Name of Student

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Research Paper

***Toni Cade Bambara*** is one of the most famous African-American author, social activist, documentary filmmaker and a teacher. She has always been a source of inspiration of many writers. Taking a look at her works, it won’t be wrong to say, she highlighted the issues that black community has been facing for long. Most of her works spot a light on feminism and awareness that African Americans should have. One of her most celebrated work is "***The Lesson***" in which she has told the story of a poor black girl, Sylvia. After critically analyzing “***The Lesson***” one would come to know that this story is about the journey of an African American girl who struggles with her growing awareness of class differences, racism and inequality. Though there are other characters in the story, but Miss Moore introduces one heart-breaking reality of society to the group of city kids whom she taught. Sylvia is the main character to whom Miss Moore teaches not only about classroom lesson but also about the life realities that shaped her perception about society.

Miss Moore being an educated black woman let the children know what it feels to be educated and wealthy. For inspiring her students, she showed them high-end part of New York. She also taught them a basic lesson that if they get an opportunity, they must take it and by availing the opportunity at its fullest, they must try to change their fate. On the other hand, she also taught them to be patient if they are not getting an opportunity. They must learn to stay happy in every situation. Critical evaluation of texts claim that point of view of the readers matter a lot and it is the essential element which highlights how a narrator speaks, thinks and feels about the characters and situations being presented in a text. In “***The Lesson***” Bambara is explaining events through the eye of a young local girl “Sylvia”. Most of the critics and scholars claim that readers get only a limited number of point of views as all the main events are being told by one protagonist, Sylvia. As readers are presented with ideas and situations being narrated by Sylvia, readers would be pushed to take things and events just as Sylvia did. There are various themes of this story i.e. the importance of education and inequality between white and black Americans. According to the author examination of poverty and wealth that makes people different from each other are two of the central themes of the story. Miss Moore takes children into the toy store where she wants them to critically view what money means in society.

Studies in almost all the fields, particularly in literature went through the criticism of other scholars and critics. Likewise, while studying this text “***The Lesson***” I came across many scholars and analysts who critically analyzed this work, themes, characters and writer “Toni Cade Bambara”. Veritably “***The Lesson***” is one of those texts that spotted a light on the issues that black Americans have been suffering from, since long. I went through many studies and critics who talked about “***The Lesson***”. For me, one of the most appealing analysis of this text was given by ***Elliot Butler-Evans***, who is an author and critic. He is an active member of Pan-African Socialist Party (PRSP). One of the capitative claims being put by Elliot is that in “***The Lesson***” Bambara has highlighted the issue of gender bias, desire, and race. As per the analysis that I did on this text, I would say that I agree with Elliot that Bambara, being the female showed more sympathy for the woman of her society (Butler-Evans,et,al,1989).

It is interesting to note that both the writer and protagonist of this story are women. According to Elliot, after considering the feminist cultural theory, semiotics, Marxist concepts, and narratology, the selected text explores a relationship between the two-clashing discourses. One is the inscription of race and second is the focused-on gender. An in-depth analysis of research done by Elliot; it could be said that the kind of narration as well as the violence being created by the articulation are important themes of this text along with the expression of desire being expressed in this story. By taking a look at this text, it could be witnessed that one of Bambara's main character ***Miss Moore*** took children to the toy shop where they express their extreme desire of buying the toys. At the same, another thing that I analyzed is that children being taught by Miss Moore questioned her about the difference between them and others who can afford to buy toys from F.A.O Swartz. Another major thing that I have witnessed is that children are made aware of the class consciousness. Miss Moore wants her students to learn how important money is, in the society they are living in. In this story, awareness about the class consciousness could be felt, when Sylvia’s best friend, Sugar asks Miss Moore about the fairness of people spending the same amount of money just on toys that some families are trying to earn for meeting their survival needs. As far as my research on this story, the same question arose in the mind of other children but an in-depth view made me realized that it was the time when Sylvia went through a hard time for digesting the reality of inequality.

Another major factor that Elliot analyzed is the narrative style of Bambara, though element of desire remained dominant as well. Desire has been portrayed by Bambara in the form of thirst that arose initially as a passion for something and its intensity reached gradually at a point that pushes one to undertake an action for bringing a change. In my opinion, Miss Moore wanted to teach her students lessons that would help them in bringing positive changes in their life. When I was reading this text, I came to know that one of the basic lessons that Miss Moore wanted to give to Sylvia and other students was, it is not a fault to born in a poor family but dying poor could be his/her choice. She used to push her students for getting out of the box by making efforts as for her it is the only way one can change his/her life. For Miss Moore education is the main tool that enables one to change the course of his/her life.

Taking into consideration some of the scholarly texts, it has been seen that linguistic features being used by Bambara in this text go far beyond than only being a mere tool of communication. In some of the articles that I studied for knowing more about the language used by Bambara I came to know narration style of black writers is different from the rest. In ***Dialect Dilemma***, ***Kendra Hamilton*** claims that common perception about English speech communities is that “*dialects are the bad Standard English*”. As per my study, this perception seems true as nations often marginalized minorities if they used little different dialect than standard English (Hamilton,et,al,2005). African Americans have long been marginalized because of their dialect.

