

This paper is impressive because it is clear and well-organized. The writer uses the ideas from the reading well, bringing up alternate points of view and examining questions from more than one side.

[Note: Comments from instructors are in green.]

Name

Professor's Name

ENG 100

Date

The Value of Poverty

In the American economy of today, the distribution of wealth and property is unbalanced. With a minority of the population controlling the majority of the wealth, the remaining people are left to fight for the scraps. In the two readings, by Jacob Riis and Toni Cade Bambara, the authors explore and analyze the problem of poverty establishing characteristics and patterns. The authors write two different narratives that concur in some areas and strongly disagree in others. Although they agree that poverty has an inherent value they disagree as to what that value is. While Riis looks at poverty as a disease, Bambara sees poverty in a more optimistic light as the possible origin of wonderful people who possess the strength and desire to rise above destitution. To Riis, the poor make the rich richer, and to Bambara, poverty forces the poor to value that which the rich take for granted. Thus suggesting that the poor have the ability to take pleasure in simple things, something a rich person seldom does. **The last two sentences of this paragraph present a thesis. You do not have to boil all the ideas in your paper down into a single**

sentence, but your introduction should present your viewpoint on the material, the perspective you have developed by working with it. Note that there is a problem here: the last sentence of this paper is actually a fragment. "Suggesting" is a noun and there is no verb to say what "suggesting" does or is. ("have," "take," and "does" are all verbs but they are part of a phrase that begins with "that" and so they are not the actions taken by the noun "suggesting").

In the lives of the poor, great value is assigned to that which the rich take for granted. Notice that this paragraph has a clear topic sentence. An example can be as simple as cleanliness. The writer is moving from the general claim, in the topic sentence, to a specific example. This makes the ideas in the paper easy to follow. That's what organizes the paper and gives it clarity. The poor take personal hygiene and the cleanliness of their children as a matter of pride. They may be poor, but at least they are clean. On this the two authors agree. "The true line to be drawn between pauperism and honest poverty is the clothesline. With it begins the effort to be clean that is the first and the best evidence of a desire to be honest." (Riis 220) "The Lesson" by Toni Cade Bambara describes the manner in which the parents send their children out with Miss Moore for their lesson. "And our parents would yank our heads in to some kinda shape and crisp up our clothes so we'd be presentable for travels with Miss Moore, who always looked like she was going to church, though she never did." (Bambara 223) Bambara is speaking of the pride, which the impoverished parents of these children take in preparing them for their trip to town. They may not have fancy clothes, but they will be clean and properly worn.

Another concept that the two authors agree on is the oppression of the poor by the rich. In the tenements Riis examines and describes, salons in the buildings are constantly selling the poor liquor, keeping them poor and destitute. At times, there may be no water for the inhabitants

of the building, but they can always walk downstairs to the conveniently placed bar and drown their problems with alcohol. “Spite of brownstone trimmings, plate glass and mosaic vestibule floors, the water does not rise in summer to the second story, while the beer flows unchecked to the all-night picnics on the roof. The saloon with the side door and the landlord decide the prosperity of the place between them, and the tenant, in sullen submission, foots the bills.” (Riis 221) Bambara also demonstrates the oppression of the poor by the rich in showing the children a toy sailboat that costs over one thousand dollars. ““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.”” (Bambara 227) The lesson Miss Moore is teaching the children is one of the economic inequalities of the world. She does not really expect the children to understand the economics behind the statement, but what she is attempting to do is open their eyes to the oppression the world has in store for them. Miss Moore is teaching the children of the problem so that when they become older they will be cognizant of their existence and can work to amend the unjust situation.

As an example of the disparity between the two author's views Bambara shows us that poverty and depression do not necessarily go hand in hand, a notion that Riis does not agree with. In “The Lesson,” Bambara speaks of an optimism that she feels about poverty. Her people may be poor, but that does not mean that they cannot be happy. When the situation with the toy sailboat is examined closer, her point here is clear. The child whose parents can afford a one thousand-dollar toy sailboat will surely be elated when given this gift. However for that child to reach that state of elation, it takes a gift as extravagant as the thousand-dollar sailboat. The child does not appreciate the money the sailboat costs or the fact it could feed a family for months. This child takes things for granted such as ice cream, candy, and simple games, the very things

that to a poor child achieve the same level of elation as the sailboat. “‘Well, we got four dollars anyway,’ she says... ‘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... Race you to Hascombs,’ she says” (Bambara 227) The child that Bambara is describing here is no doubt as happy with the notion that she has enough money to buy all these treats as the child is whose parents buy him/her the expensive sailboat. On the contrary Riis speaking of a family in one of the tenements, describes a scene that he believes portrays the average tenement family. “The rent was seven dollars and a half a month, more than a week’s wages for the husband and father, who was the only breadwinner in the family. That day the mother had thrown herself out of the window, and was carried up from the street dead. She was ‘discouraged,’ said some of the other women...” (Riis 220) Riis feels that these people are just as depressed as they are oppressed.

Philosophy is another area where the poor are rich. The poor use philosophy to fill the gap between the rich and the poor according to Bambara and use it to numb themselves to the pain of their dire situation according to Riis. In “The Lesson” one of the children comments to Miss Moore “‘...this is not much of a democracy is you ask me. Equal chance to pursue happiness means an equal crack at the dough, don’t it?’” (Bambara 227) At this comment, the teacher Miss Moore could not be more pleased. The child is showing her an understanding of the philosophical lesson that she has presented to them, a lesson that both increased their understanding of the situation and legitimizes their own existence. Jacob Riis’ “How the Other Half Lives,” shows the philosophy of the poor as a mechanism to cope with their dire situation. “Philosophy, according to my optimistic friend, naturally inhabits the tenements. The people who live there some to look upon death in a different way from the rest of us-do not take it as hard.” (Riis 220) Teaching us that people living in the tenements are so depressed and

accustomed to death that they do not view it as a dreadful and horrific ending. This paragraph discusses some of the most abstract and difficult ideas in the paper. Faculty members liked the way the writer brought the idea of philosophy, from Riis, into the analysis of the quotation from Bambara at the top of the page. They also liked the way the paragraph presented two different ideas about philosophy. Bambara treats philosophy as a positive thing, a way for poor people to "legitimize their existence." Riis treats it as an aspect of depression. A problem with the paragraph is that the writer does not resolve these two views or even provide a transition into the next paragraph. How are we to understand this difference? More analysis at the end of the paragraph, and a transition to the next paragraph, would strengthen this part of the paper.

The last sentence of this paragraph is another fragment, with the same structure as the last sentence of the very first paragraph of the paper. Here, instead of "thus, suggesting that. . ." we have "teaching us that. . ." As with most writers, this writer's sentences fall into a pattern. Get to know your own pattern so that you can try out new ways of writing sentences. Varying your pattern will help your writing flow.

To Toni Bambara poverty teaches children the value of an ice cream cone, the pride that comes with cleanliness, and the dignity that comes with philosophy and understanding. To her a poor child in clean clothes happily playing with a kick the can is a more beautiful sight than a rich child in new clothes sailing a thousand-dollar toy sailboat. To her impoverished peoples find the strength that they need to carry on by assigning greater values to items that the rich take for granted. In her opinion this gives them an advantage in life, and that is the true value of poverty. To Jacob Riis, the value of the poor lies in the money that they provide to the rich, thus continuing a never-ending cycle of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. A cycle

that Riis devoted much of his life to stopping. In many ways the two authors are both correct in their assessments of the situation, the rich are too rich, and the poor are too poor. Maybe through the teachings of both Bambara and Riis future generations can begin learning how to resolve this dilemma.