he has been in Whitey’s position before, and he is in a way teasing him because he has tried the same thing and still ended up living in a life of poverty. As with the rest of the main points of this story that the author is trying to make, much more is left unsaid than said with these ideas.

More is left unsaid than said. The statement means exactly what it says. However, it is the way the reader interprets this that determines the meaning behind this story and the statement’s relevance to the story. La Guma gives the audience the opportunity to think about his ideas in several different ways by simply leaving what he has to say “ unsaid. ” The mystery behind every point’s true meaning is what makes this short story such an interesting read and a teaching tool that all should use.