

## **“Geraldine Moore the Poet” by Toni Cade Bambara – Suggested Lesson Procedure (3 days)**

1. Day 1—Have students complete the before reading word splash activity. Students will write a brief creative short story based off words that are pulled directly from the story. Set a timer for 5 minutes. Then let students pair and share to give students a laugh. Next, give the class the opportunity to read their stories aloud to everyone—they really enjoy this. This word splash strategy helps students make connections to words that will be part of the story and consider how these words may be connected to one another. It also builds anticipation for what the story will be about.

2. Read the story out loud as a class. The story takes 10 minutes to read without stopping, but I recommend having students work on the reading questions as they go (about 40 minutes depending on your students). Review the correct answers as you go as well. This is a really important step for students while practicing literary analysis because it enhances their understanding of the literature and models techniques they will use in the future.

3. Day 2—Direct students to work in groups or in pairs to answer the literary analysis worksheets (conflict, theme, and plot analysis). Review the correct answers with the class once everyone is done.

4. Direct your students to work independently or in pairs on the discussion questions. Once everyone is done, you can have volunteers share answers out loud for further discussion.

5. Day 3—Have students work independently on the poetry project.

Note to teachers: Due to copyright law, I am unable to offer a full text version of the story. If you enter “Geraldine Moore the Poet full text” into any search engine, you will find a copy of the story available for you to print and use in class. Here is the link I used: [Geraldine Moore the Poet](#)

Name:

Class:

Before Reading  
“Geraldine Moore the Poet” by Toni Cade Bambara

Write a brief short story using all of the following words. You have five minutes.

dog	homework	furniture	bills
rubber band	formula	soup	knee socks

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Name:

Date:

**“Geraldine Moore the Poet” by Toni Cade Bambara**  
**Reading Questions**

1. What point of view is this story told from? How do you know?

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2. Describe the setting where Geraldine lives. What does it tell you about Geraldine?

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3. What information is revealed about Geraldine’s family? How does it affect her?

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4. What keeps Geraldine from concentrating on her schoolwork?

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5. Why is there a pile of furniture outside of Geraldine’s building?

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6. What is so significant about the tomato soup Anita serves to Geraldine?

7. What does Geraldine's daydream say about her?

PREVIEW

8. How does Mrs. Scott define poetry? What does Mrs. Scott assume about her students' lives when she frames her writing assignment as she does?

PREVIEW

9. What can you infer has happened to Geraldine's father? What line indicates this?

10. How does Geraldine's poem fit with Mrs. Scott's initial definition?

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11. What is ironic about Geraldine's poem?

PREVIEW

12. What is Mrs. Scott's emotional response to Geraldine's poem? Provide textual evidence to support your answer.

Name:

Date:

“Geraldine Moore the Poet” by Toni Cade Bambara  
Literary Analysis

What examples of conflict are present in this story? Fill out the chart below.

Typ of Conflict	Example from the text
Human vs human	
Human vs nature	
Human vs society	
Human vs self	

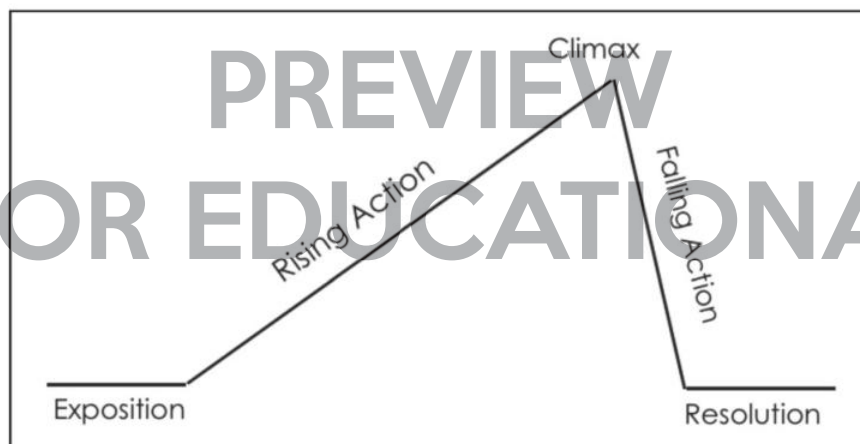
Analyze the following themes from “Geraldine Moore the Poet” by explaining how each message is present in the story. Provide textual evidence to support your response.

Life can be unjust and unfair but you can’t always control it.	It’s important to be compassionate towards others because you never really know what other people are going through.
Life experiences shape who we are as people.	School can teach you many things, but it can’t prepare you for your real-life problems.

Name:

Class:

**Plot Diagram**  
**"Geraldine Moore the Poet" by Toni Cade Bambara**



Exposition

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Rising Actions

Climax

PREVIEW

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Falling Actions

PREVIEW

Resolution

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Name:

Date:

**“Geraldine Moore the Poet” by Toni Cade Bambara**  
**Discussion Questions**

1. How would you describe Geraldine’s character? How do you think you would behave if you were in her shoes?

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2. How would this story be different if it were told from the point of view of Geraldine’s mother or sister?

