

Sonny's blues



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Running Head: Sonny's Blues Sonny's Blues s Sonny's Blues How does the character of the narrator (Sonny's brother) compare to that of Sonny? Sonny's older brother is an unnamed character in the story and also the narrator; the entire is told from his perspective. Sonny's brother is the exact antithesis of sonny, a wayward young African-American who got addicted to heroin at an early age. The main root cause of Sonny's delinquency is his addiction; however, unlike other African-American males Sonny is not violent or brutal but has a lot of emotions but doesn't know how to express them. On the other hand, Sonny's brother is an upright math teacher and a family man. Though, he always steers clear of trouble but feels trapped in Harlem and yet, chooses to remain passive about it. Sonny's character depicts restlessness and even though Sonny's brother too experiences that restlessness they both have different ways of exhibiting them and coping with such feelings.

2. What are the conflicts in the story (internal and external)? The entire story depicts various conflicts both the narrator and the protagonist face and eventually pave their paths in life. The conflicts that sonny and the narrator are constantly battling with are the feeling of being trapped in Harlem and their estranged relationship with each other. They both understand the problems they have faced throughout their lives, but due to the fact that none of them truly took the time to share and divulge their feelings to one another, none of them could truly understand each other. Moreover, Sonny's older brother had taken up the responsibility of looking after his brother after his mother died but due to the way he turned out, the narrator was always suffering from this guilt. On the other hand, the external conflict would be battling with the societal condition that exacerbated their internal conflicts even more. Racism pervaded the society

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and the African-American youth was in the clutches of drugs and violence. There is not much hope for the African American youth in the society and this is what greatly distressed the Narrator, who was teaching young boys and girls; he felt highly dejected when he thought about the bleakness of their futures. These were all very perturbing facts of the society they were living in and the efforts to attain a high living standard was all that everyone was battling for.

3. Why has Baldwin set the story in Harlem? What is the significance of time and place - the environment where both brothers were raised? The story shows a post World-War II New York, when the society was being revolutionized and New York had turned into a major center for artistic and musical accomplishments. Moreover, many African American boys had served in the army and had moved to New York in search of more job opportunities; however, there were more slums than job opportunities and the two brothers were trying to make a good life for them despite what was going on in America after they returned from the war. Sonny's blues actually signify the immense frustration that was experienced by the African-American, which eventually transformed into an artistic movement that was based in Harlem. Thus, the story actually focuses on the Harlem Renaissance period to also focus on the Political and Artistic significance of the period from an African American perspective.

4. Why did Sonny do drugs? Sonny and the narrator both belonged to an impoverished African American settled in New York. It was a time in the United States when African American people were vastly oppressed and racism was rampant. His life had been extremely hard and having lost his parents at an early, Sonny's sense of security was greatly hampered. He wanted to be a Jazz musician but no one understood his dreams and as a result, he dropped out of school and started hanging out

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with his friends, who got him into drugs. It is understandable as to why he turned to them because the euphoric sensation those drugs gave him provided an easy way out of all his life's trouble. It helped him forget and feel relived; however, eventually he is incarcerated for his addiction and realizes what a big mistake he made.

5. Why did the narrator feel he would tell Sonny "empty words and lies" if he told him "it was all within"? He felt that by telling him that life is made beautiful by one's own willpower and struggle, and happiness is from within. However, he felt that this advice was "empty words and lies" because he did not believe whatever he was telling his brother. Since, he could not practice what he preached; he understood the hollowness of his words and therefore felt as if he were telling a lie.

6. Why is music "life or death" to Sonny? What were "Sonny's Blues"? The most pivotal theme of this story is that of music. The Harlem Renaissance period was a major era during which a very prominent musical revolution took place and even to the protagonist that is Sonny, music was 'life or death' for him. From an early age, sonny wanted to become a Jazz musician. Though, his passion for music was met with great opposition from his brother, for sonny either he will live on to pursue his dream as an artist or die trying. He lived for music and was willing to die trying to be one, but never gave it up for anyone. The title of the story also becomes the title of the song that sonny played with Creole at the end, and basically this musical piece was written by sonny in order to remind of the great hardships he had faced to come here this far. From his turbulent family life to his heroin addiction, these were all Sonny's Blues.

7. Why does it take so long for the brother to listen - to hear Sonny? When does he finally hear, and what does he hear? It takes a while for him because, the brother is too caught up in his

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pride and in some ways deems himself superior to sonny. It is only after his daughter dies when he realizes that he should make amends with him before it is too late. And finally in the end when he actually hears sonny play the piano he truly realizes and experiences his immaculate passion for music and accepts his brother as he is. He hears the soulful tune that he plays and at that point, all his antagonism towards him dream faded away and he accepted sonny, his brother for what he really was - a musician. 8. Why does the narrator have no name in the story? The narrator remains unnamed throughout the story because this story is not really about him but his brother. His brother is the protagonist the should of the story and it is just his perspective on him in order to direct the reader's attention towards sonny's character from a third person point of view so he can understood better and not be judged for what he did in his life. Reference: Baldwin, J. 1957. Sonny's Blues. PDF cast. Web. <http://pdfcast.org/pdf/sonny-s-blues-by-james-baldwin>