

Developing his self in us and them essay example

[Life](#), [Friendship](#)



In "Us and Them", David Sedaris writes about his childhood when he finds a family that is very different from every family he knows. Sedaris writes about his younger self from an adult view. This view shows the amusement and sadness he finds about his life when he was young. When he was young, he did some things to other people that were not kind. He shows he does not approve of the way he acted as a child. An important message in "Us and Them" is that children are learning about themselves by watching to see how other people act and that their actions come directly from these childhood views.

The first impression a child has about what is normal in life comes from the parents. Sedaris writes, "I adopted my mother's attitude, as it allowed me to pretend that not making friends was a conscious choice. I could if I wanted to. It just wasn't the right time" (798). Sedaris's mother had an unusual way of having friends. When he was young, he thinks it is the normal way to think about friends. This is why he remains aloof from the strange Tomkey family even though he is very interested in them. When he writes "it allowed me to pretend," this quote also shows that now when he is an adult, he understands why he acted that way when he was a child. The young David Sedaris does not understand it is okay for people to be different from his own family. He does not think about how his actions can hurt other people. The young Sedaris tries to be like his mother, and remains detached from other people even though he observes them very closely, even spying on them. Young Sedaris is very concerned about what is normal and what is not normal. He is concerned about this because he is learning about himself and what people expect from him. However, like all children, he wants life to be

exciting. This need for excitement makes him to spy on all of his neighbors at night, but he is unhappy to find that they only sit at home and view television. This is one reason why he finds the Tomkey family so interesting, because they do not have a television. This makes them to be a family that is not normal to young Sedaris. He thinks this means that watching them will be more interesting, but he also sees them with a pity or even scorn. “ What must it be like to be so ignorant and alone?” he thinks about the Tomkey family because they do not have television (800). When the Tomkey family does things that are not like what his family would do, he says, “ I attributed their behavior to the fact that they didn’t have a TV” (801). It is very interesting that he thinks this Tomkey family is the best possibility for observing an exciting life but that also he pities them because they do not have a television. Now that he is older and writing as an adult, he can see this irony, but as a child he did not.

As a child, he thinks to himself that he should not become friends with the Tomkey family because it “ would have taken away from their mystery and interfered with the good feeling I got from pitying them. So I kept my distance” (800). This shows how he has learned the lesson from his mother about friendship, and believes that he is making a choice not to have the Tomkey family as friends. Never does he consider the idea that the Tomkey family would not accept him as a friend. He never dares to speak to them and so he can imagine that the permission to be friends or not to be friends remains all his decision. In childhood, people do not always understand that the fear of being different and about being rejected is a strong thing. By taking his mother’s attitude about friendship, it protects young Sedaris from

possible rejection by the Tomkey family.

The way young Sedaris acts is very shameful. For example, he eats the candy that makes him sick so he will not be able to share it with the Tomkey family. Although there are much more terrible things a person can do, it is amazing that Sedaris can write about himself in this very honest and critical way. It is very difficult to like or admire a little boy who acts like a selfish animal. By telling readers the truth about how he used to think and act, Sedaris shows everyone that he has grown from his experience. The television is a symbol of what was normal when he was a child. The television allowed him to escape from unhappy realities. It is easy to see why so many families in this story seemed to do nothing but watch television. This part of Sedaris's story does not tell readers how he managed to get away from the television and to learn about himself. It does not show how he became a better person. But readers know from his honest story that now he knows he was wrong and has learned to be a better person.

Sedaris tells the reader about a part of his childhood where he had different examples about what is normal. His mother's ideas about friendship, his pity for the Tomkey family because they did not watch television and the situation of eating the candy show a young man who still lives by a fantasy of what is normal. It shows a young man who thinks the answers to his problems in life can be easily answered by going to a mother or a television show. It shows a young man who has not yet looked outside of himself to develop sympathy for other people or things that are different. He tells his story as a memory of an adult to show the reader that even if the things he

observed in childhood did not change his actions for the good at the time, as an adult he has become a greater person from seeing his behavior as a child.

Works Cited

Sedaris, David. ““ Us and Them”.” *The Norton Field Guild to Writing*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013. 798-804. Print.