

ing a rhyme. For instance, between the two words so in *bark* and *back* make a hard and creaky, compared with the soft and smooth of the second line (about a puppet, the next four syllables and there are stresses on *getting*, and on *up*, for *pull*—whereas in the second *remember*), *be*, and *pup* are really only three syllables. I think readers will agree that the first is better than the second, which

forces the dog as it is now, forces on the reader by the speaker's memory of the dog's own lives. Thus the first is better.

He is not performing with words in the Latin *componere*, "to compose—put words together and play with words," we know the rules, such as metrical feet, and he said that to write it down.

er
The Span of Life," that a
in this chapter we will
tedly command perfor-
suggest that when you
e in a sense performing

a sense you performed
ert Frost in the act of
came, momentarily, an
in old dog bark without
ncaid. In this story you
tutoring her adolescent

daughter for her coming role as a woman. Kincaid informs us that *benna*, mentioned early in the story, refers to "songs of the sort your parents didn't want you to sing, at first calypso and later rock and roll."

JAMAICA KINCAID

Jamaica Kincaid was born in 1949 on the island of Antigua, in the West Indies, at that time a British colony. At the age of seventeen she emigrated to the United States, where she still lives, although most of her writing continues to be set in Antigua.

Girl

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk barehead in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little clothes right after you take them off; when buying cotton to make yourself a nice blouse, be sure that it doesn't have gum on it, because that way it won't hold up well after a wash; soak salt fish overnight before you cook it; is it true that you sing *benna* in Sunday school?; always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach; on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming; don't sing *benna* in Sunday school; you mustn't speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions; don't eat fruits on the street—flies will follow you; *but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school*; this is how to sew on a button; this is how to make a buttonhole for the button you have just sewed on; 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; this is how you iron your father's khaki shirt so that it doesn't have a crease; this is how you iron your father's khaki pants so that they don't have a crease; 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; 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; this is how you set a table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner; this is how you set a table for dinner with an important guest; this is how you set a table for lunch; this is how you set a table for breakfast; this is how to behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming; be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit; don't squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy, you know; don't pick people's flowers—you might catch something; don't throw stones at blackbirds, because it might not be a blackbird at all; this is how to make a bread pudding; this is how to make *doukona*; this is how to make pepper pot; this is how to make a good medicine for a cold; this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child; this is how to catch a fish; this is how to throw back a fish you don't like, and that way something bad won't fall on you; this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you; 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; this is how to spit up in the air if you feel like it, and this is how to move quick so that it doesn't fall on you; this is how to make ends meet; always squeeze bread to make sure it's fresh; *but what if the*

baker won't let me feel the bread?; you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread?

[1978]

In our introduction we somewhat misleadingly said that you would hear two voices. Had the two voices shared the space equally, the story would be a very different one—that is, the mother would be a different mother and the girl a different girl. Probably you and your mother are quite different from these two. But didn't you enjoy the experience of reading, hearing, almost uttering, almost *performing* the words of these two distinctive characters? Will you agree that the experience of hearing these characters—the experience of becoming them as you read their lines—is a pleasurable experience that enlarges your view of what life is like?



Joining the Conversation: Critical Thinking and Writing

1. What do you make of the girl's second (and last) line of dialogue in "Girl," and what do you make of the mother's response to it?
2. Try reading a section of "Girl" out loud in a rhythmical pattern, giving the two speakers distinctive voices. Then reread the story, trying to incorporate the rhythms mentally into your reading. How do the rhythms compare with speech rhythms that are familiar to you?

MyLiteratureLab For additional resources for "Girl," log in to www.myliteraturelab.com where you will find a Longman Lecture and Critical Essay, as well as an About the Author and Links for Kincaid (under Student Resources).

