

The turning point: john updike's a and p essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

James Hong English 1 B 1 / 24 / 2012 The Turning Point Finding out who you are and maturing into an adult happens in different ways for different people. In John Updike's "A&P", it is very interesting to see how the theme of coming of age slowly starts to unravel in the main character as the story progresses. The story portrays the protagonist, Sammy, as a very observant yet immature teenager who yearns the feeling of being independent and free. Through the events that take place in the store, you are able to compare the state of mind and maturity level that Sammy possesses from the beginning of the story to the end.

Analyzing his co-worker, Stokesie, and the incident with the three girls and his manager, Lengel, help Sammy question himself about what he really wants; which is to make some sort of change in his life. Sammy's decision to quit his job demonstrates his definitive desire for independence and freedom. A great example of Sammy's dependency is when he explains how his mother still irons his clothes, "... I just saunter into the electric eye in my white shirt that my mother ironed the night before..." (pg 289).

This clearly gives you an idea about where Sammy is in his life. If you have to have your mom iron your clothes for you, there is no doubt that you depend on her to do certain things that a grown adult wouldn't need done. This explains why Sammy acts the way he does at his work. Sammy, who works as a cashier at the A&P convenient store, is miserable working there and realizes that dealing with the same agenda everyday becomes boring and repetitive.

He even goes on to mock certain customers in his head as a way to feel better about the situation that he's dealing with, " I stood there with my hand on a box of HiHo crackers trying to remember if I rang it up or not. I ring it up again and the customer starts giving me hell... I know it made her day to trip me up... she gives me a little snort in passing, if she'd been born at the right time they would have burned her over in Salem" (pg. 286). The behavior that Sammy is showing is considered immature because of the fact that he was the one who made the mistake.

Instead of acting like a grown man and owning up to his mistake, he decides to make fun of the old woman as a way brush the situation off. Also, it illustrates how Sammy is able to think about all these things in his head but not able to express these feelings through his actions. Someone who is an adult speaks freely through their actions and gets their point across that way. There are two main catalysts that sway Sammy into quitting his job, which help show the first signs of his new found independency.

The first would be Sammy's analysis of his co-worker Stokesie. As Stokesie and Sammy begin talking about the 3 girls that walk into the store, Sammy briefly describes what he thinks of Stokesie, " Stokesie's married, with two babies chalked up in his fuselage already, but as far as I can tell that's the only difference. He's twenty-two, and I was nineteen this April... I forgot to say he thinks he's going to be manager some sunny day, maybe in 1990 when it's called the Great Alexandrov and Petrooshki Tea Company or something" (pg 287).

Through this analysis, Sammy recognizes that Stokesie and he are very much the same person except for the wife and two kids. Seeing how Stokesie is so much older than him and how they are so similar to one another, Sammy feels that the direction of his life will eventually follow his co-worker's if he does nothing about it. In addition, When Sammy jokes about Stokesie wanting to be the manager one day, he realizes that he will one day become Stokesie if he doesn't do anything to make a change in his own life.

The realization that he needs to free himself from his job shows the thinking process of an adult rather than an adolescent. It is when he starts to think maturely like this that he is able to get a clearer understanding of his own definition of being free. The situation Sammy encounters between the three girls and Lengel is the birth of Sammy's new found independence. When Sammy first sees the girls walk into the store guilt-free of the bathing suits they are wearing, he begins to admire the courage it takes for them to be so care free about it.

He then recognizes that in order to find the independence he's looking for, he must first become free of all the things holding him back from doing what he really wants to do. In that moment, what Sammy really wants to do is stand up for the girls because he feels that they didn't do anything wrong enough to be yelled at for, " ' I said I quit... You didn't have to embarrass them' " (pg 289). This is the moment when Sammy truly takes his first steps towards becoming free and the person that he wants to be.

Instead of thinking thoughts in his head and doing nothing about it like earlier in the story, Sammy takes the initiative to express what he really

feels through his actions for the first time. Also, instead of taking orders and acting like everything's OK, Sammy stays true to himself and through this sets himself free outside of the store in which he feels tied down to, "Looking back... I could see Lengel in my place in the slot, checking the sheep through... and my stomach kind of fell as I felt how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter" (pg289).

Even though Sammy has regrets in his decision to quit his job, he now has the feeling of being more independent in that he can make his own decisions and deal with the consequences. Moreover, believing in what he thinks is right ultimately sets him free of his problems and shows his independency from society and maturity of an adult. From Sammy's point of view, to become independent and free is to stand up for what he believes in and to do everything in his power to do what's right.

He is so used to conforming to the same agenda every day at work that he forgets the meaning of being an individual with a mind of his own. Part of that feeling of being independent, for Sammy, is being able to make the decisions he feels is right and dealing with the consequences of those decisions. The job he has at A&P somewhat symbolizes the maturity and dependency level he is currently at in his life. In order to move on and grow as a person, Sammy needs to quit his job and explore other possibilities, which is exactly what he does.

As a result of Sammy quitting his job, his character becomes more independent, mature, and free. This relates to today's world because many teenagers go through the same dilemma that Sammy goes through. The

youth always yearns the feeling of being grown up and independent, but struggle to truly understand what it is they need to do to grasp that feeling. In order to grow the way Sammy does, teenagers need to experience a situation where they find out who they really are and act on the feelings they have inside. It is when you stay true to yourself that you feel more independent, mature, and best of all, free.