

A and p: a take on society



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" A&P" is a short story written by John Updike that gives readers a glimpse into an alternate view on society. The story, described in vivid detail through the eyes of the main character Sammy, takes place in a small-town grocery store called " A&P." Although on the surface this piece is a story of a typical teenager, it is what is in the opaque water below that is the most interesting. The story of " A&P" shows the narrator's view of society and his unwillingness to become like all the others that he describes as " sheep." The author shows his pessimistic view of society by describing how the individual members of society follow pre-determined rules and rarely stray from their set paths. Sammy has a strong fascination with a group of girls who boldly enter the store in nothing but bathing suits and keep their heads up high, despite the looks of all of the other customers. Updike shows us his view of society through the customers he describes as sheep, the free-thinking girls, and of particular interest to Sammy is the most confident girl leading the pack, whom he calls " Queenie." The author uses the term " sheep" throughout the story to describe these typical customers of the grocery store who are led quite blindly by the structure of their society. It is this term that displays the author's true pessimistic view of society's limited mindsets. These " sheep" are the people who all follow the common and highly worn path, never questioning the norms of society. In the story, the author describes how " the girls were walking against the usual traffic" which clearly shows how the " sheep" follow a set routine common to one another, such as a herd of animals. Updike also says " you could set off dynamite in an " A&P" and the people would by large keep reaching and checking oatmeal off their lists." Although this statement is overly dramatic it clearly shows how oblivious the " sheep" are to what is around them, everything except the

bold young girls who walked into the store in their bathing suits. " In walks these three girls in nothing but bathing suits." Many would view this story simply as a romantic dream of a young teen, but actually these girls represent much more than mere sex symbols. Although Updike uses vivid aesthetic qualities the girls possess, he seems to notice more the way they carry themselves through the store and the reactions of the " sheep" around them. The three girls represent the unbridled side of life, the individuals that take a step outside into the " unspoken" zone. These adventurous and quite different sheep are the ones looked at with confused eyes as they " confidently walk into a grocery store on an otherwise normal day." The author shows this adventurism when stating the " sheep" wouldn't turn the head for an explosion but these girls that stepped outside the worn path " jiggled them" enough to " look around after pushing their carts past to make sure what they had seen was correct." Sammy's attraction to the " queen" of the group is used to show how the author is one of those few free-thinkers who are unwilling to become like the " herd" of society. It is not physical attraction that is the main point of the story; it is the attraction to thinking and acting outside the box, no matter how difficult it may be to swim against the tide. The cynical view of society the author presents to the reader, though written nearly 50 years ago, is not much different than how society acts today. It is through the connection to Sammy and the " sheep", the girls, and his attraction to " Queenie" that Updike shows this negative view. The similarities between the sheep of " yesterday" and today's society are strikingly similar, and Updike's views have relevance to today's society.

Sammy is introduced to these two different worlds by the end of the novel. Sammy ultimately faced with a decision, to become a part of a herd that he

seems to disgust or live the wild side of life by finding what lies beyond "A&P". At the end of the novel when Sammy stands up to his manager, it shows the authors true attempt at independence, a fight to go against the herd. Updike's use of the "A&P" story is done well with vivid details that slightly disguise his true pessimistic views. His view of society is shown through the customers that he describes as sheep, the free-thinking girls, and the particularly interesting girl "Queenie."