The Essayist as Performer

We now return to the point that when you write an essay you are, like Robert Frost and Jamaica Kincaid, necessarily performing with words. Probably your essays will consist chiefly of

- analysis and
- argument (you want to persuade your reader that your analysis makes sense)

but your essay will surely also include

- exposition (you may have to define terms or summarize someone else's argument) and
- narration (you may have to summarize a plot)

and you will have to use an appropriate

- style (largely a matter of tone)

In short, in writing any essay, even when your emphasis is largely analytic and argumentative, you will probably use all the devices that all good writers use to hold the attention of readers and to convince readers that you have something to

say that is worth hearing seriously about both the performance in words. Read each draft in a million readers will find it convincing. You will ask yourself:

- Have I defined *immoral, realistic*?
- Have I given just enough to leave readers unimpressed?
- Do transitions from paragraph to paragraph work?
- Is my title engaging? Does my final paragraph do it?
- Is my tone appropriate?

The point about tone is that you want your readers to trust you by being

- **knowledgeable** (of fact),
- **fair** (the writer is not biased),
- **courteous** (the writer does not come across to

A Rule for Writers: Write the script to perform—

This book provides you with performances—your draft. Remember: You are your own act. Get your act together, and you'll have an engaging experience.

Anatole France (1844–1924) won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1921. His later writings offended the censors. He responded with "Our Lady's Juggler" of the early thirteenth century (1902) and several films a la Tony Curtis.

In the days of King Louis IX, a man from Compiègne, who wandered

Joining the Conversation: Critical Thinking and Writing

1. If you do not know the legend of the phoenix, look it up in a dictionary or, better, in an encyclopedia. Then carefully reread the story, to learn whether the story in any way connects with the legend.
2. What do you think of the hunter?
3. What would be lost if the episode (with all of its dialogue) of Phoenix falling into the ditch and being helped out of it by the hunter were omitted?
4. Is Christmas a particularly appropriate time in which to set the story? Why or why not?
5. In an argument of no more than one page, explain the significance of the story's title.

TONI CADE BAMBARA



Toni Cade Bambara (1939–95) was born in New York City and grew up in various African American neighborhoods of the city. After studying at the University of Florence in Italy and at City College in New York, where she received a master's degree, she worked for a while as a case investigator for the New York State Welfare Department. Later she directed a recreation program for hospital patients. After her literary reputation became established, she spent most of her time writing, though she also served as writer in residence at Spelman College in Atlanta.

The Lesson

Back in the days when everyone was old and stupid or young and foolish and me and Sugar were the only ones just right, this lady moved on our block with nappy hair and proper speech and no makeup. And quite naturally we laughed at her, laughed the way we did at the junk man who went about his business like he was some big-time president and his sorry-ass horse his secretary. And we kinda hated her too, hated the way we did the winos who cluttered up our parks and pissed on our handball walls and stank up our hallways and stairs so you couldn't halfway play hide-and-seek without a goddamn gas mask. Miss Moore was her name. The only woman on the block with no first name. And she was black as hell, cept for her feet, which were fish-white and spooky. And she was always planning these boring-ass things for us to do, us being my cousin, mostly, who lived on the block cause we all moved North the same time and to the same apartment then spread out gradual to breathe. And our parents would yank our heads into some kinda shape and crisp up our clothes so we'd be presentable for travel with Miss Moore, who always looked like she was going to church, though she never did. Which is just one of the things the grownups talked about when they talked behind her back like a dog. But when she came calling with some sachet she'd sewed up or some gingerbread she'd made or some book, why then they'd all be too embarrassed to turn her down and we'd get handed over all spruced up. She'd been to college and said it was only right that she should take responsibility for the young ones' education, and she not even related by marriage or blood. So they'd go for

...specially Aunt Gretcher
...shit foolishness you
...been screwed into th
...her. Which is how st
...while our mothers v
...the time.

So this one day Miss
...and she's knockin her
...summer I heard, but s
...something the shit outta n
...goddamn college degree. I
...and. So me and Sugar lea
...and. And Flyboy checkin
...already wasting his pean
...satchel punchin on Q.T.
...the tip to the other waiti
...in Georgia so she can ki
...so we know what money
...like it's only poker ch
...I'm tired of this and
...the Sunset and terrorize th
...money too. And Miss Mo
...brotherhood, I can tell. An
...owner and besides we migh
...satchel, so we ready.

