

English II Norming Samples

General Assignment

Choose one of the topics below and, after pre-writing (see "Planning and Drafting an Essay") and writing a thesis statement (see "Thesis and Topic Sentences") write an essay (title, intro, body paragraphs, conclusion: min. 1150 words) which answers it. Remember: your purpose is to argue that your view is correct. Essay must include at least one secondary source.

Specific questions are noted at top of each essay.

Second assignment: students had received grade and comments on an earlier, shorter, composition.

Timeline: one week planning and drafting; one week revising (students received both peer and instructor feedback); one class proofreading.

152 Essay 1

"Shiloh" portrays a relationship on the rocks. Through the actions (or inaction) of the characters, what is Mason suggesting about modern-day relationships? What, given the lives of these characters, is the problem? After first determining what this X factor is, show how the story illustrates it. Instead of just one factor, you can also argue that there are several factors.

T. T.

Log Cabin Disaster: Failing Relationships in "Shiloh"

Modern day relationships are easily troubled and can have a lot of baggage. Relationships can be contaminated by those not in the relationship itself, causing the relationship to crash and burn. It can be seen in struggling relationships that one person wants to fight for what they have while the other counterpart couldn't care less. The story "Shiloh" is no different. Modern day relationships are depicted in Mason's "Shiloh," because of Norma Jean's role in gender reversal; Leroy's struggle to keep his marriage and the impact their problematic history has on their future.

Gender role reversal is when a couple or individual takes up common characteristics of the opposite sex. The gender role reversal Norma Jean exhibits is a reoccurring theme throughout the story. Gender role reversal is a major problem because of the pride a man can lose. Norma is empowering herself as a woman. She is building her confidence to the point where she can provide for herself and abandon her relationship. Norma shows this in the beginning of the story when the author describes her working on her pectorals. "She lifts three-pound dumbbells to warm up" (360). She is bolstered by her own macho behavior because she is clearly physically muscular and fit and she prides herself on the tone of her muscles. Norma Jean can be considered a modern feminist. A feminist is an individual who believes men and woman should be seen and treated as equals. Her role in gender reversal provides that she doesn't believe her husband needs to be the designated caregiver and willingly takes on his role, making them equals. I side with Norma because in my own relationship I pride myself on being able to provide for myself. I feel empowered when I can provide for my counterpart. Although it seems as though Norma may think highly of her own self when Leroy asks if he's still "king around here," (369) Norma Jean physically reacts: "Norma Jean flexes her biceps and feels them for hardness" (369). This gesture can be seen as masculine because flexing like she does it makes it clear that she sees herself as the stronger half in the marriage and doesn't take Leroy's role seriously. This is a problem in a marriage because Leroy feels emasculated. While Norma Jean is gaining confidence and power, Leroy is losing his sense of masculine pride. Men have this longing to provide and protect their partner and this is challenged when the woman is better at that role.

Marriage has become a large social issue. From the type of person someone looks to, to the way one acts in the given relationship can all be traced back to sociology. According to the Norton Sociology textbook, "Marriage regulates sexuality and forms the basis for family, with all its other functions" (356). This basically means that marriage's main purpose is to set up a foundation for a family. In Shiloh, their relationship started out because of a child but due to a miscarriage the couple was left to themselves. The book also briefly mentions divorce and breakup rates. Marriage is referenced as the "site of unequal power relations and intense feelings" (360). This correlates with Leroy because he has lost power in the relationship and can no longer mask his feelings.

Norma Jean could be considered very independent. In the past she depended on Leroy to bring in the income and provide for the family but since his accident she is the care giving and provider. "He wishes she would celebrate his permanent homecoming more happily. Norma Jean is often startled to find Leroy at home" (361). She is not used to being around him all the time and it's mentioned she seems disappointed. It can be assumed she liked her alone time and now all she does is work for money and work for him in the home.

