

# Essay on analysis of sonny's blues by james baldwin

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The book *Sonny's Blues* by James Baldwin is a masterpiece in terms of bringing out the theme of pain and suffering encountered by African Americans after World War II. This paper intends to analyze this book in terms of its plot structure, character and character change, the narrator's point of view, and its setting. The analysis seeks to explain how James Baldwin, the author, uses these features of his story to further the story's overall theme.

Focusing on the plot structure of the book *Sonny's Blues*, James Baldwin structures his plot in a way that he systematically addresses two important spheres with the African American community. First of all he starts off with explaining the problems that were facing African Americans in this period and the effects they cause to the African American society. He achieves this by bringing in the idea of Sonny being put in prison for selling and using illicit substances like Heroin. Drug use was a great problem in the African American society at this time. It was away to help the society forget about the resentment and discrimination that they faced in the American society during the post-war period. This is an excellent way of furthering the theme of pain and suffering in that it brings out how the African Americans tried to reduce pain and suffering. The agony of Sonny's friend who comes to the school gate to inform Sonny's elder brother of the arrest of Sonny is a clear exemplification of how these problems affected many people in the African American society. Secondly, James Baldwin then goes ahead to explain the remedy for the pain and suffering facing African Americans in the post-war period. He achieves this by structuring the plot in a way that Sonny and his elder brother come to terms and can now understand each other. In this way

they are more united and support each other. For example Sonny's elder brother goes to see his brother perform and he comes to understand that music was the way Sonny used to reduce the effect of the trauma resulting from the discrimination of African Americans in the United States. By addressing these two important spheres, James Baldwin is able to further the theme of pain and suffering.

Looking at character and character change, James Baldwin first of all creates his plot in a way that Sonny and his elder brother don't get along. During the time that they are separated and not caring for each other, they suffer a lot. For example, it is event from the letter that Sonny's elder brother wrote to Sonny while in prison that he suffered from mental stress during the period when the two brothers were separated. Sonny's elder brother describes his feeling as a struggle of "... trying to climb out of some deep, real deep funky hole" (Baldwin 76). He feels that there was need for a connection between him and his younger brother in order to eradicate this feeling. In fact, the mother of these two brothers had advised Sonny's elder brother to take care of his younger brother, Sonny, before she died so that he would not end up losing him as his father lost his brother who was ran over by a car full of drunk white men in the night (Baldwin 82). Sonny on the other hand suffered on his own in prison since the two brothers did not communicate with each other when Sonny was in prison. However, after the two brothers change and begin to cooperate, they begin to understand each other which eventually make them lead a happier life.

Shifting gears to the narrator's point of view, the narrator of Sonny's Blues narrates the story in first person making the readers feel that they are receiving first hand information. By using first person the narrator is reliable since he understands the characters better and can clearer describe them to the reader. The narrator's description helps the reader for imagery in their minds about how specific characters looked like. For example, the narrator describes one of Sonny's friends who is also a musician as being "... coal black, cheerful looking man, build close to the ground" (Baldwin 93). In this way the readers are able to perceive this character as being a short and every happy. By telling the story in first person, the narrator is also able to give his own opinion about the influence of given characters within the story thereby affecting perception of these characters by the reader. For example, when Sonny stays for a couple of days without playing music, the narrator explains that " the silence of the next few days must have been louder than the sound of all music ever played since time began"(Baldwin 87). This statement is his own opinion which makes readers perceive Sonny as being a very important character within the story in that he helped cheer up his audience.

Moving to the setting of the story, James Baldwin sets his story in Harlem a city that was faced by a lot of poverty and racial discrimination. Due to these modes of suffering, many African Americans rise up to the occasion by using music and political agitation to fight for their rights so that they can be treated equally like the other races within the American society. Through this setting of his story James Baldwin is able to show how African Americans

tried to free themselves from these problems in which they had been confined in.

In conclusion, James Baldwin is able to further the theme of pain and suffering facing African Americans by structuring the plot of his story in a way that it points out the pains and mode of suffering that faced African Americans and then explains the remedies to these pains and suffering. He also furthers that theme of pain and suffering through constructing dynamic characters that change over time in order to show the difference in the effects of pain and suffering when these characters are in cooperation or not. In addition, James Baldwin is able to further the theme of pain and suffering through the narrators' point of view that builds a gradual story of the cooperation between Sonny and his elder brother so as to slowly end the effect of pain and suffering. Finally, the setting of the story brings out the environment that African Americans faced and how this environment contributed to the pain and suffering facing the African American society.

## **Works Cited**

Baldwin, James. *Sonny's Blues*. Schulbuch: Klett Ernst, 2009. Print.