

# Destructive pride vs beneficial pride essay sample



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Is pride beneficial? At what point does pride become destructive? In the three short stories, "The Lesson", "The Cask of Amontillado", and "The Scarlet Ibis," each protagonist displays a sense of pride and confidence in their actions. Sylvia of Toni Cade Bambara's "The Lesson", is brought to a toystore by Miss Moore, an educated neighbor. She realizes that the only people who can afford to pay the outrageous prices on toy boats and clowns are successful people, and she resolves to be a part of that success. In "The Cask of Amontillado" by Edgar Allan Poe, Montresor is insulted by Fortunato, and he sets a trap for his transgressor, taking his revenge in murder. The narrator of "The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst, recalls a time when he attempted to teach his crippled, invalid brother, Doodle, to walk, but pushed him too far and killed him. The actions of these characters are driven by pride, which proves to be either beneficial or destructive.

In "The Lesson", Sylvia struggles to overcome obstacles presented by social inequality. When she and her friends are brought to an upscale toystore, they are forced to come to the realization that as uneducated blacks, they are at a disadvantage. Where most of Sylvia's friends are in awe of the toys, Sylvia herself is mostly ashamed to know her family would never be able to "spend on a toy what it would cost to feed a family of six or seven." (223) A bit of anger on the part of Sylvia at this injustice can also be seen when she and her friends are marveling at the price on the fiberglass boat; she says, "We just stare at that price tag.

Then Sugar run a finger over the whole boat. And I'm jealous and want to hit her. Maybe not her, but I sure want to punch somebody in the mouth." (222) Sylvia's confusion and anger stems from her pride, but we see that her pride

is actually beneficial to her, as it is the key element that enables her to learn the lesson so well. Toward the end, she says, " And somethin weird is goin on, I can feel it in my chest, " (223) referring to an inner struggle that is the conflict of the story. When Sugar suggests going down to Hascombs (223), Sylvia turns her down and decides to hold her money, showing us that she has indeed learned the lesson. Finally, Sylvia declares, " Ain't nobody gonna beat me at nuthin," and we can draw upon the conclusion that her determination and confidence will help her become successful.

Destructive pride is developed as a theme in " The Cask of Amontillado" by Edgar Allen Poe. When Montresor is insulted by Fortunato, his honor and pride lead him to take his revenge in murder. We can only guess at the nature of the insult, but several clues in the text tells us it may be a derogatory remark concerning the decline of Montresor's once respected family; in response to Fortunato's admiration of the extensive underground vaults, Montresor says, " The Montresors were a great and numerous family." ( ) The " were" causes one to wonder, what is the social status of the Montresors now and how many of them are they now? Apparently, none, because after Montresor has sent away the servants, no one is left at home. ( ) Also, when Montresor and Fortunato have traveled deep into the vaults, Fortunato, now sufficiently intoxicated, throws an empty wine flagon into the air- a gesture of the influential Freemasons. When confusion shows on Montresor, Fortunato laughs, and mockingly responds, " You? A Mason? Impossible!", further insulting the family, and increasing the tension. Montresor ultimately seals Fortunato in a casket of stone and mortar,

undoubtedly sealing his own fate in the process as well; the murder remains on Montresor's conscience for the rest of his life.

The narrator of "The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst is ashamed of having a cripple for a brother, and so he pushes Doodle to learn and walk. On his pride, he says, "I did not know then that pride is a wonderful, terrible thing, a seed that bears two vines, life and death." ( ) His dignity is what motivates him to teach Doodle. Because he is disappointed at having a brother who cannot do any of the things boys like to do with their brothers, he resolves to make Doodle conform. In the end, the narrator feels frustrated and angry at Doodle for his slow progress, so he runs ahead and leaves him behind, saying:

"The knowledge that our plans had come to nothing was bitter, and that streak of cruelty within me awakened. I ran as fast as I could, leaving him far behind with a wall of rain dividing us. Soon I could hear his voice no more."

( )

Doodle's heart bursts as a result, and the narrator is brought to regret his actions. His pride has helped Doodle to walk, but the pride of both brothers has killed Doodle.

Where pride is beneficial, the protagonist is positively motivated by their pride. Such is the case with Sylvia, whose pride grows into a desire to become successful. Her determination and strong-mindedness gives us the reassurance that she will, indeed, rise from the unfortunate circumstances into which she was born. Likewise, pride that destroys drives people to act out of character. Destructive pride is seen in Montresor, whose dignity

causes him to kill Fortunato, and in the narrator of “ The Scarlet Ibis”, whose pride has killed Doodle.