

A and p by john updiike essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A&P When three girls in bathing suits enter an A & P, the life of a cashier named Sammy is changed forever. In John Updike's "A & P," Sammy seems to be a teenaged boy who makes an irrational decision to quit his job to impress some girls, but Sammy's actions are much deeper than that. This story is not necessarily about Sammy taking a stand for the three girls in the A & P, but it's really about Sammy taking a stand in his own life. If the reader really analyzes the character of Sammy, they will see that he was looking for personal gain and self-assurance.

Sammy's disrespectful attitude can be clearly seen when Updike wrote "You never know for sure how girls' minds work (do you really think it's a mind in there or just a little buzz like a bee in a glass jar?)" (Updike 734). When Sammy takes sides with the girls, he is choosing to rebel against the policy making society. Most readers would probably think Sammy is just a boy with a boring job, who gets so infatuated by a girl that he nicknames "Queenie" that he makes a poor life changing decision.

However, the names he gives all three of the girls that enter the A&P are very critical and condescending. In a sense Sammy seems almost like he looks down on the girls. There is an obvious admiration for the girls but not necessarily a vanity based admiration. On some level Sammy probably gets his admiration for Queenie's free, independent, and rebellious spirit confused with infatuation of her beauty. Queenie is attractive in the story, but Sammy seems awestruck and in complete shock of everything about her including the way she carries herself.

The way she carries herself is important to him obviously because he named her “Queenie”. The girls did not care what anyone thought, and their attitudes were refreshing to Sammy. The girls had been youthful and beautiful. At the beginning of the story Sammy’s thoughts about one of the girl’s legs are interpreted as a “witch about fifty with rouge on her cheekbones and no eyebrows”. This admiration Sammy has of the girls is so intense that it inspires him to stand up against his authority figure and ultimately the dreary adulthood that is his fate.

Sammy’s view towards the three girls is a key factor to this story. How Sammy views the girls is important not because of his attraction towards their appearance, but because of everything they stood for. Sammy was so baffled by the strangeness of the girl’s lack of clothing that he rang up a customer’s crackers twice by mistake. Even though Lengel is confrontational, and Sammy keeps his thoughts to himself, they both are still in agreement. The real reason Sammy quits is because of his own mixed emotions towards the girls.

Sammy didn’t like that he looked down on the girls. The contradiction and mixed emotion in his attitude made him quit, not a heroic gesture. Sammy didn’t want to be like his boss, Lengel. Sammy describes most everyone around him in the story in a very cynical way especially Lengel. Sammy gets very irritated when Lengel embarrasses the girls by stating “This isn’t the beach”. (Updike 736) However, Sammy’s sarcastic thoughts on Lengel’s remarks do not erase the fact that Sammy shares the same standards about which types of clothing are appropriate to specific social spaces.

Updike shows Sammy's conventional view towards clothing in specific settings in the sentence " You know, it's one thing to have a girl in a bathing suit down on the beach, where with the glare nobody can look at each other much anyway, and another thing in the cool of the A & P, under the fluorescent lights, against all those stacked packages, with her feet paddling along naked over our checkerboard green-and-cream rubber-tile floor. " (Updike 735) . Right after Lengel does this Sammy thinks " Society is what the kingpins want.

What everyone else wants is juvenile delinquency. "(Updike737). This is probably the moment when Sammy realizes that he is on the side of the kingpins. Sammy is doing the job and even having the same opinions as Lengel. Sammy was not on the delinquency side. Sammy describes the adults in the story by using names like pigs, cows, sheep, and house slaves. It's very clear that Sammy's view on adulthood is unflattering and critical. Sammy doesn't want to become one of these awful adults that he has described in such a cynical loathing way.

Updike wrote this story in first person through Sammy's point of view and thoughts. The first half of the story is thoughts, description, and very little action at all. Even though Sammy is the main character, he is a passive bystander through the first half of the story. It's not until Sammy starts thinking about quitting that the reader finds out Sammy's name in the second half of the story. Updike probably wrote it that way to demonstrate Sammy's character achieving his own independent identity in the story.

Sammy may lose his job at the end of the story, but he does his best to take control over his fate of conforming to adulthood. His job is not just a way of making money. His job is an act of initiation into the adulthood and policy making society. Stoksie, Mcman, Lengel, and Sammy are all men, and they run the A. The shoppers are almost all middle-aged unattractive women. The girls are flaunting their sexuality in a male controlled environment. This is a challenge, and it may make men behave in ways that are not obedient in the policy based society.

Female sexuality is dangerous and unpredictable, and it may influence an alternative way of thinking towards life that undermines the market place. The girls to Sammy are untouchable representations of sexuality, youth, nonconformity, and sincerity. Sammy's character in this story demonstrates that he is not performing a heroic, romantic act of chivalry. Sammy is simply inspired by the girl's ability to reject the values of this social world. Sammy does not want to fall into the trap of blind conformity by which young people grow up into horrible adults.