

Sonnys blues

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Sonny's Blues

There are several elements that combine to create a good story. Many stories carry a theme or a moral and revolve around a plot or storyline. Some have well-defined and recognizable structures while others concentrate more on character development. To me, the essential elements of a good story are character development and the use of symbols in order to convey deeper meaning. These can both be seen in the story "Sonny's Blues" written by James Baldwin.

Throughout this story, the narrator demonstrates significant chronological growth. Chronologically, the narrator shows that he is incapable of listening to his younger brother shortly after their mother dies. This same characteristic is demonstrated in his unwillingness to consider the words of Sonny's old friend outside the school. However, the seeds of change are already planted and hope for a different future is suggested in the narrator's willingness to listen to Sonny in the end. Because of his previous inability to listen to others, the narrator created division between himself and his brother that prevented him from understanding the drug difficulties his brother was experiencing, yet his newfound willingness to try listening suggests hope for both brothers' futures.

Music emerges as a tremendous symbol of the narrator's increasing ability to listen to what others are saying. This begins when he listens to a boy whistling as an escape from the angry laughter of the others. As the narrator listens more carefully to Sonny's old friend, he begins to understand those around him at a greater depth and he begins to hear the music inside the bar. Just before Sonny finally risks telling his brother about his music gig at a bar that evening, Baldwin describes a touching scene in which the narrator

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observes a musical group on the sidewalk. He seems to be starting to understand the messages the music is conveying. Finally, although he's never understood Sonny's music before, the narrator agrees to try and does finally understand what is being said through Sonny's music.

Throughout the story, the narrator shows increasing growth in his ability to listen to others, symbolized through the music of the streets in which he and his brother exist. As the narrator begins to hear the underlying messages of the music around him, he can be seen to understand more of what his brother and others have been trying to tell him. Finally, his willingness to try to listen to Sonny reveals an ability to understand his brother's music and opens up a channel of communication between them that exists on more equal terms. Although he'd been unable to hear his brother earlier in their lives, the narrator's experiences after his brother is arrested begin to open his mind to the concept of other people's stories finally giving him the ability to hear his brother. The symbolism of the music works not only to track the narrator's progress, but also provides a pulse to the story that helps retain interest and illustrate the deeper aspects of the story.

Works Cited

Baldwin, James. "Sonny's Blues." *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*. R. V. Cassil & Richard Bausch (Eds.). 6th Ed. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000.