Considering the literary work of most African writers, I came to know that the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) by black writers partially reflects the inevitable and natural process of language transformation that African Americans went through. AAVE is specifically used by the black writers for spotting social and political issues. Critical evaluation of language being used in “***The Lesson***” it won’t be wrong to say that Bambara used AAVE for reflecting the thought process of the adolescent narrator (Sylvia). I agree with the perception presented by different scholars about the linguistic features being used by Bambara. Especially, I agree with the point, presented by ***Kendra Hamilton***. I have seen AAVE is being used by Bambara for showing the difference of opinion on values between the narrator and her teacher. One of the basic reasons I agree with the perception of Kendra is that Bambara gave the young narrator her own voice (intelligent black female protagonist) so that she could openly express her thoughts in her language.

As far as my analysis of this story and other texts, I would say use of specific linguistic features could be witnessed easily in “***The Lesson***”. According to the linguistic analysis of ***Janet Ruth Heller***, use of AAVE by Bambara is used for adding a flavor of humor and realism. While studying this text I felt, the narrative style of Sylvia, showed realism by adding humor. Both elements (realism and humor) are concerned with black community’s issues (inequality, lack of opportunities and injustice). I would say that the first paragraph provides sufficient pieces of evidence for supporting the claim being put by Janet that I totally agree with (Heller,et,al,2003). In the opening paragraph of the story, I witnessed a struggling relation between standard English and AAVE when Sylvia introduces Miss Moore saying “this lady” who “has nappy hair and proper speech” and “been to college”.

Several things and elements discussed in this story have been analyzed by different authors, critics, and scholars. One of the most discussed and engaging topics that most of the scholars talked about is the link between Marxism and class consciousness that are being addressed in this text by Toni Cade Bambara. According ***to B Ruby Rich***, Bambara is one of the few black writers who point towards social, economic and political exploitation of black. While going through her work, I witnessed that she has courageously raised the issues i.e. social injustice, lack of opportunity, racism and social inequality in “***The Lesson***”. B ruby Rich, like many other authors and critics claims that one of the most heart-breaking aspects along with other social dilemmas spotted by Bambara in this text is viewing practical implementation of ***Marxism***.

Being the reader of this text of Bambara, I would say, I agree with the view of B Ruby Rich and other analysts who claim that Marxism could be clearly seen in Bambara's "The Lesson". I second this claim that there could be witnessed a clear implementation of Marxism as I analyzed through this story that the prevailing class maintained the top position and by exercising its power it controlled the ideology of lower class (Rich,et,al,2019). According to Marxism, a mindset was created by drawing a line between “haves and have nots”. In this story, I have seen that those who can buy toys from F.A.O Swartz are portrayed as the heads of the society in which Miss Moore and Sylvia are living with other children. While studying different scholars and texts, I witnessed that some of the major subjects of western literature were economic inequality and social injustice. I noticed that in “The Lesson” character of Miss Moore reveals the black children with the difference that they have from the white upper-class citizens. With the advancement of the story, I came to know that group of children, being taught by Miss Moore went through a process of social awakening as they become aware of the ***class consciousness***. For me, the title of the story is a metaphor for the working class for awakening them so that they could make efforts for minimizing the class difference between the heads and hands of the society.

Another similar kind of element that has been witnessed by in the criticism, evaluation, and analysis of the scholars and analysts over this story, is of realization of class consciousness. There are scholars like ***Harris***, who claimed that realization of class from which one belongs, can be pleasing as well as heart-breaking (Harris,et,al,2019). Generally, it has been seen, those who belong to upper class wants to be all controlling and this feeling pleases them but, on the hand, those who are minorities, hands or the poor feel discouraged when they first went through class consciousness. At the beginning of the story, by considering Sylvia a strong-headed character, I did not agree with Harris’s point of view, but as I was reaching climax, my perception changed and I would say that without any second thought I agreed with Harris and all those scholars and experts who claimed that class consciousness has been pointed by Bambara in this story which affected her characters as well (Gardner,et,al,2013). Her characters showed that class consciousness made them aware that they have to be conscious of their words and actions. While critically evaluating this story when I was approaching the climax, I came to realized that Sylvia became aware of the huge wealth inequality between her and Harlem. The rage shown by Sylvia when Sugar runs her finger on the expensive sailboats showed realization of her class consciousness. I felt the pain, she went through when I was analyzing the climax as it was the time when she realized for the first time that she was from underclass family and this bitter reality filled her heart with anger and rage.

According to a scholar, Leila Naderi, Bambara adopted a narrative style in this story that was a source of self- expression. Self-expression helped this African American writer to raise her voice against the social inequality. After having an in-depth analysis of this story, I would say that view of Leila could be correct for other literary writings in which African writer’s particular narration style and AAVE is used for self-expression primarily, but considering “The Lesson” I don’t agree with Leila. I witnessed that all the characters with the advancement of story become aware of the class they belonged to and this realization of class consciousness was not at all pleasing for any of them (children to whom Miss Moore used to teach).

So, taking a look at the above discussion, it could be promulgated that in literature, undoubtedly a text or writing could be interpreted in different styles. Taking a look at the work and analysis of different authors and researches, I would say that for every analyst there is a specific area he/she may be interested in. There are few factors and themes that all the scholars claim to find common in this text of Bambara i.e. inequality, class conflict, and Marxism etc. After digging the details about “The Lesson” I would say, there are various aspects that have been spotted by Bambara. One of the primary purposes of the author in this story is to make the African Americans aware of the inequality that is mainly because of the lack of education. So, the author wants people of black community to educate themselves so that they could bring a positive change not only for themselves but for the whole black community as well.

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