As previously mentioned, Leroy has a personal struggle and hope to keep his marriage afloat. Throughout the story it is perceived that Leroy strains to understand Norma Jean and why it seems as though her love for him has changed drastically. The picture he paints in your head about Norma makes her seem so delicate and perfect. Norma no longer takes about how lovely Leroy is and this could be an ego boost for someone feeling their relationship slip through his or her fingers. He is still head over heels in love with Norma Jean. "After fifteen years on the road, he is finally settling down with the woman he loves" (362). His feelings have not differed but he knows that hers have. "Norma Jean closes her eyes when they are in bed. She wants the lights turned out" (365). Norma is clearly uncomfortable and not emotionally invested in their relationship any longer. Leroy is disturbed and clearly upset about her actions towards him. He wants their relationship to last because he is still in love with her, but she does not feel the same. Leroy says, "She is still pretty. Her skin is flawless" (362). One would believe he still thinks of her as he did when he was eighteen.

Of course, not all the blame of Norma Jean and Leroy's relationship is on them. Throughout their relationship they have had their share of drama and obstacles. It is believed they only married because Norma was pregnant. They were very young and the decision they made when they were in their late teens impacted the rest of their lives together. "He married Norma Jean when they were both eighteen and their child Randy was born a few months later, but he died at the age of four months and three days" (363). The death of their son Randy has had a major impact on their fate as a couple. The death of Randy is a topic they seldom bring up and it has made quite a negative impression on them as individuals. It can be assumed that they only married due to the pregnancy and because of the child's death Norma now realizes the mistake she made. Another factor to their relationships demise is Mabel, Norma Jean's mother. "Mabel has never really forgiven him for disgracing her by getting Norma Jean pregnant. When the baby died, she said that fate was mocking her" (363). Mabel spends a lot of time with Norma Jean and it makes Leroy uneasy.

Although most modern-day relationships don't have this many complications, they are easily linked to *Shiloh*. Whether they rushed to marry or loose feelings for one another, Leroy and Norma Jean are easily comparable. Norma Jean's role in gender reversal; Leroy's struggle to keep his marriage and the impact their problematic history has on their future are all factors that conclude that modern-day relations can be compared to Mason's "*Shiloh*." This is all shown throughout the short story and simply means modern relationships can easily end in turmoil.

Works Cited

Ferris, Kerry, and Jill Stein. "Chapter 12." *Real World: Intro to Sociology*. 4th ed. New York City: W.W. Norton &, 2014. 356-60. Print.

Mays, Kelly J., ed. "Shiloh." *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. 11th ed. New York City: W.W. Norton &, 2014. 359-72. Print.

152 Essay 2

"Shiloh" portrays a relationship on the rocks. Through the actions (or inaction) of the characters, what is Mason suggesting about modern-day relationships? What, given the lives of these characters, is the problem? After first determining what this X factor is, show how the story illustrates it. Instead of just one factor, you can also argue that there are several factors.

R. P.

Marriage Complications

Not all Marriages happen for the right reasons, but sometimes occur because they feel compelled to be together. In "Shiloh" Norma Jean and Leroy were drawn together because Norma conceived a child from Leroy. Many couples now days think that it is love at first sight and do not realize till a couple months after the marriage that they aren't really in love at all and it was really just a waste of time. Some feel that if they have a child before getting marriage they should just get married for the betterment of the child's upbringing. Norma Jean and Leroy's marriage is a defective one but clearly symbolizes many bad marriages that do not succeed today because the only reason they are still together is for a child or hope that one day it will get better.

Norma Jean and Leroy's Marriage is by far not the best example of a successful one. Throughout this story their relationship seems like a lot is missing between the two of them and aren't really happy. Just like many today they got in to a marriage for what they thought was a good reason but ended up wasting much of their lives with someone who they do not truly love. Throughout the story it is obvious that Leroy is uncomfortable being home and being around Norma Jean it is made clear by this "Since he has been home, he has felt unusually tender about his wife and guilty over his long absence."(pg.361). Feeling guilty about something should be shared with a life partner it, Leroy not doing this shows that something is wrong in their relationship. In most cases Divorces will occur over time "The initial Decision-making process can take months or even years, and even when the divorce decision has finally been made, the progression of divorce may not be quick."(52 Clark-Stewart).

