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## **SILENCE AS RESISTANCE: BLACK GIRLHOOD AND EMERGING CONSCIOUSNESS IN TONI CADE BAMBARA'S THE LESSON**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The literature by Black women has been a site of resistance, expression, and identity as well as a reflection of lived experience. In the short story "The Lesson," Toni Cade Bambara follows this tradition by showing how the early social awakening of a young Black girl, Sylvia, is exposed to economic inequality and social power. This paper will discuss the use of the narrative voice, silence, and the internal struggle through close textual analysis. This study contends that Sylvia's silence serves as an emergent form of political agency influenced by intersecting structures of race, class, and gender rather than as passivity by placing the story within Black feminist cultural criticism and Black Girlhood Studies. The study presents Black girlhood as a site of early political awareness rather than narrative absence by emphasizing silence as an active mode of meaning-making. Bambara suggests that political knowledge is not always manifested through immediate action or speech. Black girls' early discussions of gender, race, and class are represented in the narrative as a formative form of political realization displayed through silent and resolute resistance.

**Keywords:** Black girlhood, narrative silence, emotional resistance, intersectionality, Black feminist criticism.