

# The Secret Is Black Coffee

John Bandler

A young man tries to explain to a young woman the utility of coffee shops as incubators for creativity.



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A one-act play

By John Bandler

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# THE SECRET IS BLACK COFFEE - A Stage Play

By John Bandler

## PLOT SUMMARY

A young man tries to explain to a young woman the utility of coffee shops as incubators for creativity

## CHARACTERS

SARA, a young woman

DAVID, a young man

## SETTING

A coffee shop

## SCENE 1

Sitting at a small table in a coffee shop, staring at two paper coffee cups, a young man and a young woman.

DAVID

Ready?

SARA

(looking around, eager)

Always.

DAVID

Pick up your cup, then, and take a sip.

Sara lifts cup, takes sip, puts down cup, stares at it.

SARA

Bitter.

DAVID

That's what creative people are supposed to love. Coffee, black, usually bitter, but smooth if the price is right.

SARA

(rapid fire)

OK. But if they're creative people, wouldn't they be experimenting? With sweetness, color, and so forth?

DAVID

(lifting his hands)

Slow down. Slow down. Take it easy. One step at a time.

(small laugh)

They told me you were quick; that I'd have to kind of dampen your enthusiasm a bit. Your reboot must have been --

SARA

(with emphasis)

-- New. Generation. Plus. Plus!

DAVID  
(with resignation)

Right.

(pause)

Continuing...

SARA  
Creative people came here...

DAVID  
All manner of people came here. Some would line up at a cashier --

SARA  
-- they paid?

DAVID  
Of course, it was the custom. They'd pay, get their cup -- usually too hot to handle, imagine that -- and leave. Others would take their coffees and sit at one of these undersized tables --

SARA  
-- why such small tables?

DAVID  
We're getting sidetracked.  
(off her look)  
Firstly, it clearly increased the establishment's profits. Second, to encourage what was perhaps believed to be a sense of togetherness, community.

SARA  
Togetherness. So unnecessary.

DAVID  
Of course, profits diminished when people stayed too long, either because they had nowhere else to go or because they were creative and --

SARA  
Great. Let's stick to the creative part.

DAVID

(annoyed)

Moving on... It is well established and accepted that creative people took their coffees black and that non-creative people added other ingredients that changed their coffee's color and taste.

SARA

(takes a sip of her coffee)

And that made them less creative or were they like that all the time?

DAVID

There is no hint about that. Cause and effect are not known in this case.

SARA

First item on my agenda.

DAVID

What? Cause and effect? I don't think that's a good idea.

SARA

That's for me to decide.

DAVID

All that matters is that black coffee... Look, we have urgent things on our plate, not least of which is our mission in rediscovering mankind's imagination and creativity.

SARA

Are you telling me what I should and shouldn't do?

DAVID

Black coffee does it. That's all that matters.

SARA

What's your creativity score?

DAVID

That's irrelevant.

SARA

Your score!

DAVID

It's your creativity we must concentrate on. I've been instructed to simply ensure --

SARA

-- I know, to update me with all known details --

DAVID

-- necessary details --

SARA

-- I'll decide what's necessary and what isn't -- about creative incubators. I'm here for whatever background you can provide about so-called "coffee shops" and then move on. Now let's be quick about it. Quick, quick, quick.

DAVID

Why do you insist on interrupting me?

SARA

Let's move on.

DAVID

(exasperated)

This is really quite -- This is slowing us down. It is hugely inefficient.

SARA

I'm not going to argue about what I should and shouldn't concentrate my efforts on. Let's move on and address "disruptive technologies" --

DAVID

I'll be passing you on to my colleague --

SARA

-- OK. Good. Are we done with coffee and coffee shops, and these unimaginative but supposedly creative people who drank only black coffee?

DAVID

Hold it!

SARA

(takes another sip)

But this coffee is beginning to taste good.

DAVID

Hold it. This is important. I have vital information.

(pause)

Writers, poets, even scientists, developed some of their most creative works or breakthroughs in such plain surroundings.

SARA

(excited)

Then we must build as many of them as possible at once!

DAVID

(sarcastic)

Suddenly coffee and coffee shops are important again?

SILENCE. They glare at each other for a while.

DAVID

(less sarcastic)

But creative people must have been only a fraction of the shop's clientele, and they frequently spent inordinate amounts of time here.

SARA

Like us? Now?

SILENCE.

DAVID

There are other reasons people chose to spend time sitting here.

SARA

(combative)

Drinking or just wasting their uncreative and useless time?

DAVID

Pairs of people would come here on planned dates to meet and talk -- the coffee itself was much like a theatrical prop -- or sometimes an uninvited or unwanted person would sit down at an empty chair and strike up a conversation --

SARA

A creative conversation, I assume.



DAVID

According to our records, some of these conversations were quite disruptive.

SARA

At last! Creative and disruptive!

DAVID

Not quite.

SARA

These pairs of people were writers, poets, scientists?

DAVID

Not always.

SARA

Too bad.

DAVID

It seems that the disruption was either to their own lives or to the other clients in the shop.

SARA

To their lives?

(looks around)

The other clients?

DAVID

Disturbing the other clients.

SARA

By arguing.

DAVID

Yes.

SARA

Like we are now.

DAVID

So it seems.

SARA

(laughing)

This is finally... Now were getting somewhere. We are discovering the uses of these places for ourselves. But why here?

DAVID

I have been instructed --

SARA

Oh, stop that.

(mimics David)

I have been instructed...

(back to her normal voice)

Lighten up, will you? We have only a minute left.

DAVID

I don't think you are taking this seriously.

SARA

At least we are establishing that you're thinking. Of course I am. Taking this seriously. I am being asked to find a more effective --

DAVID

-- efficient --

SARA

-- effective way of harnessing imagination and creativity. Apparently, according to your homework, if I may be so bold as to extrapolate from the little you said that made any sense, to me at least, coffee shops have served mankind as creative incubators for centuries. Coffee shops were hardly profit centers, by your accounts, anyway, at least not to the proprietors, it seems, unless, of course, they had massive take-out clients, paying for whatever color of coffee they preferred to take out, but were hugely effective, the coffee shops, that is, as vessels for getting artistic and scientific breakthroughs off the ground. The secret, according to you, and not to be questioned, is black coffee -- mind you, I am beginning to like black coffee, the bitterness is definitely fading --

DAVID

(now anxious)

-- your reboot must have a glitch --

SARA

-- and you also covered other uses for coffee shops like airing grievances in public between willingly or unwillingly paired people, who, if you are correct, are not likely to be creative in themselves per se. Is this the gist of what you have to update me with right now, because we almost hit the time limit of ten minutes? One thing I must contradict you with, however, is that it is my firm belief -- based on our ten-minute interaction, data-driven, all too lightly, as it was -- that creative people would never have submitted, at least not in their cognitive domains, to external pressure by unimaginative or fearful authorities and their lackeys into avoiding or reshaping certain unpleasant matters or topics that the so-called authorities wanted them to avoid or reshape --

DAVID

-- Hold it!

He puts his hand to his forehead for a few moments.

DAVID

(as if talking to someone not there)

Are you sure? Really?

(turns to Sara, speaks grudgingly)

It seems I am to congratulate you. You passed our test. It must be a mistake.

SARA

Amazing. What did I do right?

DAVID

It's all quite ridiculous. It seems that you questioned the coffee. The blackness of the coffee.

SARA

I'm thrilled! Don't you see? Taking your coffee black is just a metaphor for not letting small issues like taste and puffery get in the way of the bigger picture.

(pause)

By the way, you never touched your own coffee. Is there something wrong with it?

END

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