

A reading response on ap by john updike essay example

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John Updike's short story entitled "A&P" is a portrayal of the notions of conformity and rebellion in the pervasive force that was the postwar American consumerism. A small group of girls, led by a character named Queenie, brazenly walks into a store wearing only their bikinis, showing a display of pseudo-sexual power and self-confidence. While their flaunting evokes more than disturbed gazes by other customers and the male workers, who make significant eye gesticulations and pour waterfalls of lewd comments, the effect the girls, especially Queenie, have on Sammy is a reformatory one. He becomes aware that so far, his profoundly inquisitive observations have been aimed at others, and now is the time to focus them on himself. Thus, he takes the first step towards his self-liberation, following the surprising example given by a group of teenage girls.

The girls' unabashed prancing around the store is a portrait of their deliberate disregard for the rules, social ones as well as sexual ones, because they present their beautiful, young, tanned bodies as a provocation. For Sammy, who noticed them exactly because of this, the bathing suits develop into a personal connotation of freedom and breaking away from a rut he has found himself in. Despite the fact that Queenie swans around the isles in search of her Herring Snacks, which serve as a symbol of the upper class she apparently belongs to, as opposed to Sammy's working class family and their gatherings, she is still brought down by the words of the manager: "Girls, this isn't the beach I don't want to argue with you. After this come in here with your shoulders covered. It's our policy." They leave the store with much less self-confidence than on their walking in, but a significant change occurs in Sammy. He decides to quit his job, initially to

impress the Queenie, but in essence, it is really a change towards self-liberation.

In the end, Sammy decides to rebel against the rigid society with so many imposing policies, but simultaneously he is aware that the path he has chosen is wrought with difficulty: " I felt how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter." His moment of epiphany is complete, because he has chosen the path of rebellion, not the path of conformity.

References:

Updike, John. " A&P." Web. 10 Feb. 2012. <http://www.tiger-town.com/whatnot/updike/>