

Analyze one or more
main character traits
of the protagonist in
one of the storie...



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John Updike's "A & P" An Appreciation John Updike's "A & P" is a short story which reveals the disillusionment of a teenager working in a store, as the world in his imagination fails to reconcile with the actual world outside. It also tells the power of sex which can upset the life of young boys if they lack the sense of reasoning. The story is set in a grocery store in New England town where the narrator, Sammy, works in the checkout line. He has an extraordinary sense of observation whenever beautiful girls appear before his eyes and immediately his imagination begins to be active. This is the character trait of Sammy and this paper is an analysis of Sammy's character in order to trace how Updike weaves a beautiful story using this inherent weakness in the central character. The place where Sammy stands in the store gives him a full view of the intricate divisions in the store. His eyes can easily follow the customers who pick up the articles for purchase and for him "there was nothing much to do except lean on the register and wait for the girls to show up again" as it was a Thursday (Updike). The readers follow Sammy as he is also the narrator. When the three girls enter the store and when his eyes study the details of their physical appearance, Sammy becomes spellbound. The incident shows the natural impulses of a boy at the sight of his opposite sex. Sammy is overpowered by the force of female attraction: "With the straps pushed off, there was nothing between the top of the suit and the top of her head except just her ... it was more than pretty" (Updike). The girls have arrived there wearing their swimming suits, revealing the beautiful shapes of their bodies. He could bear the sight of the first two girls walking into the store, but the third one, Queenie's beauty, broke his heart. Sammy is an innocent boy who has not learned to live in this

corrupt world. He reacts immediately to his impulses, to fulfill his desires. He hardly thinks of the consequences, nor is he aware what is in store for him. The story has a Joycean resonance and Sammy's epiphany springs from the realization of his own ignorance in life. At the end he says, " I look around for my girls, but they're gone" (Updike). It is his desire for the company of the girls which sets the action in the story. As he longs for a life rich and sensual, like what he finds in the upper class people, he must have toyed with the idea of quitting his present job several times. The appearance of the girls merely precipitated this desire. He did not realize that the need to take a hard decision will come too soon, and that the manager will warn the girls for entering the store wearing the swimming suit. The words he uttered, "" I said I quit"" (Updike), are very affirmative. He is given a chance to withdraw his impulsive decision to quit his job, but he remains firm telling that " But it seems to me that once you begin a gesture it's fatal not to go through with it" (Updike). This shows that the boy has moved from innocence to boldness, and he has learned to take hard decisions in life. Through the character of Sammy and Queenie Updike is able to highlight the social reality of the modern world and the fast changing culture. There is a tone of denial in the story coming from the young, denying the outmoded norms which were imposed on man. This is evident in the girls appearing in swimming dress. Though they admit that their mothers sent them to the store, there is the impression of a new way of appearing in society with full freedom. In the same way, Sammy's character reveals that he is a new boy who wants to step out boldly taking risks. Therefore, it is clearly evident that the inherent nature of Sammy and Queenie shape the action in the story. Reference

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