So we heading down
...and what our parents
...and divided up right in th
...near and live in the slums,
...but she steps out in the str
...half the crew in with her at
...the percent tip for the drive
...hangin out the window
...other cause Flyboy a fagge
...But I'm mostly trying to fig
...with the meter ticking and
...Flyboy can't hold his breat
...he when we get there. So I
...is to jump out at the next
...Then the driver tells us to g
...reads eighty-five cents. And
...a dime. And I decide I
...then he tries to take off wit
...mama something ferocious
...everybody dressed up in s
...folks crazy.

"This is the place," Miss
...the museum. "Let's look in t

"Can we steal?" Sugar
...squared away before she pl
...out. So she leads us aroun

Thinking and Writing

ook it up in a dictionary or
e story, to learn whether the

dialogue) of Phoenix falling
nter were omitted?

ich to set the story? Why or

lain the significance of the

A

*was born in New York City
American neighborhoods of
iversity of Florence in Italy
here she received a master's
s a case investigator for the
ment. Later she directed a
patients. After her literary
spent most of her time writ-
ter in residence at Spelman*

or young and foolish and me
ed on our block with nappy
naturally we laughed at her.
bout his business like he was
ecretary. And we kinda hated
red up our parks and pissed
stairs so you couldn't halfway
ss Moore was her name. The
ne was black as hell, cept for
e was always planning these
ostly, who lived on the block
same apartment then spread
k our heads into some kinda
le for travel with Miss Moore,
ough she never did. Which is
hen they talked behind her
me sachet she'd sewed up or
then they'd all be too embar-
all spruced up. She'd been to
e responsibility for the young
ge or blood. So they'd go for

it. Specially Aunt Gretchen. She was the main gofer in the family. You got some ole dumb shit foolishness you want somebody to go for, you send for Aunt Gretchen. She been screwed into the go-along for so long, it's a blood-deep natural thing with her. Which is how she got saddled with me and Sugar and Junior in the first place while our mothers were in a la-de-da apartment up the block having a good ole time.

So this one day Miss Moore rounds us all up at the mailbox and it's puredee hot and she's knockin herself out about arithmetic. And school suppose to let up in summer I heard, but she don't never let up. And the starch in my pinafore scratching the shit outta me and I'm really hating this nappy-head bitch and her goddamn college degree. I'd much rather go to the pool or to the show where it's cool. So me and Sugar leaning on the mailbox being surly, which is a Miss Moore word. And Flyboy checking out what everybody brought for lunch. And Fat Butt already wasting his peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich like the pig he is. And Junebug punchin on Q.T.'s arm for potato chips. And Rosie Giraffe shifting from one hip to the other waiting for somebody to step on her foot or ask her if she from Georgia so she can kick ass, preferably Mercedes'. And Miss Moore asking us do we know what money is, like we a bunch of retards. I mean real money, she say, like it's only poker chips or monopoly papers we lay on the grocer. So right away I'm tired of this and say so. And would much rather snatch Sugar and go to the Sunset and terrorize the West Indian kids and take their hair ribbons and their money too. And Miss Moore files that remark away for next week's lesson on brotherhood, I can tell. And finally I say we oughta get to the subway cause it's cooler and besides we might meet some cute boys. Sugar done swiped her mama's lipstick, so we ready.

So we heading down the street and she's boring us silly about what things cost and what our parents make and how much goes for rent and how money ain't divided up right in this country. And then she gets to the part about we all poor and live in the slums, which I don't feature. And I'm ready to speak on that, but she steps out in the street and hails two cabs just like that. Then she hustles half the crew in with her and hands me a five-dollar bill and tells me to calculate 10 percent tip for the driver. And we're off. Me and Sugar and Junebug and Flyboy hangin out the window and hollering to everybody, putting lipstick on each other cause Flyboy a faggot anyway, and making farts with our sweaty armpits. But I'm mostly trying to figure how to spend this money. But they all fascinated with the meter ticking and Junebug starts laying bets to how much it'll read when Flyboy can't hold his breath no more. Then Sugar lays bets as to how much it'll be when we get there. So I'm stuck. Don't nobody want to go for my plan, which is to jump out at the next light and run off to the first bar-b-que we can find. Then the driver tells us to get the hell out cause we there already. And the meter reads eighty-five cents. And I'm stalling to figure out the tip and Sugar say give him a dime. And I decide he don't need it as bad as I do, so later for him. But then he tries to take off with Junebug foot still in the door so we talk about his mama something ferocious. Then we check out that we on Fifth Avenue and everybody dressed up in stockings. One lady in a fur coat, hot as it is. White folks crazy.

