

Sonnys blues or to build a fire

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



Analysis of “ Sonny’s Blues.” James Baldwin’s short story, “ Sonny’s Blues,” is a poignant account of two brothers growing up in Harlem. The narrator is the older brother who relates the struggles of his younger brother, Sonny, to overcome drug addiction and find his identity and place in the world. However, the story is not only about Sonny: the narrator also gives the reader a glimpse into his own struggle to come to terms with Sonny’s drug use, his subsequent incarceration and the younger brother’s choice of jazz as a career. “ Sonny’s Blues” is essentially a family narrative based on the dynamics of the brotherly bond. Baldwin effectively uses characterization, conflict and setting to explore the relationship between the narrator and his younger sibling.

The contrasting characters of the narrator and Sonny delineates their relationship. The narrator is an algebra teacher, whose point of view describes his own life and Sonny's. He is a practical family man who is aware of his responsibilities and is content to earn a living and carry on as best as he can. He is willing to accept the status quo of the world. He believes in “ will power and how life could be well, beautiful” (Baldwin, 21-1). He is seven years older than Sonny and feels a sense of responsibility towards his younger brother. He promises their mother, “ I wont let nothing happen to Sonny” (Baldwin, 11-5). On the other hand, Sonny is the boy with “ wonderfully direct brown eyes, and great gentleness and privacy” (Baldwin, 1-3), who is in search of meaning and identity. He is not content to follow the beaten track and wants to make jazz his life. Their contrasting characters leads to conflict in their relationship.

The conflict in the relationship between the two brothers is brought about by

