

Between harrison bergeron and aandp

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Tim Kenda English 102 Short Story Essay 2/28/10 Heroism Through Choice

When people think of heroes, they often think of muscle bound men in pdex with unrealistic powers of flight, strength, or x-ray vision. But in real life, heroes are often determined based on the smallest of situations and their outcomes.

In both of the stories I have chosen (A&P and Harrison Bergeron), the main characters are classified as heroes because of their willingness to defy the authoritative forces around them, whether it be the store manager Lengel in A&P or the Handicapper General in Harrison Bergeron, as well as their willingness to strike out on their own instead of adhering to social norms. In Harrison Bergeron, the main character Harrison stands up to a society that attempts to dull his individual qualities by ripping off his physical handicaps and temporarily liberating all of the oppressed people watching the television for a moment.

In A&P, the main character stands up to his dreary, Sunday school teaching boss when he feels as though his boss has embarrassed three female customers in a grocery store. Both Harrison and the cashier pay the price for their defiance (Harrison gets killed and the cashier loses his job), and it is because of the character's selflessness that the actions appear heroic. Both characters fit the definition of a hero, the cashier for his willingness to lose his job over what he deems an inappropriate action by his manager, and Harrison for ripping off (literally) the shackles that his society has placed on him in a fight to show his individualism.

The fact that they performed these actions with no thought towards their own outcome helps outline their true heroic qualities. In the story A&P, the cashier exhibits a heroic quality when he quits his job due to a perceived insult made by his manager to three young ladies. While it first appears to be a dangerous and rash decision (quitting your job over an apparent slight made by your manager to a girl you do not know), the underlying factors actually make this a very heroic choice.

When the cashier quits the A&P, he is not quitting as a direct result of that one insult but rather he is quitting because he does not want to work in what he views as a strict and religious workplace. After he quits, he looks back and sees “ Lengel in [his] place in the slot, checking the sheep through. ” and then goes on to describe Lengel by saying “ His face was dark gray and his back stiff, as if he’d just had an injection of iron. ”(Updike 529). When he sees Lengel in this state, he realizes that moments before that had been him.

At the end of the story, the cashier becomes a symbol of the thoughts of many young people during the late fifties and early sixties. He does not want to work in the same dreary place for his whole life. He does not want to be just like his parents and Lengel. And despite that fact that he knows it will be hard, he makes the decision to strike out on his own, and consequently to fight back against what he views as a dreary and depressing reality. That is a hard decision to make, and a heroic one as well.

As a result of his actions, the cashier in A&P not only commits a heroic gesture, he also becomes a symbol of the change that was taking place in

the late fifties and early sixties. Many young people at that point in time were breaking away from what their parents were doing and were bravely striking off onto their own paths, just like the hero in our story. The overall theme of the story mirrors the same path, showing the drear and the tension and the uncertainty that crept into the American conscious following the start of the cold war and the adolescent urge to do something better than what ones parents did.

The cashier represents many of America's younger generation in that aspect. In the story Harrison Bergeron, the main character is a "genius and an athlete" and is sent to jail for "suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government." (Vonnegut 536). He then breaks out of jail and declares on national television that he is the emperor. Now in our society, these actions would be considered those of a madman or a lunatic. But in his society, Harrison's actions are very heroic.

When Harrison rips off his handicaps and declares to the world he is emperor, he represents the idea that individualism and competition are superior to similarity and monotony. His actions also represent the destruction of the limitations that society has attempted to place on him just because he was different. Also, the fact that he did this and was then killed makes it even more heroic. This shows us that Harrison's real intent was not to simply take over the world, but rather his intent was to show everyone that they could be different and they could fight the limitations imposed on them.

The theme of this story is one of oppression and normalcy, and idea that Harrison attempts to destroy. Harrison becomes a symbol of freedom and liberation, showing us as readers that it is possible to break free of social normalcy despite the possibly grave consequences. In both Harrison Bergeron and A&P the main characters in the story are considered heroic for their willingness to stand up against authority and their ability to commit what they perceive as “ good” actions regardless of the consequences they face. In both stories society is a dull, oppressive place, and the characters fight against the oppression in their own unique ways.

And ultimately each character suffers a consequence as a result of their actions. But despite these consequences, which in the story were apparent before the characters committed their actions, both characters made their choices based on what they believed was right. This is why the cashier and Harrison are both heroic figures in their stories. Works Cited 1. Updike, John. _A&P. Literature and its Writers. Ed. _Ann Charters, Samuel Charters. Bedford/St. Martins, Boston. 2009. 2. Vonnegut, Kurt. _Harrison Bergeron. Literature and its Writers. _Ed. Ann Charters, Samuel Charters. Bedford/St Martins, Boston. 2009.