"This is the place," Miss Moore say, presenting it to us in the voice she uses at the museum. "Let's look in the windows before we go in."

"Can we steal?" Sugar asks very serious like she's getting the ground rules squared away before she plays. "I beg your pardon," say Miss Moore, and we fall out. So she leads us around the windows of the toy store and me and Sugar

screamin, "This is mine, that's mine, I gotta have that, that was made for me, I was born for that," till Big Butt drowns us out.

"Hey, I'm goin to buy that there."

"That there? You don't even know what it is, stupid."

"I do so," he say punchin on Rosie Giraffe. "It's a microscope."

"Whatcha gonna do with a microscope, fool?"

10 "Look at things."

"Like what, Ronald?" ask Miss Moore. And Big Butt ain't got the first notion. So here go Miss Moore gabbing about the thousands of bacteria in a drop of water and the somethinorother in a speck of blood and the million and one living things in the air around us is invisible to the naked eye. And what she say that for? Junebug go to town on that "naked" and we rolling. Then Miss Moore ask what it cost. So we all jam into the window smudgin it up and the price tag say \$300. So then she ask how long'd take for Big Butt and Junebug to save up their allowances. "Too long," I say. "Yeh," adds Sugar, "outgrown it by that time." And Miss Moore say no, you never outgrow learning instruments. "Why, even medical students and interns and," blah, blah, blah. And we ready to choke Big Butt for bringing it up in the first damn place.

"This here costs four hundred eighty dollars," say Rosie Giraffe. So we pile up all over her to see what she pointin out. My eyes tell me it's a chunk of glass cracked with something heavy, and different-color inks dripped into the splits, then the whole thing put into a oven or something. But for \$480 it don't make sense.

"That's a paperweight made of semi-precious stones fused together under tremendous pressure," she explains slowly, and her hands doing the mining and all the factory work.

"So what's a paperweight?" asks Rosie Giraffe.

15 "To weigh paper with, dumbbell," say Flyboy, the wise man from the East.

"Not exactly," say Miss Moore, which is what she say when you warm or way off too. "It's to weigh paper down so it won't scatter and make your desk untidy." So right away me and Sugar curtsy to each other and then to Mercedes who is more the tidy type.

"We don't keep paper on top of the desk in my class," say Junebug, figuring Miss Moore crazy or lyin one.

"At home, then," she say. "Don't you have a calendar and a pencil case and a blotter and a letter-opener on your desk at home where you do your homework?" And she know damn well what our homes look like cause she nosys around in them every chance she gets.

"I don't even have a desk," say Junebug. "Do we?"

20 "No. And I don't get no homework neither," says Big Butt.

"And I don't even have a home," say Flyboy like he do at school to keep the white folks off his back and sorry for him. Send this poor kid to camp posters, is his specialty.

"I do," says Mercedes. "I have a box of stationery on my desk and a picture of my cat. My godmother bought the stationery and the desk. There's a big rose on each sheet and the envelopes smell like roses."

"Who wants to know about your smelly-ass stationery," say Rosie Giraffe fore I can get my two cents in.

"It's important to have a work area all your own so that . . ."

25 "Will you look at this sailboat, please," say Flyboy, cuttin her off and pointin to the thing like it was his. So once again we tumble all over each other to gaze at this magnificent thing in the toy store which is just big enough to maybe sail two

kittens across the pond if price tag like we in assen one hundred ninety-five d
"Unbelievable," I hea
myself just in case the gre
reason this pisses me off.
I dunno what.

"Who'd pay all that w
tube of glue for a dime, an
and a whole lot else besid

"But will it take water?"

"Took mine to Alley P

"Sailed mine in Central
for another dollar."

"And you got the strap
it. My old man wailed on h

Little Q.T. was staring b
But he too little and someb

for kids, Miss Moore?"

"Parents silly to buy se
Giraffe.

