

# Maggie: a girl of the streets essay sample

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## Introduction

What life has to offer a person who lives in pure squalor, extreme poverty, utterly imperfect family, and cruel society? Can such person who is denied of a fine family and caring parents develop good virtues and grow morally? These are the questions that every reader tries to mull over Stephen Crane's novel titled 'Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.'

The story tells about the indispensable role of the family in molding children and young people. Parents, being the role model of every household, play an integral role in guiding their children the way they should go and giving them material, emotional and spiritual needs. Society also has a great role in protecting its members against injustice, immorality, depravity, and criminality through strict justice system and good governance.

## Story's general outline

The story starts with a gang fight between young boys in the Bowery. Young Jimmy fights against the "Devil's Row" gang in order to save the "honor of Rum Alley," a place in the Bowery.[1] When his comrades run away, Jimmy fights alone with rage and viciousness. Before the "champion" of the Rum Alley succumbs to the devils, he is rescued by Pete, a disdainful and self-assured young boy.[2] Jimmy is the brother of Maggie, the protagonist of the story. Maggie, formerly a naïve and beautiful young girl, becomes the girlfriend of Pete. Aside from Jimmy, Maggie has a little brother named Tomy who later died after a few years.

Her father, Mr. Johnson, is a drunkard who also died at the latter part of the story. Mary, the mother of the brutal household which Mr. Johnson calls as “hell”, is an alcoholic woman who becomes nasty and utterly vicious whenever she gets drunk and who represents the ‘devil’ in the story. Nelly, on the other hand, is the woman in the latter part of the novel who convinces Pete to leave Maggie and who later on abandons the former.[3]

The story presents Jimmy as the man ‘who could have been.’ As a kid, he fought against the young ‘devils’ in the Bowery for the ‘honor of Rum Alley.’ At a very young age and in spite of the seemingly innate cruelty inside their household, the young Jimmy had already formed his simple concept of good and evil.

However, he turned into a broken man due to the savageness of his own parents and the innate imperfectness of his family and the society where he lives. Maggie, on the other hand, could have grown into a fine young lady had it not been for her own innocence, the cruelty of her mother and brother who sent her away, and the seduction of Pete who also abandoned her. Because of her own misfortune, Maggie became a prostitute. At the end of the story, Pete broke the news to Mary that her daughter was found dead.

The concept of evil

Life in the Bowery fits the word “hell.” As a young kid, Jimmy engaged in a series of gang fights against other young boys in the Bowery. At home, the siblings witnessed traumatic and horrible scenes which should not be seen by young children who are in the stage of cognitive development.

Maggie and Jimmy saw how their ruthless and alcoholic mother drank herself into a stupor, perhaps, almost everyday. They witnessed the regular fights of their drunkard parents. People in the neighborhood frequently engaged in gossiping. Maggie, Pete, and Pete lived in a place where gang fights probably almost happen everyday, where people do not have sense of responsibility, and where depravity, decadence and criminality are probably an everyday scene.

All of them worked in sweatshops where exploitation, poor working condition, and abuses are a commonplace. The story is actually set during the industrial revolution wherein industrial accidents were rampant and where employees had limited or few rights. Maggie worked as a factory worker in a clothing company. His brother Jimmy worked as a teamster, while Pete worked as a bartender. All of them engaged in and dealt with violence, abuses, and exploitation at their respective workplaces. The cumulative abuses they experienced at home, including the violence they suffered or witnessed around them, shaped their lives.

## Solutions

If I were an upper-class reformer, there are problems associated with lower-class life that must be addressed. In regard to the irresponsibility of parents, the best thing to do is to sponsor, conduct, or to encourage the local government to carryout a series of seminars on responsible parenthood.

However, this is not enough to work on the problems in the Bowery. Poverty is the reason why parents are irresponsible. Because of unemployment, most

parents, like Mary and her husband, busied themselves drinking everyday. And because of their inability to improve their lives, they would later on cast their baseless rage on their children.

Employment serves an integral role in combating poverty. Another solution is to lobby the local or national government to encourage local investment in order to create more jobs. Since the local government cannot afford to give jobs to people, it may engage in micro-lending by allowing responsible and skilled citizens to borrow money at a minimal interest. This is to make the people, especially the parents, busy. Also, this action will make them self-reliant and more responsible parents and citizens.

In regard to violence at home and against women, a law that aims to protect women, children, and the defenseless can be a good solution. This is justified under the *parens patriae* doctrine seeks government intervention in case parents are the abusers themselves or in case they failed to protect or defend their children. With respect to workers, they need a law that protects their rights against industrial accidents, abuses of employers, and exploitation.

Domestic violence, neglect, abandonment, and poor working conditions drove Maggie to take the risky road to oblivion. With no one to help her, Maggie thought of no other way to survive— to amble down the dark alleys and streets of perilous New York to work as a prostitute.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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[1] Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 2

[2] Ibid, 3

[3] Ibid, 6