

John updike- a essay



**ASSIGN
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Eliana Orosco Mrs. King Composition II 8 March 2013 A&P John Updike was a prolific writer of novels, short stories, essays, poems, and children's tale. In the early stories such as "A&P" John Updike uses memories from his childhood and teenage years. For the sort of "small" scenes and stories for which he quickly became famous for (Updike 233). Updike uses the elements of setting, mood, and characters to illustrate the theme of a rebellious generation in the short fiction story "A&P".

The setting of the "A&P" takes place in a small town north of Boston around 1960. Sammy needs a sympathetic listener (or reader), someone who will grasp the meaning he is constructing for himself as he puts his actions into narrative order. Collapsing past and present in rapid yet reflective colloquial speech, Sammy tells how three teenage girls, barefoot, in bathing suits, came into the A & P store to make a purchase. As they move through the aisles, Sammy, from his work station, first ogles them and then idealizes the prettiest and most confident of the three.

He names her, to himself, "Queenie"; and though he jokes with his fellow cashier about the girls' sexiness, he is quietly disgusted by the butcher's frankly lustful gaze as the girls search for what they want to buy. Worse is his manager's puritanical rebuke for their beach attire as Queenie pays Sammy for her purchase. Outraged that his manager, Lengel, has made "that pretty girl blush" and wanting to demonstrate his refusal of such demeaning authority, Sammy quits his job on the spot.

Though the girls leave without recognizing their hero, and though his manager tries to dissuade him from disappointing his parents, Sammy feels "

that once you begin a gesture, it's fatal not to go through with it" (196). He acts decisively, but the girls have disappeared from the parking lot by the time he exits the store. In practical terms, Sammy's action has gained him nothing and cost him everything, but his narrative affirms his gesture as a liberating form of dissent, (M.

Gilbert Porter discusses Sammy's dissent as Emersonian nonconformity: (Porter 1155-58.) Sammy does not see how he could have done otherwise, though he finds himself at odds with the only society he knows, sure that "the world will be hard to me, hereafter" (Updike 238). The time of year in the story illustrates the old generation versus a new generation. The narrator states that the way the young ladies were dressed isn't normally how they dress in the "A; P" a very respectable supermarket.

Sammy notices everyone's expression towards the girls while they walk the aisles like when he says, "The sheep pushing their carts down the aisle-the girls were walking against traffic (not that we have one-way signs or anything) were pretty hilarious. You could see them, 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" (Updike 235).

Another way the regular customers were so shocked how Queenie and her friends were dressed they had to take a second glare at them, "A few house slaves in pin curlers even looked around pushing their carts past to make sure what they had seen was correct." (Updike 235). The mood of the story is informal/rebellious that it illustrates that the "A; P" is an uptight supermarket and everything has to be done the right way. Like for example

when Sammy rings an item up twice and he gets chewed out by one of the customers, “ I ring it up again and the customer starts giving me hell.

She is one of those cash-register-watchers, a witch about fifty with rouge on her cheekbones and no eyebrows, and I know it made her day to trip me up” (Updike 234). Mr. Lengel the manager at the “ A; P” was the first to mention to Queenie and her friends that their attire was not acceptable in the supermarket by saying, “ Girls, this isn’t the beach. Girls, I don’t want to argue with you. After this come in here with your shoulders covered. It’s our policy” (Updike 237). The characters in the short story illustrates the different rebellious moments in the story.

Like for example, when Queenie shows the reader she doesn’t care what people think about her or has to say when she enters the supermarket with a two piece bikini, “ Walking to the A; P with your straps down, I suppose it’s the only kind of face you can have. She held her head so high her neck, coming up out of those white shoulders, looked kind of stretched” (Updike 235). When Sammy tells Mr. Lengel, “ You didn’t have to embarrass them” (Updike 238). With Mr. Lengel replying to him, “ It was they who embarrassing us” (238).

Then Sammy quits by pulling the bow at the back of the apron and start shrugging it off his shoulders. When Sammy quits his job is also a rebellious moment because he quits to show the girls he stands up for them but when he does there is no one to thank him for his heroic moment. Sammy finally realizes that “ the world will be hard to me, hereafter” (Updike 238) for the decision he had made for sticking up for people he really didn’t know. What I

learned while reading the story is that with every decision there is consequences.

Speaking up for someone may not always be the wrong or right thing to do. When you want to speak your own mind and defend someone you should be ready for the consequences coming after. Work Cited John Updike “ A; P. ” Compact Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing Ed. Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mendall. Compact 8th ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2013. 234-38. Print. Saldivar, Toni. “ The Art of John Updike’s ‘ A & P’. ” Studies in Short Fiction 34. 2 (1997): 215. Literature Resource Center. Web. 7 Mar. 2013.