

# Patsy vernon

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



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Kincaid's short story "Girl" is of a complicated relationship with her mother that comes out in the mother-daughter dynamic in the story. The mother, obviously a dominant figure in the young girl's upbringing, informs the young girl of various duties associated with being a young, dignified lady. Her mother gives the daughter advice to make her the "proper" woman she should in fact be, and this advice gets more and more firm as the story continues. "Girl" is a very well suitable title for this story because the mother is instructing the child of the appropriate steps to take to become a woman, and had she already been a young woman then it wouldn't be based off the mother acknowledging her of such things. The mother does most of the talking; she delivers a long series of warnings to the daughter, who twice responds but whose responses go unnoticed by the mother. For example, in the story the young girl asks if it was true that you sing benna in Sunday school. The mother, however, ignores her while continuing to tell her how to chew food in an appropriate way that won't turn someone else's stomach (157.) The simple fact that her mother opts to ignore her daughter lets the reader know that the daughter is very young because her mother felt that what she asked had no relation to the matter at hand and was a question a "child" would ask so therefore chose to disregard her; which further gives "Girl" a believable title. I can imagine myself as a young child when my mother was also instructing me on the correct way to do something, and of course not yet being a woman; I acted as a child, had the attention span of a child, and asked questions in the form of a child. This too would result in my Mother not responding to me in a message that says "that was irrelevant,

and by me ignoring you will inform you that you've strayed from the topic. " So I then knew not repeat the question again. The mother then tells the daughter " this is how you smile to someone you don't like too much; this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all, this is how you smile to someone you like completely" (157.) This was yet another subject I could relate to as a child that allowed me to notice that the mother wasn't speaking with a young woman, but was simply directing a young girl. When you're older you realized that you're not going to like everyone but you are still expecting to behave maturely but a child obviously wouldn't know that, and children are very quick to let it be known to someone that they think little of them. These messages and many other messages throughout the story such as "soak your little cloths right after you take them off" (156-57.) refers to the cloths woman in many parts of the world use to absorb their menstrual flow and that even indicates that the girl is a young adolescent. So why not use the name " girl" I for one can't possibly seek many better titles that indicates the overall story with such success. The title also allows the reader to portray an idea of what the story itself will be dealing with before actually reading it. Therefore a title name such as " Susan" has no relation to the story because the child's name was never mentioned nor was it important; this can have the effect of directing readers off the correct path and not be prepared as to what the meaning truly is. Let's imagine the title was in fact named " Susan" and after reading the story what would one understand about the title besides confusion? I myself would then believe the story wasn't about a mother directing her child but behind it was some other unknown meaning. I would begin to explore the name Susan for a short

period of time, and toss it around in my head. Followed by all this; I would soon pursue to asking myself “ Why Susan? ” “ her mother name wasn’t Susan, neither was the author” “Does she have some other attachment to the name or is just simply rather fond of it? ” “hmmm, what could it be? ” Notice how these questions may indeed be thought provoking but would have only resulted in me to question the overall context of the story, which is something this particular author didn’t want. If I were to picture another title for the story it would probably be in relation to the repetitive message the mother used throughout the story “ Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming” (157.) and then a little further into the story I read “ 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” (157.) This of course isn’t the last time the mother warns her of this. It’s soon followed by again in a sentence where the mother tells her daughter how to behave in the presence of a man so that he wouldn’t recognize the slut she was bent on becoming (157.) This is a theme in the story I do believe the author was using to speak out to her readers so I could see if she would somehow use this as the title but she chose a more clever approach by reiterating in throughout the story. So this makes me ponder with the thought that maybe her mother wasn’t warned of this as a child and gentleman received the wrong impression towards her so she wanted it to be engraved in her daughters head, yet perhaps the mother was sure herself that this was the daughter’s unrighteous destiny (for what reason is unknown) because notice how she said to act in a way for the man wouldn’t RECOGNIZE the slut she was bent on becoming. To me her mother is telling

her that she will in fact be a slut but she at least must be aware of how to disguise it. This is also why “ Susan” would have definitely not been able to stand a chance as a suitable title that would bring any specific meaning. Followed by the warnings of becoming a slut; at the end of the story, the mother teaches the young girl that she should “ always squeeze the bread to make sure it’s fresh” (157). The girl responds: “ but what if the baker won’t let me feel the bread? ” (157.) The mother, in disbelief after all her lecturing, asks: “ you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman the baker won’t let near the bread? ” (157.) While this conversation adds a touch of humor to the story, especially being it was the one question the mother felt need to respond to; this scene illustrates the way that the mother expects the girl to define her own identity within the gender system. Ultimately, it is up to the girl to determine what sort of woman she will be and whether or not she will be worthy to “ feel the bread. “ Works Cited Kincaid, Jamaica. " Girl." Literature: Reading Reacting Writing. Ed. Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell. Boston: Wadsworth, 2013. 156-57. Print.