"That much money it sl

"My father'd buy it for 1

"Your father, my ass," say

"Must be rich people sh

"You are a very bright b
him on the head with the b

get away with. Though Q.T.
locks in when you half expe

"What I want to know
I wouldn't give the bitch tha

a thousand'd get you a yach

"Why don't you check
which really pains my ass. I

you could do is have some
up her sleeve. Only she dor

where the entrance is, but
scared, what's there to be af

what I got to be shamed abo
how I can't seem to get hold

hangs back too. And I look
I mean, damn, I have never e

But then Mercedes steps up
and shove, and next thing v

squeezing past us, smoothing
Then the rest of us tumble i

people lookin at us. And it's
church on a dare. But once w

the candles and the bowin an
couldn't go through with the

a tap dance while Sugar playe

was made for me, I was

roscope."

It got the first notion. So
 bacteria in a drop of water
 on and one living things
 I what she say that for?
 Miss Moore ask what it
 re price tag say \$300. So
 save up their allowances.
 ne." And Miss Moore say
 medical students and in-
 butt for bringing it up in

ie Giraffe. So we pile up
 ne it's a chunk of glass
 pped into the splits, then
 30 it don't make sense.
 is fused together under
 doing the mining and all

e man from the East.
 when you warm or way
 make your desk untidy."
 ten to Mercedes who is
 s," say Junebug, figuring

and a pencil case and a
 ou do your homework?"
 ise she nosys around in

Butt.
 lo at school to keep the
 r kid to camp posters, is

ny desk and a picture of
 k. There's a big rose on
 y." say Rosie Giraffe fore

at . . ."
 in her off and pointin to
 er each other to gaze at
 ough to maybe sail two

kittens across the pond if you strap them to the posts tight. We all start reciting the price tag like we in assembly. "Handcrafted sailboat of fiberglass at one thousand one hundred ninety-five dollars."

"Unbelievable," I hear myself say and am really stunned. I read it again for myself just in case the group recitation put me in a trance. Same thing. For some reason this pisses me off. We look at Miss Moore and she lookin at us, waiting for I dunno what.

"Who'd pay all that when you can buy a sailboat set for a quarter at Pop's, a tube of glue for a dime, and a ball of string for eight cents? It must have a motor and a whole lot else besides," I say. "My sailboat cost me about fifty cents."

"But will it take water?" say Mercedes with her smart ass.

"Took mine to Alley Pond Park once," say Flyboy. "String broke. Lost it. Pity."

30 "Sailed mine in Central Park and it keeled over and sank. Had to ask my father for another dollar."

"And you got the strap," laugh Big Butt. "The jerk didn't even have a string on it. My old man wailed on his behind."

Little Q.T. was staring hard at the sailboat and you could see he wanted it bad. But he too little and somebody'd just take it from him. So what the hell. "This boat for kids, Miss Moore?"

"Parents silly to buy something like that just to get all broke up," say Rosie Giraffe.

"That much money it should last forever," I figure.

35 "My father'd buy it for me if I wanted it."

"Your father, my ass," say Rosie Giraffe getting a chance to finally push Mercedes.

"Must be rich people shop here," say Q.T.

"You are a very bright boy," say Flyboy. "What was your first clue?" And he rap him on the head with the back of his knuckles, since Q.T. the only one he could get away with. Though Q.T. liable to come up behind you years later and get his licks in when you half expect it.

"What I want to know is," I says to Miss Moore though I never talk to her, I wouldn't give the bitch that satisfaction, "is how much a real boat costs? I figure a thousand'd get you a yacht any day."

40 "Why don't you check that out," she says, "and report back to the group?"