PREVIEW

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3. What would you do if you were Mrs. Scott? Explain.

4. Do you ever feel like what you’re learning in school won’t help you in real life? Explain.

PREVIEW

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5. If you could choose what you learned in school, what classes would exist? What lessons would be taught?

PREVIEW

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6. Who do you depend on more than anyone else in the world? How so? Does anyone depend on you? Explain.

Name:

Date:

## POETRY PROJECT

Write an open form poem that is at least 8 lines in length. "Open form" poetry—also known as "free verse"—does not follow any rules, so it doesn't have to rhyme or have rhythm.

Your poem should be an expression of your feelings based on the prompt below. Once you are done with your rough draft, you will rewrite your poem nicely on a blank piece of paper and add an illustration to complement your work. Your visual component should be colorful, relevant, and visually appealing. Your text should be clear, neat, and written in pen or marker.

**Poetry Prompt: What do you daydream about?**

Name:

Date:

**"Geraldine Moore the Poet" by Toni Cade Bambara**  
**Reading Questions**

1. What point of view is this story told from? How do you know?

Third person limited. The narrator is outside of the story, describing Geraldine's life experience. The narrator only has access to Geraldine's inner thoughts and feelings, so its limited to one character.

2. Describe the setting where Geraldine lives. What does it tell you about Geraldine?

Geraldine is walking down the street and passes a hot-dog man and thinks to herself that there's no point to his business because no one has money in this neighborhood. The setting is an urban, poverty-stricken city where people don't have extra money for entertainment or treats.

3. What information is revealed about Geraldine's family? How does it affect her?

Geraldine's mother is sick and has been sent "away" (hospitalized). Her neighbor, Mrs. Gladys, makes her dinner sometimes, but Gerry doesn't usually eat breakfast which means she goes to school hungry. Geraldine's sister Anita moves in to take care of her and makes her lunch every day.

4. What keeps Geraldine from concentrating on her schoolwork?

Gerry is hungry—her stomach growls during class because she hasn't eaten. She is also probably worried about her mother who is ill. (Once she is evicted later on in the story, she can't focus in class because she is worried about where she is going to live.)

5. Why is there a pile of furniture outside of Geraldine's building?

Geraldine's family is being evicted and kicked out of their apartment for not paying rent.

6. What is so significant about the tomato soup Anita serves to Geraldine?

When Anita serves Gerry tomato soup, Gerry is reminded of the free lunches at her school that she despises. Geraldine was glad she didn't have to eat the free lunch at school anymore because the tomato soup really bothered her, but when she goes home, she still has to have tomato soup because she's so poor.

7. What does Geraldine's daydream say about her?

Geraldine dreams about moving somewhere new and getting her own room. Geraldine's dreams tell us that she is a young girl who is concerned about her future and worried about what will happen next.

8. How does Mrs. Scott define poetry? What does Mrs. Scott assume about her students' lives when she frames her writing assignment as she does?

"A poem is your own special way of saying what you feel and what you see" according to Mrs. Scott. She says, "Try expressing what it is like to be... to be alive in this... this glorious world." These lines show Mrs. Scott assumes all her students have gratitude or something positive in their life to look forward to. She doesn't realize some students have troubles that a positive attitude can't fix.

9. What can you infer has happened to Geraldine's father? What line indicates this?

Geraldine's father has left the family and is not a part of her life anymore. Readers can infer this through the line, "She thought about saying that her father doesn't even come to visit any more, but changed her mind."

10. How does Geraldine's poem fit with Mrs. Scott's initial definition?

Geraldine expresses what she sees and feels. Geraldine sees rain, darkness, bills, and the furniture being put on the street. Geraldine feels that nothing lovely has happened in her life.

11. What is ironic about Geraldine's poem?

Geraldine thought she could not write a pretty poem, yet the poem she spoke was so beautiful and lovely, she moved her teacher to tears.

12. What is Mrs. Scott's emotional response to Geraldine's poem? Provide textual evidence to support your answer.

Mrs. Scott was crying because of Geraldine's circumstances. Mrs. Scott wanted Geraldine to feel heard and validated. Mrs. Scott didn't want any of her students to know she was crying.

Textual evidence:

- Mrs. Scott said very sadly.
- She went to the board and stood there for a long time staring at the chalk in her hand.
- She kept her back to the class.
- She heard a whimper.
- She saw Mrs. Scott's shoulders shake a little.

