

# The witch



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Beyond the Stereotypes Shirley Jackson's short story "The Witch" skillfully examines the contrasts of human nature. Jackson uses symbolism and juxtaposition to make the distinction between young and old, wise and naive more evident. However, she uses these contrasts in order to develop her argument that though people may seem very different, humans are often more similar than they first appear. In "The Witch" the two main characters, the old man and the young boy are a contrast of males young and old.

At a glance, the young boy Johnny seems sweet, naive and innocent sitting in the cart with his loving mother and beloved little sister. He is very kind and sweet towards his sister, for when she cried he left his seat to pet his sister's feet and beg her not to cry. Johnny plays into the stereotypical child by constantly asking frivolous questions like "How far do we have to go?" Johnny is quite immature because when the man asks him simple questions, like how old are you and what's your name, the boy mischievously answers by saying "Twenty-six" and "Mr. Jesus".

These attributes help to establish Johnny as the picture of youth. When the old man is introduced in the story he seems to be a complete opposite; experienced, suave and wise. When he talks to Johnny he seems at ease as he stopped just beside the little boy's seat, and leaned against the back. The level of maturity is evident when the old man starts talking down to Johnny by saying things such as "Hello yourself, son." The man's cigar and the boy's lollipop immediately form another contrast. The image portrayed by a lollipop is sweet, young and naive, and the image of a cigar is more wise and sinister. When the little boy says "My father

smokes cigars,???" and the man replies "???" All men smoke cigars, Someday you???" "I'll smoke a cigar, too.???" We see that the man is obviously much more experienced than him, and he seems to have life all figured out, unlike Johnny who is new to the world.

The lollipop is a symbol for the differences in maturity between the man and Johnny. Though at first the old man and Johnny seem like opposites, further into their discussion we begin to see the parallels between them. Though the lollipop and the cigar seem very different, they are actually quite similar. A cigar is merely a more sophisticated substitute for a lollipop, as they are both tools used to distract ones self from boredom. They are also similar in the way that they think. When Johnny is bored in the cart, he resorts to a slightly more sinister side to receive attention. When the old man is bored he entertains himself by filling the young boys mind with evil doings.

Shirley Jackson is trying to show that when males are bored it leads to inner thought, and they explore a more sinister side of their mind. This deep, inner evil brings another connection between the boy and the old man. Even though there is such a large age difference between the two characters, the connection they have is unquestionable. Though the old man is more seasoned and knowledgeable, he was once the same as Johnny, and he can therefore bond with him easily.

This relationship that they share proves that when one looks beyond the obvious, they can see the links between them. Johnny and the old man are a Jackson uses many contrasts that have secret parallels to prove that though

people may seem very different, humans are often more similar than they first appear.