Which really pains my ass. If you gonna mess up a perfectly good swim day least you could do is have some answers. "Let's go in," she say like she got something up her sleeve. Only she don't lead the way. So me and Sugar turn the corner to where the entrance is, but when we get there I kinda hang back. Not that I'm scared, what's there to be afraid of, just a toy store. But I feel funny, shame. But what I got to be shamed about? Got as much right to go in as anybody. But somehow I can't seem to get hold of the door, so I step away for Sugar to lead. But she hangs back too. And I look at her and she looks at me and this is ridiculous. I mean, damn, I have never ever been shy about doing nothing or going nowhere. But then Mercedes steps up and then Rosie Giraffe and Big Butt crowd in behind and shove, and next thing we all stuffed into the doorway with only Mercedes squeezing past us, smoothing out her jumper and walking right down the aisle. Then the rest of us tumble in like a glued-together jigsaw done all wrong. And people lookin at us. And it's like the time me and Sugar crashed into the Catholic church on a dare. But once we got in there and everything so hushed and holy and the candles and the bowin and the handkerchiefs on all the drooping heads, I just couldn't go through with the plan. Which was for me to run up to the altar and do a tap dance while Sugar played the nose flute and messed around in the holy water.

And Sugar kept givin me the elbow. Then later teased me so bad I tied her up in the shower and turned it on and locked her in. And she'd be there till this day if Aunt Gretchen hadn't finally figured I was lyin about the boarder takin a shower.

Same thing in the store. We all walkin on tiptoe and hardly touchin the games and puzzles and things. And I watched Miss Moore who is steady watchin us like she waitin for a sign. Like Mama Drewery watches the sky and sniffs the air and takes note of just how much slant is in the bird formation. Then me and Sugar bump smack into each other, so busy gazing at the toys, 'specially the sailboat. But we don't laugh and go into our fat-lady bumpstomach routine. We just stare at that price tag. Then Sugar run a finger over the whole boat. And I'm jealous and want to hit her. Maybe not her, but I sure want to punch somebody in the mouth.

"Whatcha bring us here for, Miss Moore?"

"You sound angry, Sylvia. Are you mad about something?" Givin me one of them grins like she tellin a grown-up joke that never turns out to be funny. And she's lookin very closely at me like maybe she plannin to do my portrait from memory. I'm mad, but I won't give her that satisfaction. So I slouch around the store bein very bored and say, "Let's go."

Me and Sugar at the back of the train watchin the tracks whizzin by large then small then gettin gobbled up in the dark. I'm thinkin about this tricky toy I saw in the store. A clown that somersaults on a bar then does chin-ups just cause you yank lightly at his leg. Cost \$35. I could see me askin my mother for a \$35 birthday clown. "You wanna who that costs what?" she'd say, cocking her head to the side to get a better view of the hole in my head. Thirty-five dollars could buy new bunk beds for Junior and Gretchen's boy. Thirty-five dollars and the whole household could go visit Granddaddy Nelson in the country. Thirty-five dollars would pay for the rent and the piano bill too. Who are these people that spend that much for performing clowns and \$1000 for toy sailboats? What kinda work they do and how they live and how come we ain't in on it? Where we are is who we are, Miss Moore always pointin out. But it don't necessarily have to be that way, she always adds then waits for somebody to say that poor people have to wake up and demand their share of the pie and don't none of us know what kind of pie she talkin about in the first damn place. But she ain't so smart cause I still got her four dollars from the taxi and she sure ain't gettin it. Messin up my day with this shit. Sugar nudges me in my pocket and winks.

45 Miss Moore lines us up in front of the mailbox where we started from, seem like years ago, and I got a headache for thinkin so hard. And we lean all over each other so we can hold up under the draggy-ass lecture she always finishes us off with at the end before we thank her for borin us to tears. But she just looks at us like she readin tea leaves. Finally she say, "Well, what do you think of F. A. O. Schwarz?"

Rosie Giraffe mumbles, "White folks crazy."

"I'd like to go there again when I get my birthday money," says Mercedes, and we shove her out the pack so she has to lean on the mailbox by herself.

"I'd like a shower. Tiring day," say Flyboy.

Then Sugar surprises me by sayin, "You know, Miss Moore, I don't think all of us here put together eat in a year what that sailboat costs." And Miss Moore lights up like somebody goosed her. "And?" she say, urging Sugar on. Only I'm standin on her foot so she don't continue.

50 "Imagine for a minute what kind of society it is in which some people can spend on a toy what it would cost to feed a family of six or seven. What do you think?"

"I think," say Suga
I whip her ass in a mini
chance to pursue happi
is besides herself and I
one more time to see if
sorrowfully I'm thinkin.

