

"the lamp at noon" –
short story about
isolation essay
sample



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“ The Lamp at Noon” – short story about isolation Essay Sample

Sinclair Ross responds to the issue of isolation, in his short story, “ The Lamp at Noon.” The author focuses on the theme of how not to deal with isolation. This notion is reinforced by the setting (mood/physical), characters, and symbolism that he describes so vividly.

The first method the author uses to convey the idea of isolation is through setting. The setting was beautifully described creating imagery that assists the focus of the theme. Sinclair expresses personification in climate changes, for example, “.. Demented wind fled keening past the house: a wail through the eaves that died every minute or two.” (Ross, p. 62). From this given statement in the story, you can already imagine the mood of the setting, a dark, dreary, somewhat harsh, and depressing scene. The different changes in weather reflect how the characters are feeling. Paul and Ellen both feel upset, depressed, and dark, especially about their relationship. As the story progresses, the changes in weather correspond to the characters moods a little more directly. The setting in this short story is a major element of this piece, without it, the plot would be kind of dull and “ blah,” because it gives you an idea of the time and place in the story. Time and place are key elements of a story’s plot, which helps focus on the given theme of isolation, and how not to deal with it in this case.

The second method that the author uses was characterization – another major factor of foundation for a good read. Ross used excellent descriptions for the two main characters. This is because they could be related to fairly

easily, and realistically. Ellen's strong and hopeful feelings which dance around the idea of a better, healthier and even a little more "rewarding" life are nicely depicted. The reality of her hopes, however, is that the things she wants and needs most are unattainable, which links her feelings to the theme of isolation. So, if she can not produce these things, she just sits and waits for a better opportunity, and her husband to come home safe and sound to comfort her with love and affection as shown in this following quote, "... Please stay ... I'm so caged – if I could only break away and run. See – I stand like this all day. I can't relax. My throat's so tight it aches." (Ross, p. 68).

From this little paragraph, you can already dissect the thoughts and feelings portrayed by the character's strong words that she used to be well off, and accustomed to the finer things in life, but also that she needs love and affection from her husband to "replace" that "need." Now Paul on the other hand, a rugged, strong, 30 year old farmer is a touch stronger and more persistent for success compared to Ellen. He struggles to keep his land and livestock alive and booming. He was quite determined in staying and trying, and waiting for the land to sprout with better crops, as well as lots of rain to feed them. There was a constant notion of his feeling for rain and better crops the following year, "We'll have crops again ... good crops. The land will come back. It's worth waiting for." (Ross, p. 66).

The pride Paul has for his land, the hope he keeps for progression, and success, and the strength, physical and emotional, he has is great. Since he is the only one who feels this way between himself and Ellen, he is '

isolated,' as well. Both characters, their feelings, their actions, and the way
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they are described play a vital role in the contribution towards the theme. They are individually isolated themselves, as well as isolated together from society, in the barren land they occupy. The way they act, and feel, plus the results and conclusion of what happens is how not to deal with isolation.

The third, but not last, method the author uses is symbolism. This powerful and meaningful element is spread out throughout the story. Ross uses a couple symbols, among one is the most major and significant: the lamp. The fact that it is lit at noon shows that it is constantly dark, and foggy from all the storms, which symbolizes the dark, depressing and "grubby" lives and feelings of the characters. However, it also symbolizes hope, and faith the couple has for each other, for a better life, and for their child. The lamp is a very important key element in the story, it is part of the title as well! From this single object, and the way it is used in the story, you can already structure the overall frame of the story; the setting, characters, plot and conclusion. Ellen also points out the lamp's role, "... Desert. The lamp lit at noon -..." this quote shows the lingering thread of hope and faith left among the two, a way to deal with isolation is to keep your head up and hope for something good to happen.

Later on it is revealed that the lamp finally burns out, symbolizing their hope being gone. This was not a good point in the story, because losing faith in that kind of situation is not a good way to deal with isolation, or anything else for that matter. This lamp was the most major symbol in the book, among others such as; the wind, and the desert, which represents the battle of survival, and sanity, and the prison of isolation. The two taunting

members of nature and earth challenge the strength, faith, and hope of the

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characters. Ellen's sign of fear shows the weakness and defeat which thus slowly bottles up and explodes in anger and sorrow later on. This is also not a good way to handle matters of isolation.

Moreover, the author depicts ways of how not to be or act with isolation sitting beside you, and has done a good job of it. A setting, assisted by mood, characters, and symbolism all contribute to the remedies or viruses, depending on the circumstances of how to deal with a story's main theme, in this one, isolation.