

"needle in the hay" song analysis



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

" Needle in the Hay" by Elliott Smith Your hand on his arm The haystack charm Around your neck Strung out and thin Calling some friend Trying to cash some check He's acting dumb That's what you've come To expect (Chorus) Needle in the hay Needle in the hay Needle in the hay Needle in the hay He's wearing your clothes Head down to toes A reaction to you You say you know what he did But you idiot kid You don't have a clue Sometimes they just Get caught in the eye You're pulling him through *Chorus* Now on the bus Nearly touching This dirty retreat Falling out 6th and Powell A dead sweat in my teeth Going to walk, walk, walk Four more blocks Plus the one in my brain Down downstairs To the man He's going to make it all ok I can't beat myself I can't beat myself And I don't want to talk I'm taking the cure So I can be quiet Whenever I want So leave me alone You ought to be proud That I'm getting good marks *Chorus 2x* In health class, we just finished a unit on drugs and addictions. We learned about the different classifications of drugs, their effects, and symptoms of addiction.

Our current assignment is to analyze a song that describes the negative effects of drugs, and share our personal reaction to it. The song I chose is " Needle in the Hay" by Elliott Smith. This song can be interpreted in many different ways, but it's almost always recognized as being about drugs, specifically heroin. Though Smith only became addicted to heroin in his later life, he writes about drugs, alcohol, and addiction in many of his songs, from his first album on.

" Needle in the Hay" seems to be about a girl who is addicted to heroin, and is in a relationship with a guy who is beginning to use heroin himself. I chose this song because it's beautifully written, and uses many interesting

metaphors to help tell the story. The first line in the song is "Your hand on his arm, the haystack charm around your neck." I think this is saying that she is beginning to become a bigger part of his life, but she is bringing her addiction into it also.

"Strung out and thin, calling some friend, trying to cash some check." The girl is thin from heroin use, as the drug causes loss of appetite, which leads to weight loss. She is stressed from not having the drug, so she calls a friend, hoping she can buy more. "He's acting dumb, that's what you've come to expect." Her boyfriend knows what is going on with her, but he plays dumb and doesn't acknowledge it.

She knows that he knows, but doesn't say anything. The song then goes to the chorus, which just repeats "Needle in the hay", referring to the hidden, unspoken addiction(s) in the relationship. The next verse begins with "He's wearing your clothes, head down to toes, a reaction to you." I don't think that he is literally wearing her clothes; I think it is a metaphor meaning that ever since he's been with her, he's becoming just like her, especially after acquiring the addiction. "You say you know what he did, but you idiot kid, you don't have a clue."

The girl thinks that she knows the guy so well, but she does not realize the severity of the situation, or the fact that she has brought this on him. "Sometimes they just get caught in the eye, you're pulling him through." Sometimes people just get caught up in bad things, and she's only worsening his problem. In the third verse, the point of view seems to shift

from third person into the girl's eyes. " Now on the bus, nearly touching this dirty retreat.

" The girl is going to get drugs, and she's almost there. She knows what she's doing is wrong, but by now it almost feels like a comfort, or an old friend. Falling out, 6th and Powell, a dead sweat in my teeth. " She's now walking to the place where she's going to get her drugs. The " dead sweat in my teeth" part is a bit hard to understand but I have a few ideas. It may just be symbolizing her craving, her need for the drug.

It may be referring to the actual condition of her teeth, as heroin can cause teeth rotting and gum disease. Or, it could be a combination of both. " Going to walk walk walk, four more blocks, plus the one in my brain. Down, downstairs, to the man, he's going to make it all okay. " Her addiction is so serious that she is willing to walk blocks and blocks to get to the drug. She feels that once she gets it from the dealer, she will feel better and everything will be okay.

She is dependant on the drug. " I can't beat myself, I can't beat myself, and I don't want to talk. I'm taking the cure, so I can be quiet whenever I want. " She has gotten to the point where she no longer has faith in herself, and she needs the drug to feel okay.

She's so focused on the drug and feeling better that she's becoming withdrawn and shutting the rest of the world out. She's using heroin to ease her pain; she thinks that it will make things easier. " So leave me alone, you ought to be proud that I'm getting good marks. She wants everyone to leave her alone. She wants to keep her problem a secret, so she tries to hide it by

doing well in other aspects of life, perhaps school or work. I think that this song's view of addiction and the problems that come with it is simply brilliant.

It shows the dependency on the drug, the user's personal feelings and hopes for what the drug will do, and the way drug addiction can affect relationships. What I learned in health class helped greatly with this project. I have loved this song for a long time, and getting this in-depth look at it by doing the analysis has only made me love and appreciate it more.