**Blackout -**Literature Notes

**SUMMARY**  
  
This short story is about a white American woman's encounter with a black man on the street of an unnamed island in the Caribbean. The story opens with the young lady waiting at a bus stop on the night of a blackout. She encounters a young man who approaches her and politely asks for a light (for his cigarette). She explains that she does not have a light, but he points out that she is smoking a cigarette. She grudgingly acquiesces to give him a light from her cigarette. She holds her arm out for him to take her cigarette and light his, but instead, as is the case with many smokers, he bends over the offered arm and lights his cigarette. He looks up to thank her and realizes that she has discarded her cigarette. An ongoing internal monologue occurs, where it is revealed that the white woman is racist. The black male proceeds to educate her on the differences in race relations in the Caribbean versus America. The situation remains unresolved as the woman boards the bus and goes on her way and the man remains at the bus stop, where he picks her half smoked cigarette out of the gutter.  
  
**SETTING**

* An unnamed island in the Caribbean.
* The story occurred around the time of [World War II](http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-3368.html).

**CHARACTERS**  
*American Woman (White)*

* Took pride in the fact that she was an American young woman who did not scare easily.
* Considered herself to be superior to the young man.

*Caribbean Man (Black)*

* Had a sense of pride about being black.
* Did not consider himself to be inferior to the American woman.

**THEME**  
*Racism*  
This is a strong theme in this short story. The simple act of asking for a light becomes a tension filled moment in time where two individual's honestly confront each other about their beliefs. The fact that the woman feels that she is superior to the man, based on race, is highlighted when she expresses the following views:   
1. 'She could snub him quietly, the way she should have properly done from the start" (Mais, p.10)  
2. 'In America they lynched them for less than that' (Mais, p.10)  
3. 'Do you really think that all men are created equal?' (Mais p.10)  
The young man's reaction to her rejection of him is to be quietly contemptuous, a reaction that she categorizes as insolence, proving that she believes herself to be superior to him. Her reaction implies that he should be accepting of whatever she 'dishes out' to him. She boards her bus, shaken, but still holding on to her beliefs, as seen in her refusal to take a last look at him. However, the young black males show of strength is, ironically, lessened by the fact that he picks her cigarette out of the gutter.