

Role of music in sonny's blues



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Music plays an integral role in the development of social theory and understanding of identity. Sonny's Blues incorporates the idea of music to help define the characters and establish a better understanding of the sociopolitical reality and culture of Harlem. The rather turbulent relationship between the two brothers becomes apparent early on as Sonny yearns to translate his passion for music into a career decision his brother struggles with accepting.

The two brothers have different visions of life, which, in turn forces them to continually have contrasting views. Sonny struggles to be heard especially by his brother however it is through music that Sonny is able to express that which could not be articulated in the verbal language and continually communicates his reality through the medium of jazz.

The pain and suffering Sonny endures can be witnessed through the character's adoration of Charlie Parker, a jazz musician who himself died at an early age as a result of drug addiction. We see the parallel between the character and Charlie Parker who at the end of the short story plays his music in front of his brother. The narrator finally listens to his brother Sonny play, revealing the raw essence of his reality which in turn brings the brothers closer and provides both understanding and acceptance of the other in a previously strained relationship. Music served as Sonny's salvation and allowed for the two brothers to open a respectful and understanding dialogue. The narrator's understanding can be further demonstrated when he says, Sonny's fingers filled the air with life, his life. But that life contained so many others, indicating that he had now accepted Sonny's music and no longer undervalued the meaning it holds.

Sonny's Blues is a story about suffering and triumph which play a fundamental role in the development of identity. Each experience served as a chance for salvation and an opportunity for the brothers to make sense of the cruelty of life. Through communication the two brothers are able to achieve a form of salvation by articulating that which seemed impossible. Through listening the two brothers are able to achieve a sense of freedom from the despair that fuels their reality. Music acts as the underlying method of communication for Sonny allowing the character to express his internal struggles that his brother ultimately understands.

Baldwin ultimately believes that true sympathy is shown not by trying to change an individual's lifestyle or personality but to support the individual and remain at their side. True compassion does not stem from agreeing with an individual's perspective but rather results from a meaningful attempt to understand the perspective of others that leads to genuine regard for one another. Perhaps this was the message Baldwin attempted to illustrate in Sonny's Blues, that in order to function as individual's in a rather austere environment it is paramount to communicate and listen, for that is what will ultimately free us.