

Lesson 10

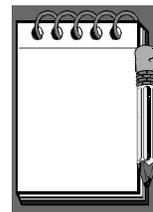
“Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid

Materials Needed:

- ▣ journal
- ✎ pen or pencil

Journal Entry

Parents, more often than not, prove to be experts at giving advice and enforcing rules and restrictions. Think of the kinds of advice your parents have given you and the rules that they have set up for you to follow. Do you think their advice and the enforcement of their rules have helped to make you a better person? In your journal, write about the lessons and advice that your parents have given you. Write for about ten minutes.



About the Author

Jamaica Kincaid was born in Antigua, a Caribbean island, in 1949 and moved to New York in 1965. Her given name was Elaine Potter Richardson, but she changed it to Jamaica Kincaid when she moved to the United States. Kincaid gained literary acclaim when she was in her early twenties by writing pieces for *The New Yorker*, a nationally acclaimed magazine. Her work focuses on her real life experiences both in Antigua and the U.S. She now lives in Vermont with her family and teaches at Harvard University. “Girl” is a selection from her short story collection, *At the Bottom of the River*.

As you read “Girl,” you will notice that this story is different from the others presented in this unit. It does not follow the traditional short story format, meaning it does not have a typical plot sequence. It actually represents what is called a **stream-of-consciousness**. *Stream-of-consciousness is an imitation of how the mind works.* It does not follow grammatical rules for sentence structure and it links random thoughts together, just as the mind does. It is usually uninterrupted by any outside source, including the dialogue of another person. Kincaid uses this technique to create an entire story, illustrating all of the rules and regulations a young girl receives from her mother on how to live life properly.

Vocabulary



Words to help you in your reading:

Word	Definition
benna	popular songs
okra	plant with pods that are used in soups, stews, etc.
dasheen	a plant
doukana	a type of pudding

Reading Assignment

Read “Girl.” As you read, try to determine the tone and mood of the story. Review the definition of tone and mood.

mood	the feeling that the author creates in a story. The mood of a story can be sad, happy, confusing, solemn, excited, matter-of-fact, or a combination of any of these. It is affected by the setting and language and actions of the characters. Mood can also change within a story, for instance, from being happy to sad or from excited to disappointed.
tone	the author’s attitude toward the subject and/or characters of a story. Tone can often be determined by the mood that the story generates. For example, if the mood is happy or exciting, the author’s attitude or tone is most likely positive.

Girl

by Jamaica Kincaid

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 cloths 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 fruit 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?
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Reading Comprehension: Answer the questions in complete sentences:

1. Explain why this story is a good example of the stream-of-consciousness technique. Why is this technique effective for expressing the life of a child?

2. Why do you think there are more warnings or restrictions than encouragement?

3. What image of the female role is emphasized in this story? Include two details from the selection that support your answer.

4. List some characteristics of the young girl's environment based on this story.

5. What is the tone of the story?

Reader Response in Stream-of-Consciousness Style:

Rules, Regulations, and Restrictions

Use Jamaica Kincaid's story as a model for recording some of the rules and restrictions that your parents or guardians enforce. Use a stream-of-consciousness technique and write down some of the rules and pieces of advice that your guardians often repeat. Like Kincaid, use a semi-colon to separate ideas and a period at the end of the paragraph. After finishing give your passage a fitting title. Write one sentence explaining why that is the best possible title.

