

Questions for JOHN UPDIKE's "A & P"

Individual responses:

1. If you were in Sammy's position, would you have made the same decision? Explain.
2. Where in "A&P" does the dramatic conflict become apparent? What moment in the story brings the crisis? What is the climax of the story?
3. Describe Sammy. What is your reaction to his description of the girls and what he says about the customers?
4. Is the supermarket setting vital to the story? Could the story have been set in a car wash? In a fast-food restaurant? In a business office? Why or why not?
5. What values and attitudes does Sammy assume about the fifty year-old woman and the other "sheep," to Queenie and her family, to Mr. Lengel, to his own family? How accurate are Sammy's judgments about the other characters? How might the characters be portrayed if the story were told be Lengel? To what extent is he guilty of oversimplification?

6. What is the role of Stokesie? To what extent does he serve as a **foil** (a character who by contrast highlights the qualities or characteristics of another character) to Sammy?
7. What attitudes cause Mr. Lengel to be angry with the girls? Is his anger justified?
8. Does anything lead you to expect Sammy to make some gesture of sympathy for the three the girls? What incident earlier in the story (before Sammy quits) seems a **foreshadowing**?
9. Why does Sammy quit his job so suddenly? Is his gesture genuinely heroic or is it merely the misguided idealism of a rebellious adolescent? How is it prepared for earlier in the story? Why is it **ironic**?
10. What do you think Sammy means when he says, "Now here comes the sad part of the story, at least my family says it's sad but I don't think so myself"?
11. At the end of the story Sammy says, "I felt how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter." What does he mean? What do you think he learned from this experience?
12. Notice how artfully Updike arranges details to set the story in a perfectly ordinary supermarket. What details stand out as particularly true to life? What does this close attention to detail contribute to the story?
13. What part of the story seems to be an **exposition**? Of what value to the story is carefully detailed portrait of Queenie, the leader of the three girls?
14. As the story develops, what change in Sammy's feelings do you detect toward the girls?