

Stephen's personality in part one of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist*

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James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* documents how Stephen's experiences with sensual and ethical awareness, Irish politics, language and religion lead him to understand and define both his identity and aesthetic theory. From the very beginning of the novel, Stephen expresses his thoughts in a stream of consciousness. He often thinks about one topic and then relates it to another, and he often ponders on profound or important matters that he does not yet understand. He also repeats certain powerful words and phrases, such as Father Dolan's "unfair and cruel" (45) treatment of him. In the first section of Part One, Stephen is a very young child.

He takes in the world through his senses, noting his father's "hairy face" and his mother's "nicer smell" (6). Stephen possesses the beginnings of a conscience, hiding under the table out of guilt and fear after controversially proclaiming that he will one day marry his Protestant friend Eileen. Aspects of language such as rhyming and word patterns fascinate Stephen, as he makes a poem out of Dante's admonishment that "the eagles will come and pull out his eyes" (7). In the second section of Part One, Stephen is a young boy at boarding school, who loves and misses his parents and home terribly. His definition of politics as the cause of his family's arguments reflects that he still makes sense of things that he does not understand in terms of how they relate to him. In both sections one and two, Stephen expresses a desire to grow up and understand the universe, God, and human actions, which seem foreign and incomprehensible to him.

He still takes in the world with his senses, constantly mentioning "hot" versus "cold" and "light" versus "dark". In both sections one and two, <https://assignbuster.com/stephens-personality-in-part-one-of-james-joyces-a-portrait-of-the-artist/>

Stephen interprets the world in a way that every cause has a direct effect; for example, he believes that he must say prayers before bedtime “ so that he might not go to hell when he died” (15). Stephen’s frailty and scrawniness contrast with the other bigger and older boys at school who play sports on the playground. At this point, Stephen begins to develop an honor code, recalling his father’s teaching to “ never peach on a fellow” (7). In the third section of Part One, Stephen has become a young adolescent.

His family’s argument about politics bewilders him, because although he has started to understand more about politics, he has not yet formulated his own opinions about it. The fact that he looks up to Mr. Casey reflects his beginning recognition of what he values in others. In the fourth section of Part One, Stephen is still rather shy and quiet. He demonstrates his continuing fascination with language in his relation of the “ Tower of Ivory”, a religious topic, to Eileen’s “ long and white and thin and cold and soft” hands (31). This also demonstrates how Stephen makes sense of confusing aspects of his world in terms of how they relate specifically to him.

Stephen continues to take in the world in terms of what he sees, making amusing and honest comments, such as his calling the boy Corrigan “ fat” (47). Stephen begins to experience snippets of profound thoughts, such as his assertion that “ by thinking things, you could understand them” (37), which reflects his growing intellect. He shows his developing compassion in his sympathy for the trouble-making boys who will be flogged. The fact that he does not understand the meaning of “ smuggling” (37) demonstrates his innocence. Stephen also demonstrates his beginning sense of justice and

ethics when he rationalizes and strongly feels that Father Dolan was unjust for hitting him.

Stephen expresses his first traits of confidence and bravery when he works up the courage to report Father Dolan to the rector. Amazingly, Stephen decides that he will forgive Father Dolan and remain “ quiet and obedient... to show him that he was not proud” (51). This reflects Stephen’s humility and his concern for how others perceive him.