

The story "sonny's  
blues" by james  
baldwin literature  
analysis essay



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"Sonny's Blues" is a story that revolves around two brothers who seem to have different perceptions about life. While Sonny is shown to be a drug addict and uneducated, his brother is educated and teaches in a local high school. Although he is a teacher, he adopts a poor lifestyle that symbolizes the issues of poverty and racism in the US. Sonny is an introvert and it takes some time before his brother could understand his ways of living.

In fact, it is at the end of the short story that his brother understands why he appears withdrawn from the family and society. The narrator was requested to look after Sonny by his mother before she died. He is married to Isabel and they have children. This essay aims at offering a literary analysis of the short story with an emphasis on the feelings of the narrator when his brother is performing at the club.

The raconteur has unique feelings as he watches his brother play jazz music at the nightclub. The realization of the narrator with regard to his brother's playing the piano begins when the duo are on their way to the club. He appears amazed about the location of the club, where his brother is going to perform. The surprise is obvious because the brothers have been living in "separate worlds". The narrator describes it as "...the only nightclub on a short, dark street, downtown" (Kennedy and Gioia 73).

He uses the description to imply the state of poor infrastructure in the neighborhood. In fact, if it was a neighborhood with wealthy people, it could not be located along a dark street. Further, the chronicler emphasizes on the poor state of the club by saying "...we squeezed through the narrow,

chattering, jam-packed bar to the entrance of the big room..." (Kennedy and Gioia 75). In addition, it is termed as the only nightclub in the location.

This implies that people in the area could not afford to go to clubs probably because of poverty. In areas where affluent people live, there are many nightclubs because citizens have extra cash to spend there. Thus, the description provides a clear feeling of the narrator that they are living in a locality with poor quality of living standards. In fact, the realization helps him to heal a culture problem, which he has been suffering from over a long time.

While watching Sonny play at the nightclub, the storyteller realizes that he has played the role of a guardian in helping his brother achieve his goal in life. He was requested by his mother to ensure that his brother did well in life. Just a few days before his mother died, she called him to tell him a few things with regard to life. She spent some time looking for Sonny on the streets, but with no success. She told the narrator " you may not be able to stop anything from happening.

But you got to let him know you's there" (Kennedy and Gioia 58). Although Sonny did not complete his education, his brother had tried to ensure that he went to school while staying at Isabel's place. In addition, the chronicler aimed at making his brother happy by allowing him to play the piano because he showed much interest in it. Thus, it could be concluded that his consciousness is being redefined and he appreciates the role of a collective consciousness in upbringing children in the society.

The realization with regard to the narrator could be likened to that of the military people who do not spend quality time with their children. Walsh and <https://assignbuster.com/the-story-sonnys-blues-by-james-baldwin-literature-analysis-essay/>

colleagues (35) conducted a study to investigate the quality of parenting that is exhibited by men in the military. The researchers found that many male military personnel felt that they were not present to influence their children during critical period of development.

In fact, they expressed fear that their children could not grow as desired because they missed the "father figure" in the family. In addition, the narrator did not influence his brother when he was in the early years of life, which could have greatly contributed to his taking hard drugs. However, he did not give up with regard to helping Sonny become a responsible person in life. For example, he asserts that he kept thinking about his sibling and he sent him letters.

This exhibits the level of concern that the raconteur showed for Sonny. An important realization that gets into the narrator's mind when watching his brother perform at the club is the fact that Sonny is now a grown-up, who can look after himself. In fact, he is amazed that almost everyone in the nightclub knows Sonny for his meticulous performance of jazz music. Thus, it could be concluded that he is happy to have accomplished his mother's dream.

The chronicler comprehends that music could be an excellent platform on which to understand his sibling. It is clear that the brothers have been having tensions in the past based on their perceptions of life. In fact, it is documented that the raconteur was insensitive with regard to issues of his brother while Sonny looked at him with a lot of admiration and optimism. The

epiphany of the narrator at the nightclub could be termed as a sentimental delusion, which could be explained by many incidents in the short story.

Sonny planned to go to India at the age of 14 because he believed that he could gain a substantial amount of wisdom in the country (Kennedy and Gioia 60). Although his brother knew that the decision could not benefit him, he did not explain to Sonny the demerits of travelling to India. Instead, he asserted “ with those people walking naked and barefoot through hot coals would only be getting away from wisdom” (Kennedy and Gioia 65). The assertion, from a brother, could have caused much psychological suffering.

In fact, the suffering could be one of the factors that made Sonny take drugs. The raconteur is haunted by Sonny's words in the music, which seem to be very powerful. While listening to his brother, the raconteur thinks “ I seemed to hear with what burning he had made it his, with what burning we had yet to make ours, how we could cease lamenting...” (Kennedy and Gioia 75).

He has not only heard the piano play, but also the story being narrated by Sonny. It is at this point that the raconteur appreciates his brother's passion for music. The significance of music in life cannot be underestimated. It has been shown that “ music, a human phenomenon, is hailed as a source of personal and collective identity, a means of individual expression, a social fact” (Campbell, Connell and Beegle 235).

Through listening to the music, Sonny's brother learns that it could be utilized to deliver expressive meaning in an excellent manner. Ultimately, he views music as a medium via which people with different perceptions in life could connect and communicate without being insensitive.

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The performance at the nightclub by Sonny makes his brother have a metaphysical experience and learn about important lessons in life. From a metaphysical perspective, the narrator can now appreciate that some unknown forces could impact an individual's destiny. For example, he could not imagine that his brother could become a person to be admired in the society. However, almost everyone at the club acknowledges Sonny as a meticulous pianist (Kennedy and Gioia 75).

Although the narrator held different perceptions in life in relation to his brother, some unknown forces have ensured that the two finally come to understand each other. They are headed to better living. The storyteller has learned some essential lessons with regard to general life.

The transformation of his brother has made him understand the importance of letting siblings and children do what they want in life. Through the music being played by his brother, he appreciates that parents and guardians should not scoff at their children. As an alternative, they should give them an opportunity to express their feelings in a free manner. Finally, he learns that children should obey their parents by taking care of their siblings.

The ending of the short story plays a significant role in shaping the perceptions of the raconteur with regard to issues in life. He uses the music being played by Sonny as a platform on which changes could be addressed. The metaphysical experience and lessons learned will make the narrator adopt a better relationship with his brother.

Campbell, Patricia S., Claire Connell, and Amy Beegle. " Adolescents' expressed meanings of music in and out of school." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 55. 3 (2007): 220-236. Print.

Kennedy, Joseph., and Dana Gioia. " Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama". London, United Kingdom: Longman Publishers, (2007). Print.

Walsh, Tova B., Carolyn Dayton, Michael Erwin, Maria Muzik, Alexandra Busuito, and Katherine Rosenblum." *Fathering after Military Deployment: Parenting Challenges and Goals of Fathers of Young Children.*" *Health & social work* 39. 1 (2014): 35- 44. Print.