

Naturalism in maggie girl of the streets assignment

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The novella *Maggie: a Girl of the Streets*, is a story that centers on Maggie Johnson, a pretty young woman who struggles to survive the brutal environment of the Bowery, a New York City slum, at the end of the nineteenth century. Maggie lives in a harsh environment and it ends up leading to her downfall and ultimately her death. The novella is a brilliant example of naturalism because Maggie's destiny is shaped by her family life, poverty, and the man she becomes involved with.

Maggie's mother, Mary, is a crude alcoholic who has no business raising children. Stephen Crane describes her terrifying nature during a fight with her husband: "The woman screamed and shook her fists before her husband's eyes. The rough yellow of her face and neck flared suddenly crimson. She began to howl" (9). Crane describes the mother as crimson because he is depicting her as the devil. Maggie is raised in an unhealthy environment where her parents are constantly fighting.

Her mother even kicks her out of the house because she is impure, and Maggie is forced to live on the streets. Maggie's mother is not a responsible parent and because of this Maggie does not know how to act proper and how to take care of herself. She is a helpless child and she is doomed to a life on the streets. Like many other families at the turn of the 20th century in America, Maggie lives in a small tenement crowded with other residents.

The building she lives in "quivers and creaks from the weight of humanity stomping about in its bowels" (7). Maggie's descent into prostitution and her eventual death are an inevitable consequence of the limited choices offered by the poverty of her New York environment. Since Maggie is not educated,

she has nowhere to turn when she is abandoned by her family. One can infer that Maggie is doomed from the beginning because she lives in a very poor area and there is not much opportunity for her to take hold of.

Abused by an alcoholic mother and victimized by the overwhelming poverty of the slums, Maggie falls in love with a charming bartender, who, she tells herself, will help her escape her harsh life. Maggie's relationship with Pete compounds her suffering, however, when her family and her neighbors condemn her. Eventually abandoned by her lover, as well as her family, Maggie is forced to make a living on the cruel city streets. She becomes "a girl of the painted cohorts of the city" and must prostitute herself so that she can survive (63).

If Maggie had never met Pete, she might have stayed with her family and survived. After Maggie encounters Pete and he abandons her, she relies on her body as means of making money and her new life of prostitution and homelessness eventually leads to her mysterious death. Overall this novella shows that one's environment is a key factor in determining the outcome of one's life. Maggie is a poor and helpless child whose destiny is to perish in the evil streets of New York. Crane's depiction of the devastating environmental forces that ultimately destroy this young, hopeful woman is a beautiful example of naturalism.