

An analysis of john updikes short story, aandp essay example

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John Updike's 1961 comic short story revolves around the day in the life of Sammy, a bachelor checkout assistant in an A&P grocery outlet. John Updike employs literary techniques to capture the attention of the reader. Through the deployment of literary techniques such as plot development, character development and the use of themes and symbolism, Updike manages to write a well balanced literary masterpiece that captures the reader's imagination.

The plot of the short story is comprehensively developed and it revolves around the life of Sammy, a cash register clerk at an A&P store. Sammy is undertaking his shift at his work station on a hot summer noon when three girls unexpectedly walk into the store. The three girl's presence in the store is unexpected because of their manner of dressing. They walk into the store in skimpy swimsuits while walking bare feet. They later make their intentions known - they were out to shop for herring snacks. Sammy contends that the girls are actually "dressed for a day in the beach" and if that was the case, then they wouldn't be deserving of the attention that they were getting because everyone in the beach dresses in swimsuits.

Sammy then quickly proceeds to appraise the girls in a sexual manner. He conceives details about the girls by strictly limiting his judgment to their appearances. However, when the leader of the trio, a shapely girl that Sammy has nicknamed Queenie eventually speaks within Sammy's hearing range, he is surprised that her voice is not what he thought it would be. The plot climaxes when the owner of the store then proceeds to give the girls a public dress down on how inappropriate their outfits were for the errands at hand. Sammy finds the behavior of his boss towards the girls to be

inappropriate. He thus proceeds to quit his job to express his solidarity with the girls thus offering a solution to the main conflict in the short story's plot. The major characters that Updike has developed to advance the story's plot include the protagonist Sammy. The reader reads the story through the eyes of the protagonist. Sammy is a hugely sarcastic and opinionated teenager with a typical keen interest on the opposite sex. He is very keen on detail and he quickly picks up on the events happening around him. This is how the girls in the store come to his attention. He goes beyond the physical appearance of the girls to deduce the probable insights on the girls. Sammy is equally contemptuous. He deems other customers at A&P to be "house slaves" and "sheep". He however realizes his inferiority in the presence of the rich and to prove that he too is destined for greatness and wealth he quits his job.

Updike introduces Lengel towards the end of the story. He occupies the manager's office at the store. Lengel represents the system and how things should ideally run. From his dealings with both the protagonist and the group of girls, Updike successfully depicts him as a stickler for decency. Updike uses Lengel as a source of conflict in the story's plot. A conflict that is eventually resolved at the end of the story.

Queenie is portrayed as the leader of the trio who are skimpily dressed for their shopping errand. She stretches the boundaries of decency. Updike uses her to occasion the conflict between the girls and the store's management. It's the combination of her vulnerability and confidence that jolts Sammy to pursue his ideal success pathway.

Stokesie is also another minor character in the story. The author uses

Stokesie as a reflection of Sammy's future. The possible future that Sammy envisions through the author's depiction of Stokesie is what motivates him to quit his job all together.

Desire and ambition is one of the major themes that Updike explores in the short story. This theme is explored through the author's characterization of Sammy. Sammy is a young man on the move. He believes that he is destined for better things in the not so far future. The other broad theme discussed in the text is that of conformity and rebellion as depicted in the conduct of the girls and Sammy. The girls will not conform to the society's decency rule the same way Sammy would no longer conform to his manager's desires.

The short story has also made good use of symbolism through the use of bathing suits. The bathing suits represent what is wrong with the society. Funny that people always get attracted to the societal wrongs hence the gazes that follow the girls as they shop in the store. Sammy's attention is drawn to the three girls just because they are inappropriately dressed. He even quits his job to express his solidarity with their actions. The use of bathing suits provides the manager with the opportunity to address the conflict in the plot and to amicably resolve it eventually.