

Talking back by bells
hooks, and girl by
jamaica kincaid |
comparison



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How To Act Like A lady; Or Not

Jamaica Kincaid wrote an interesting short fiction called " Girl". At first glance, there seems to be a narrator listing multiple objectives and rules for a person to follow. On closer inspection, there seems to be an adult figure, talking to a young female character about acting like a lady. Bell Hooks wrote an essay called " Talking Back". The phrase " Talking back" meant speaking as an equal to an authority figure and daring to disagree and/or have an opinion. In bells hook case, she is sharing the women's rights and talking about the authority and oppression of a previous generations society. These two articles share a common element about women's place in society in a previous generation. Kincaid portrays the narrator as an elderly woman trying to teach a young female child how to act in male dominated society because she wants to inform the reader about women's point of view from a previous generation. She uses analogies, imagery, diction and to make her viewpoint to the reader. Bell Hooks provides important elements and details in " Talking Back" that supports Kincaid's short piece with substantial substance on women's role in society in previous generations.

Kincaid portrays the narrator as an elderly woman trying to teach a young female child how to act in male dominated society because she wants to inform the reader about women's point of view from a previous generation. She uses analogies in her work to provide her viewpoint about the suffrage of women in previous generations. In the essay, the elderly woman explains " you mustn't speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions; don't eat fruits on the street - flies will follow you,"(Kincaid 320). When the reader

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encounters this dialogue, one might say they will think nothing less of fruit flies. However, why would you tell a young girl not to eat fruit on in the street ? Isn't Fruit good for you? Kincaid is comparing the flies to boys. Just as fruit flies swarm over fruit, boys can sometimes harass, or get too aggressive when girls decide to flirt back. The elderly womans' primary motivation is to prevent her daughter from becoming a " slut", or at least from being perceived as one. Kincaid uses this unique analogy that gives the reader a circumstantial and critical viewpoint , about women having to be aware of certain actions around boys , especially in a male dominated society.

Bell hooks supports this argument about young females, having to be careful about what they say or do not only around males but in public generally. Women in previous generations could not speak and say whatever they want. They had to adhere to an invisible, but strict set or rules a male society has forced upon them. Hooks states " Had I been a boy, they might have encouraged me to speak believing that I might someday be called to preach. There was no " calling" for talking girls, no legitimized reward speech."(426). Hooks makes a clear distinction and included the word boy. It is interesting to understand this because since Hooks is a female, she cant have conversations and dialogues with " grown folk". Hooks also states " The punishments I received for " talking back" were intended to suppress all possibility that I would create my own speech. That speech was to be suppressed so the " right speech of womanhood" would emerge."(426). Hooks uses the words " punishment" and " suppress" to give the reader, a dismal truth on how women were subdue in this previous generation. Hooks

gives to context to support Kincaid , by showing that women had to be careful and aware of what they say in a previous generation because they were either going to become a slut, or not have the “ right speech of womanhood” that all women should have.

Kincaid portrays the narrator as an elderly woman trying to teach a young female child how to act in male dominated society because she wants to inform the reader about women’s point of view from a previous generation by using mild imagery. The elderly woman describes a woman’s typical duties to the young female , by showing how to undertake and complete it. The elderly woman states “ this is how you grow okra - far from the house , because okra tree harbors red ants; when you are growing dasheen, make sure it gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it; this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard,”(Kincaid 320). But why must women do all this work? Why can’t women have a job outside of their home instead of having all this work to do at their home? Kincaid provides the reader with the typically women’s role in society during this time. They have to have these jobs in this society because that was their mandatory thing to do in this male dominated society.

Hooks provides insight into women’s role in society during this generation by including her thoughts about the matter. She also talks about assignments and tasks, women must execute during this time. Hooks states “ Writing a poem (when ones time could be “ better” spent sweeping, ironing , learning to cook) was a luxurious activity, indulged at the expense of others,”(427).

The challenge that women faced was more at a social level. The males in this society set rules for what women could and could not do based on gender.

Kincaid portrays the narrator as an elderly woman trying to teach a young female child how to act in male dominated society because she wants to inform the reader about women's point of view from a previous generation by using a distinctive diction. The elderly woman states

" This is how you catch a fish; this is how you throw back a fish you don't like, and that was something bad won't fall on you; this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you,"(Kincaid 321). She uses the phrase " this is how" repeatedly throughout the piece. The phrases introduced with " this is how . . ." suggest the ways that adults possess a model behavior for children. This shows the younger female is watching and learning. the elderly woman possess a negative tone that might indicates she has little hope of her daughter's growing into decent adult woman.

Hooks gives more insight into this generation. Hooks states " Within feminist circles, silence is often seen as the sexist " right speech of womanhood" - the sign of woman's submission to patriarchal authority,"(426). Women during this time period, had a different living experience then compared to woman today. In the present, woman are not only allowed to do more things, but can do most things. This includes jobs, careers, leisurely activities, hobbies, and even sports. But to think, that it was ok, to suppress women and create invisible social rules for them is unacceptable and is substandard for humanity as a society.

In conclusion, the future looks bright. The purpose of Kincaid and Hooks articles, is to inform the reader about women's suffrage from a past generation. In particular, Kincaid portrays the narrator as an elderly woman trying to teach a young female child, how to act in male dominated society, to get the reader to think about its perspective. She uses analogies, imagery, diction and to make her distinct viewpoint to the reader. Hooks supports Kincaid by providing more substance and evidence of woman suffrage from a previous generation. Women have gone through their civil rights period with protest and such. They are still fighting for rights such and fair wages today. However the future looks bright for the future generations. By looking in the past and learning from articles such as Kincaid's " Girl" and Bell Hooks " Talking Back", society can learn from it, and not make the same mistakes of silencing women again.

Work Cited Page

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