## Literary Analysis Answer Guide

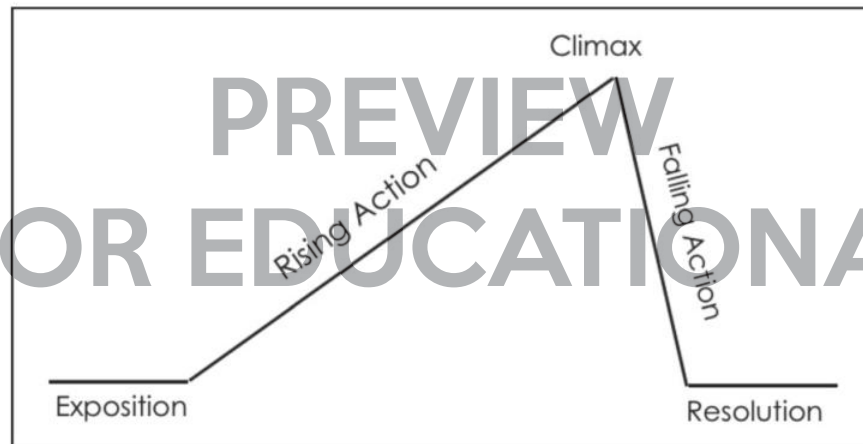
What examples of conflict are present in this story? Fill out the chart below.

Type of Conflict	Example from the text
Human vs human	Geraldine vs Mrs. Scott—Geraldine announces loudly that she cannot write a poem, which initially hurt the teacher's feelings.
Human vs nature	Geraldine's mother vs the illness—Geraldine's mother is dying and there's not much that can be done for her.
Human vs society	Geraldine's family vs poverty and hunger—Society and economic circumstances have left Geraldine's family in a compromising situation. They can't afford food or rent.
Human vs self	Geraldine vs herself—She struggles to stay positive; she can't understand why school matters if she doesn't have a place to live. She wants to speak up in some of her classes about these issues, but keeps quiet until the end.

Analyze the following themes from “Geraldine Moore the Poet” by explaining how each message is present in the story. Provide textual evidence to support your response.

<p><b>Life can be unjust and unfair but you can't always control it.</b></p> <p>Geraldine's life is unfair. For example, she can't control that her mother is sick and that her father left. She doesn't deserve these hardships, but it doesn't change the reality of her situation.</p>	<p><b>It's important to be compassionate towards others because you never really know what other people are going through.</b></p> <p>Some people do not understand how hard life is for others. Geraldine's teachers don't realize what some of their students are going through at home and it would be helpful if they considered how students struggle outside of school. For example, Geraldine can't focus in class because she is so hungry.</p>
<p><b>Life experiences shape who we are as people.</b></p> <p>Geraldine has a hard life and no longer has childlike innocence that most people her age have. Her experiences of being poor and having to take care of herself at such a young age will make her independent and strong for the rest of her life.</p>	<p><b>School can teach you many things, but it can't prepare you for your real-life problems.</b></p> <p>Geraldine can learn geometry, protein, tissues, and poetry, but nothing she is currently learning in school can solve her problem that she is homeless and can barely afford food.</p>

**Answer Guide**  
**Plot Diagram**



**Exposition:**

Geraldine is the protagonist. She is a young girl in high school and lives in a poor urban apartment complex. Her family struggles to afford clothes, food, and rent.

**Rising Action(s):**

Geraldine gets evicted from her home.

Geraldine's mother is hospitalized and Anita must care for Geraldine.

Geraldine struggles to focus in school when all she can think about is where she will live and how she will eat.

Mrs. Scott asks the class to write a poem.

**Climax:**

Geraldine announces she cannot write a pretty poem and expresses how she feels about what is happening in her life.

**Falling Action(s):**

The teacher turns Geraldine's words into a poem.

Mrs. Scott writes Geraldine's poem on the chalkboard and makes her students write it down.

**Resolution:**

Students congratulate Geraldine for her poem.

The teacher cries after realizing the hardships her student Geraldine faces.

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**Discussion Questions = Answers will vary**

**Possible Answers**

1. How would you describe Geraldine's character? How do you think you would behave if you were in her shoes?

Answers will vary. Geraldine is strong, frustrated, outspoken, and independent. She doesn't complain to her sister even though she hates tomato soup. She is mature and understands that her problems are bigger than geometry.

2. How would this story be different if it were told from the point of view of Geraldine's mother or sister?

Answers will vary. If the mother or sister told the story, we might have a clearer view of Geraldine's mother's illness and how bad it is (terminal or not). Anita puts on a brave face for Geraldine, so readers don't know how bad the situation is, although we can infer it is pretty bad.

3. What would you do if you were Mrs. Scott? Explain.

Answers will vary. Students might say they would give money to Geraldine's family or start a fundraiser. Maybe they would invite her family over for dinner.

4. Do you ever feel like what you're learning in school won't help you in real life? Explain.

Answers will vary.

5. If you could choose what you learned in school, what classes would exist? What lessons would be taught?

Answers will vary. Some students might say they want to learn more about taxes, cooking, cars, healthcare, or plumbing—more practical life skills.

6. Who do you depend on more than anyone else in the world? How so? Does anyone depend on you? Explain.

Answers will vary.