

# Girl analysis

Business



English 101 October 17, 2011 Expectations What types of expectations are placed on you? Have so many of them piled up over time that it seems so overwhelming that you could run through them in a mad list in your head? Well then welcome to one of Jamaica Kincaid's famous short stories, "Girl". In the essay "Girl," Jamaica Kincaid portrays the stereotypes and expectations placed on women and girls of her culture in the 1950's.

She uses authoritative tone, syntax, and progression of thought to show the expected responsibilities of girls and women in the narrator's culture.

Throughout the essay the narrator of the essay "Girl," uses a lot of examples to show the expectations placed on women and girls, actually the whole essay is mostly examples of this. One of the most important expectations, it seems, is to make sure one never seems like a slut. This seems very important because it is mentioned throughout the essay as if to drill the fact into one's head. There are many examples, such as, "on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming;"(p. 200).

She is showing examples of the expectations such as, walking like a lady and going to Sunday school. She also puts an emphasis on one of the main points she is trying to convey, which is not to act like a slut. It is so important not to be a slut it is tied into simple tasks such as walking and going to Sunday school. She also states, "this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming;"(p. 200).

She again is nailing in the point of girls duties, in this case as simple as hemming a dress. It is showing the domestic duties girls are expected to carry out. Once again though it ties in an important point to the women of the culture, to make sure you are not a slut. The repetition of the fear of a girl becoming a slut makes it clear it is a big deal in her culture. She continues to describe many of the other womanly responsibilities that are expected. She touches everything from cleaning cloths, to washing dishes, to things like growing plants “ this is how to grow okra—far from the house, because okra tree harbors red ants; when you are growing dasheen, make sure t gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it;”(p.

200). She is showing that no matter what the situation there are responsibilities for women whether it be from domestic cleaning or growing plants and going to Sunday school. No matter what part of a woman’s life that is being described they are all examples of what is expected for her to act or do. These expectations and stereotypes are defiantly not being placed on the girl all at one time. The narrator goes through the essay progressively throughout a life of a girl and a young woman.

The essay starts off with duties of a younger girl. The narrator is trying to teach the girl many things, like, “ Soak your little cloths right after you take them off;”(p. 200). By stating “ little cloths” the narrator is putting emphasis on that this is a lesson for a young girl. She is stating that the cloths are little because they are for a small girl. She also goes on to state, “ is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school? “(p.

200). She is still talking about young girls here with the mention of Sunday school, this would be a question that could only be posed to a girl young enough to be attending one. This is all used at the start of the essay to show responsibilities of a young girl. The narrator moves on though to describe the duties of a girl as they get older. She mentions things like how to clean a house, “ this is how you sweep a whole house;”(p. 200).

This time the narrator has moved to girls a little older, young girls wouldn't have the energy to sweep a whole house. She also mentions, “ this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all;”(p. 200). She is showing that she is talking about girls a little older as well since she is saying they need to start learning how to control their emotions. This is still showing that the narrator is progressing through time since young girls couldn't care less about emotions let alone trying to deal with them.

She finally progresses to things that girls are told when they are young women and the expectations placed on them then. Things like how to have an abortion, “ this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child;”(p. 201). This is defiantly something no girl would have to worry about, and the narrator had obviously progressed to talk about young women who might have to deal with this situation. The narrator also tells how how to love a man, “ this is how to love a man, and if this doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work don't feel too bad about giving up;”(p.

201). Only young women would have to know these thing and this shows that the narrator is moving progressively through time as she describes the

responsibilities of women. Having the essay progress gives the feeling of a flashback on all of the responsibilities placed on women throughout her life. Jamaica Kincaid uses syntax in her essay “ Girl,” to set the tone for the whole paper. There are not just a few examples of syntax throughout the essay; the whole essay is an example of it. For starters the whole essay is one big run on sentence.

The only things that break up the thoughts are dashes and semi colons. There are actually 51 semi colons used throughout the entire short one-page essay. The use of this syntax is setting a very prominent tone in this essay. It makes it feel like it is all a thought or a stream of conciseness. By using syntax it makes it seem like the thoughts are overwhelming and all coming very fast.

Almost as if it is a flashback with all the expectations of her running though her head over time flashing by. This blatant use of syntax in the essay helps show girls and women expected responsibilities throughout the extended time period of the essay. The whole essay, except for two lines, was told in a very authoritative tone. It gives the whole essay a feel as if it is being remembered as a mother’s voice, or from a teacher, or even societies voice as a whole telling girls what to do. “ Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and out them on the clothesline to dry;”(p.

200). This is the first line of the story and a great example of the authoritative speech. It is using direct commands, such as “ put” and “ wash”, without any sense of choice. This authoritative tone is carried in the

same way throughout the essay. There are just a few places where the essay breaks from this. There are a few spots where a question is being asked or the girl breaks the thought to defend herself.

Like what happens in the center of page 200, “ but I don’t sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school. ” Other than those few breaks the tone is set throughout the essay, a strong authoritative tone that is letting girls of this culture know this is the way to be, and there isn’t any other way. The tone firmly lets the girl know these are her expected responsibilities to accomplish. In the essay “ Girl,” Jamaica Kincaid portrays the stereotypes and expectations placed on women and girls in her culture in the 1950’s. She shows how the use of authoritative tone, syntax, and progression of thought to show the expected responsibilities of girls and women in the narrator’s culture.

Works Cited Kincaid, Jamaica. “ Girl. ” Writing As Revision. 4th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2010. 200-201.

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