

# Learning her lesson

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Teenagers will do anything to be liked. Desperate for popularity, they act before they think, making rash decisions in the heat of the moment. In his short story "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," F. Scott Fitzgerald offers a commentary on the fickleness and danger of popularity. Despite her flaws, the main character Bernice is shown in a favorable light as she learns the foolishness of living for the approval of her peers. As the story unfolds, Bernice changes from a shy, timid girl to one who is confident and stands up for herself.

The beginning of the story reveals Bernice as a pretty but uninteresting girl. Although desperately wanting to be popular and well-liked, Bernice does not understand how to go about achieving this goal. She is especially shy and tongue-tied around young men. Her timidity frustrated her popular cousin Marjorie, "I've never heard her say anything to a boy except that it's hot or the floor's crowded or that she's going to school in New York next year.... Thrilling".

Marjorie is not the only one who finds Bernice dull. A friend of Marjorie's, Otis Ormonde, considered using a club to hit Bernice over the head after being forced to dance with her for over an hour. Although Bernice understands she is not well-liked, she does not know how to remedy that until she receives much needed help from her cousin Marjorie. Marjorie began to tutor Bernice with specific instruction as to what to say and do. Bernice is delighted with the immediate improvement. "To Bernice the next week was a revelation.

With the feeling that people really enjoyed looking at her and listening to her came the foundation of self-confidence". With the help of Marjorie, she is able to interest the young men by discussing how she plans to bob her hair.

This intrigues those around Bernice and they begin to fight for her affection. Although Bernice still relies on Marjorie to provide interesting conversation, she grows in confidence and determination. As time goes on however, Bernice makes a fatal mistake.

Assured in her power, she begins to gain the attentions of Marjorie's beau, Warren. This does not make Marjorie happy. Facing the imminent loss of Warren's affections, Marjorie takes revenge on Bernice. Marjorie forces Bernice to go through with her idea of bobbing her hair, something Bernice had never planned to do. With her beautiful hair and tantalizing story gone, Bernice loses her charm. Marjorie won, or so she thinks.

Bernice, however, is no longer the shy girl who would do anything to be liked. After realizing that Marjorie had tricked her, Bernice decides to leave the town. But before she leaves, she impetuously decides to give Marjorie a taste of her own medicine. " Suddenly she drew in her breath sharply and an expression flashed into her eyes that a practised character reader might have connected vaguely with the set look she had worn in the barber's chair- somehow a development of it. It was quite a new look for Bernice and it carried consequences".

Bernice cuts off Marjorie's hair in her sleep, leaving Marjorie with a vivid reminder that Bernice had changed. She flings Marjorie's two long braids onto Warren's porch, exclaiming " Scalp the selfish thing," before running off into the night. By responding to Marjorie's actions the way she did, Bernice demonstrates that she had learned to stand up for herself. She does not let Marjorie have the last say, but instead, chooses to fight back. Fitzgerald's

short, colorful story demonstrates how easily someone's personality can be changed and molded to match those around them.

In order to gain popularity, Bernice changes who she is and how she acts. Although she ultimately behaved in a way that hurt her friendships and herself, through the experience, she gained confidence. Cutting off another person's hair out of spite is never a good idea, but the action, though foolish, showed Bernice had changed for the better.