"Anybody else lea
Sugar has to run to catc
off my shoulder.

"Well, we got four c
"Uh hunh."

"We could go to Ha
Sunset and still have ple

"Uh hunh."

"Race you to Hasco
We start down the b
going to the West End an
run if she want to and ev



Joining the

1. What is the point of Mi
2. Describe the relationshi
the story?
3. What does the last line c
4. In a paragraph or two, c
assume that your reader
by references to episode

MyLiteratureLab® For additi
www.myliteraturelab.com w
benston Quiz, as well as an
Overview for Bambara (und

Amy Hempel was born in Chi
Columbia University, and now
programs at Bennington Colle

Today

"I think it's the other way
the *bridge* would collapse and
He looked at his sister wit
"You are just trying to see
not true."

me so bad I tied her up an
ie'd be there till this day if
e boarder takin a shower.
I hardly touchin the games
o is steady watchin us like
sky and sniffs the air and
ation. Then me and Sugar
, 'specially the sailboat. But
outline. We just stare at that
And I'm jealous and want
nobody in the mouth.

nothing?" Givin me one of
urns out to be funny. And
in to do my portrait from
n. So I slouch around the

racks whizzin by large then
out this tricky toy I saw in
es chin-ups just cause you
y mother for a \$35 birthday
eking her head to the side
ollars could buy new bunk
and the whole household
r-five dollars would pay for
: that spend that much for
nda work they do and how
is who we are, Miss Moore
that way, she always adds
: to wake up and demand
kind of pie she talkin about
ill got her four dollars from
with this shit. Sugar nudges

ere we started from, seem
And we lean all over each
she always finishes us off
rs. But she just looks at us
t do you think of F. A. O.

oney," says Mercedes, and
ailbox by herself.

Moore, I don't think all of
sts." And Miss Moore lights
sugar on. Only I'm standin
n which some people can
six or seven. What do you

"I think," say Sugar pushing me off her feet like she never done before, cause I whip her ass in a minute, "that this is not much of a democracy if you ask me. Equal chance to pursue happiness means an equal crack at the dough, don't it?" Miss Moore is besides herself and I am disgusted with Sugar's treachery. So I stand on her foot one more time to see if she'll shove me. She shuts up, and Miss Moore looks at me, sorrowfully I'm thinkin. And somethin weird is goin on, I can feel it in my chest.

"Anybody else learn anything today?" lookin dead at me. I walk away and Sugar has to run to catch up and don't even seem to notice when I shrug her arm off my shoulder.

"Well, we got four dollars anyway," she says.

"Uh hunh."

"We could go to Hascombs and get half a chocolate layer and then go to the Sunset and still have plenty money for potato chips and ice cream sodas."

"Uh hunh."

"Race you to Hascombs," she say.

We start down the block and she gets ahead which is O.K. by me cause I'm going to the West End and then over to the Drive to think this day through. She can run if she want to and even run faster. But ain't nobody gonna beat me at nuthin.

[1972]



Joining the Conversation: Critical Thinking and Writing

1. What is the point of Miss Moore's lesson? Why does Sylvia resist it?
2. Describe the relationship between Sugar and Sylvia. What is Sugar's function in the story?
3. What does the last line of the story suggest?
4. In a paragraph or two, characterize the narrator. Do not summarize the story—assume that your reader is familiar with it—but support your characterization by references to episodes in the story and perhaps by a few brief quotations.

MyLiteratureLab* For additional resources for "The Lesson," log in to www.myliteraturelab.com where you will find a Longman Lecture and Comprehension Quiz, as well as an About the Author, Bibliography, Links, and Critical Overview for Bambara (under Student Resources).

AMY HEMPEL

Amy Hempel was born in Chicago in 1951. She was educated in California and at Columbia University, and now lives in New York City. She has taught in the writing programs at Bennington College in Vermont and at the New School in New York City.

Today Will Be a Quiet Day

"I think it's the other way around," the boy said. "I think if the quake hit now the *bridge* would collapse and the *ramps* would be left."

He looked at his sister with satisfaction.

"You are just trying to scare your sister," the father said. "You know that is not true."