

A dynamic character in john updike's "aandp" essay sample

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A Dynamic Character in John Updike's "A&P" Essay Sample

In John Updike's "A&P", the main character, Sammy, becomes the story's narrator. Sammy is a typical nineteen-year-old man, working a boring, dead end job as a grocery store cashier in a lower middle class town. His only role models are Stokesie, a twenty-two year-old man doing the same job as Sammy, trying to support a family, and Lengel, his manager, who most likely some years earlier held the same occupation.

The entrance of the beautiful Queenie and her two friends break the cycle of the stereotypical customers that Sammy sees daily: "these are usually women with six children and varicose veins mapping their legs and nobody, including them, could care less" (p. 16). This is an eye opener for Sammy, who doesn't really step outside the boundaries of his boring little community.

Sammy not only notices Queenie as having remarkable beauty but also a slight arrogance about her: "she was showing them {the other two girls} how to do it, walk slow and hold yourself straight" (p. 15). Sammy can tell that Queenie is from at least an upper middle class family from the way she speaks and the manner she carries herself in. Sammy says that he "slid right down her voice into her living room" (p. 17). Being so envious and in awe of Queenie, he felt as if he had to do something to earn a place among those people in her social class, proving to himself and others he is better than the run-of-the-mill customers at the A&P. He quit his job not to impress Queenie, but to become one of the social elite.

While Sammy greatly admires Queenie's beauty and elegant manner, the ultra-conservative customers at the A&P think quite differently, almost negatively: "when Queenie's white shoulders dawned on them, kind of jerk, or hop, or hiccup, but their eyes snapped back to their own baskets and on they pushed" (p. 15). Lengel, upholding policy, asks the girls to at least cover their shoulders as a sign of decency. Sammy's final gesture of quitting can be seen as an act of defiance and protest against corporate America. The title Updike has chosen for this story clearly represents corporate America, being that during the time this story was published, A&P's were one of the largest grocery store businesses across the U. S. After Lengel's insistence of the girls to be dressed decently, Sammy not only criticizes Lengel's upholding of some sort of dress code, but he attacks policy in general: "That's policy for you. Policy is what the kingpins want" (p. 17).

After quitting, Sammy is not very confident in his decision: "my stomach kind of fell as I felt how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter" (p. 19). Lengel, being a friend of Sammy's parents, urges him not to quit. Living in a typical small American town, he might have brought discredit upon himself and possibly his family. But Sammy felt as if he needed to stand by his beliefs, and he did.

Throughout the story, Sammy is an ever-changing character. He is a young man who we see actually take a giant step into manhood. After leaving the store, he sees that the girls have already left, and is able to look around at what opportunities are left for him outside of the A&P world. Sammy is a man

now, and will have to deal with his decision and press onward toward the future.