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A&P Reading Story: Essay

The "A&P" story by John Updike is narrated by one of the characters of the story, ‘Sammy’, a nineteen-year-old boy who works as a cashier in an A&P grocery store located in a small town in the United States. The story narrates an incident that occurred in the store when three young girls visited the store dressed in bathing suits which captured the attention of the people and staff present at the store. Sammy, standing at the checkout line also noticed the girls and observed them closely. He seemed interested and attracted by the girls and assessed their looks minutely. Sammy wondered about the reason behind their odd dressing which grabbed the attention of people at the A&P. Besides that speculation, Sammy noticed the most attractive girl from the group and assumed her to be the leader of the girls' gang. In his imagination, Sammy labeled her as ‘Queenie’ who seemed naturally graceful and beautiful among other girls. The store observed a unique commotion as the three girls wandered around the store. Sammy opinionated the attire of the girls as the store was not located near a seashore which would have made their dressing less noticeable.

Besides Sammy, his coworkers also gazed at those girls and joked around. Later, another colleague joined them and made lewd remarks on the teen girls. Soon, Sammy sensed a feeling of shame and disappointment towards the girls for compromising themselves in a way that everyone got attracted to them. However, Sammy thought that they might not have realized the impact of their actions. In the meanwhile, the ladies chose Sammy's checkout line to pay for their purchases which displaced the feelings of Sammy from pity to a complete excitement.

The author introduces a new character in the story named ‘Lengel’. The manager of the A&P store came to Sammy's checkout row. The store manager castigated the attire of girls with regard to the store culture and policy. The treatment of Lengel made the girls, especially Queenie, discomfited and humiliated. Though Queenie stated some reasons to justify the objection which invoked the interest of Sammy who imagined her as a high-class girl with a liberal mindset.

The argument between the two parties ended when the girls left the store. That generated an unexpected response from Sammy who decided to quit his job at that particular moment. The reaction surprised the store manager and warned Sammy about the repercussions of his decision but Sammy was determined and assumed that the girls were watching him. Despite Lengel's cautioning, Sammy left the store, quitting his job. However, the girls were long gone and Sammy was left with his vague feelings and the aftermath of his prompt decision *(Updike).*

The story depicts the character of Sammy as a common teenager who was uninterested in his job and as a young boy, he was fascinated by the girls to get their attention which made him decide on quitting his job at A&P store. Following are some quotations from the story which explicated his ambiguous and unjustified decision:

**Quotation 1**

“You never know for sure how girls’ minds work (do you really think it’s a mind in there or just a little buzz like a bee in a glass jar?”

The comment made by Sammy depicted his male chauvinist attitude towards girls, who apparently showed that he neither noticed the girls nor got attracted to them and suppressed the girl's mental abilities initially. Sammy, a teenager boy poses to be aloof of the girls and their thinking due to which he stated disproving remarks about the girls' minds. The boy showed a sarcastic and arrogant behavior and tried to justify his opinion among his fellow workers. It also shed light on Sammy's non-serious attitude and immature thinking which pushed him to make such remarks which actually portrayed his inner complex. He assumed that the girls belonged to an elite class which was in contrast to Sammy's status who belonged to a poor family and did the job to make his livelihood. In order to overcome his feeling of inferiority, he commented in a way to mask his feelings in front of his co-workers but actually, he was completely occupied by the leader of the girls' gang, Queenie, physically and mentally and had a growing intention to impress her *(HAO et al.).*

**Quotation 2**

 “But it seems to me that once you begin a gesture it’s fatal not to go through with it.”

Near the end of the story, the above resolution made by Sammy against Lengel's cautioning made him more determined towards his decision of quitting. Although, Sammy disapproved of Lengel's behavior towards girls, his decision was inadequate with relevance to the A&P culture. Lengel was right about his criticism as he abided by the values of his company. But Sammy who was an employee of the A&P and was obligated to follow his company's principles, suddenly linked himself with the girls' thinking and lifestyle. Though, Sammy realized that he did not conform to the old cultural values of the A&P but quitting the job was not the right option to choose. He might have stayed there and brought a change in their culture with an acceptance of the customers belonging to diverse cultures. Sammy's decision was irrespective of his future considerations. He might have changed the culture of the company by staying there but his decision of quitting just separated him from those obsolete cultural values and allowed Lengel and the A&P to confine to their outdated principles *(Kristoff).*

**Quotation 3**

Sammy said, "I quit," in time for them to hear, but they continued out of the store, paying no attention.

Sammy's response to Lengel's misconduct (in his opinion) was quite prompt and immature. In Sammy's belief, the girls were standing there and taking notice of Sammy's remarks about quitting the job which depicted Sammy's intention to impress the girls which represented the common behavior of a teenage boy who got attracted to girls and wanted to get the attention. That depicted his immature consideration towards the incident and he fell a victim of temporary elucidation which resulted in him with no fruitful outcome and he had to leave his job. The choice he made led him to an epiphany. His effort of acting as a hero in front of the girls, later made him realized that things were different in the real world. For, in reality, Sammy’s decision neither captivated the girls nor resolved anything *(Kristoff)*.

**Quotation 4**

“His face was dark gray and his back stiff, as if he’d just had an injection of iron, and my stomach kind of fell as I felt how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter.”

At the end of the story, Sammy thought about the aftermath of his decision and the hardness of the life he might encounter after quitting his job. He compared Lengel's robust personality and hardness in his attitude with the hardships of the world that awaited Sammy outside the A&P store. Although, he had made him free from Lengel's service and his mindset, he might face such inflexible managers in his future. Each time he could not abandon such individuals and had to face the reality of life. His decision was based on his firmness and attitude towards the misconduct but how his decisions could affect him was not pondered. Sammy did not consider the complications he might encounter in his future due to his prompt decision. He learned about the true picture of the world and what it demanded upon considering his thinking and choosing his path *(Stearns et al.)*

**Works Cited**

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