

Saturday before they
cooked and ate it...”



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Saturday Afternoon by Erskine Caldwell is a short story that conveys just how regular racism and violence had become in a small southern town during the early 20th century.

In the short story, the author, Erskine Caldwell, incorporates indirect characterization, and a passive tone. These elements fused together to allow the reader to experience just how ordinary violence was at this time. The characters that Caldwell creates for the story are pertinent to the story's setting and time. Readers can obtain a more in-depth assimilation of each character reflective upon their actions and mannerisms. Throughout the piece, Tom Denny's inner characterization is built through his attitudes, motives, and actions. In Tom's everyday life, he comes across as rather careless.

As the town's butcher, he sleeps on the meat and produce he sells to his neighbors. "The tobacco juice splattered on the floor midway between the meat block and cigar box. What little of it dripped on the piece of rump steak did not matter: most people cleaned their meat before they cooked and ate it.

..." Like other civilians, Tom was a white male in the working class, whom despite his exhaustion, wanted to please everybody. Caldwell does a fine job of painting a normal day in the life of Tom Denny. "All the town people who had wanted some of Tom's meat for Saturday dinner had already got what they needed, and it was too early in the day to buy Sunday meat."

The readers can see Tom's daily routine and understand the role he played in his community and the relationships it has built. Another flat character

thereaders are introduced to is Will Maxie. Will Maxie, much like Tom, was acivilian in the town whom many knew to be successful.

Caldwell lays down aseries of characteristics that are connected to both Tom and Will. Will was thebest at his profession, and many could have benefited from his skill, but theygrew envious and decided to hate him instead. "...Will was a pretty smartNegro.... But nobody liked Will...He made more money than Tom and Jim made in thebutcher shop selling people meat." This quiet Saturday afternoon Caldwellillustrates for his readers abruptly converts into an uprising hate crime. Thereader is snapped into the action just as "...Jim ran in the back door andgrabbed Tom by the shoulders." Asthe audience is walked through the day in the life of Tom Denny, there is arelationship established between them. Caldwell creates a routine employingrepetition and emphasizing the certain minute actions such as Tom swatting afly out of his face.

These subtle actions, which typically can be overlooked, portray how ordinary the day was. This particular Saturday afternoon beginsquite monotonous, and the lack of events almost extracts a feeling of empathy. As soon as the readers are comfortable with Tom, Caldwell begins anotherjourney that scars the mental image they have developed of him. It is anincredible feature how Caldwell can instantly flip the mind of his readers justas quickly as Tom's day turned around. Forthe readers, the mob of blood-thirsty white men is appalling.

Jealous white menare out to make an event of publicly assassinating a man, and the readers canonly anticipate the role their character, Tom, will play in

it. It is best that the story is told from a third party, because of everyone's role, no matter how big or small, seems to be important to the cause. The young boy going around selling Coke's for his father, only highlights how normal these events were.

" There is nothing better to drink on a hot day if the dopes are nice and cool." A man felt that it was safe enough to have his child out selling items to a large group of angry men killing an innocent man on a Saturday afternoon. Caldwell takes advantage of this role and inserts his own beliefs of learned racism and hate through the minor role of a young boy. The violence taking place in this town was just that normal. Caldwell does a great job of fulfilling a wholesome setting and mood throughout the story by simply describing each character's actions and fitting the minor actions into the current lynching. The story ends by coming back full circle, and the readers and the characters end right back where they would be on any other day as if nothing important is happening, such as a man being beaten and hung. " Everything's slick as a whistle...except my old woman's got the chills and fever pretty bad again." All of which features that Caldwell uses as an instrument that depicts just how nonchalant violence was during this period.