Many young couples make common mistakes just like Leroy and Norma Jean by getting pregnant when they are not in the right state in their relationship to settle down. Many feel compelled to stay together for the child and the hope to raise it where there are two parents in the household. In Norma Jean's and Leroy's situation it differs "They had a child died as an infant, years ago."(pg.361). Leroy and Norma never discuss it because it's an "awkward" and uncomfortable topic. When something as sad as that happens it's hard holding on to the past but by Norma being with Leroy it's as she can never truly get over that.

The main reason that Norma Jean and Leroy even stayed together at the time was for their child that Norma was pregnant with. Their main reason was lost when "Randy" passed away but Leroy was a trucker at the time and was constantly on the road. By Leroy being on the road it made it easier for Norma Jean to move on and forget about their dead son. Leroy would only come home for short visits which was fine for Norma but once he was home for good it was as if they just met and were unsure of each other and their feelings. Like many marriages today they forgot why they were together and if they even still loved each other.

By staying together as long as they did it showed that they still had hope for their marriage and it might get better one day. A lot of the times people now days will try to do this and will seem like the right thing but it can also never end up getting better. Leroy is clearly trying to keep their Marriage together by trying to build Norma Jean "Log Cabin" in hope that this may persuade her to stay with him or there is still something in their marriage. Norma often seems that she has lost hope and is trying a lot to separate herself from him by working, taking "body building class" and taking "night classes". Leroy is not oblivious to his Marriage being on a rocky path "He has the feeling that they are waking up out of a dream together that they must create a new marriage, start fresh."(pg.362).

Their bumpy relationship has also caused a huge gender reversal role between Norma Jean and Leroy. They have both completely swapped rolls Norma once the stay at home wife is now the sole

provider and Leroy once the bread winner is now the stay at home husband. It's an unsteady marriage with uncertain roles both seem to be uncomfortable at their very own house. Norma has attempted to even emasculate herself, by taking on many roles that a guy might "She has graduated from her six-week body-building course" (pg. 368). They are not certain of themselves or certain of their marriage.

By far this relationship is the best example of a good one but shares so many common traits with ones in todays. Norma Jean and Leroy problems by far emulates most with losing a child at such a young age but is common to many today by showing that getting someone pregnant or getting Married should be closely considered . It should be made sure that they are actually in love and can spend the rest of their lives together. Norma jeans decision was defiantly not a spur of the moment idea to break it off with Leroy "Divorce is not a single event that happens on the day that the divorce decree is issued: it is a long, drawn-out process."(52 Clark-Stewart) .Norma shows through her actions and remarks that she is not happy being with him the whole story. Most are happy when they get to spend more time together but Norma Jean and Leroy seem to resent the fact that they can work on their relationship which why theirs ended.

Works Cited

- Clark-Stewart, Alison. "Chapter 3 A Marriage Ends." *Divorce: Causes and Consequences*. N.p.: In Current Perspectives in Psychology. New Haven [Conn.]: Yale UP. 2006, 2006. N. pag. Print.
- Mason, Bobbie Ann. *Shiloh*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. 1940. Web. Feb.-Mar. 2015.

152 Essay 3

How could Updike's "A&P" be read as a critique of American society? What is he criticizing?

Walk Your Own Way: Nonconformity in "A&P"

The back-drop: a corporate supermarket on a sizzling summer day in 1960's, near Boston; a hostile territory for nonconformity. The players: the young opposition swimming against the currents of tradition. Action! For young people in the 1960's, the future seemed like a daunting burden as America moved past the post-WWII opulence and towards a rapidly changing world molded by the growing Soviet threat. Under this weight, lifestyles and perspectives among young people began to change in spite of long-standing social norms. John Updike's "A&P" illustrates a critique of 1960's through the narrator's negative view of the dominant tribe within A&P, his sympathy for the girls, and his struggle against the majority. At 19 years old, Sammy finds himself at odds with the staff and customers because of age and belief differences. Because the girls are around his age and also foreigners in the A&P microcosm, he is able to sympathize easily with their struggle. His final attempt at chivalry- standing up for the girls and quitting his job- turn Sammy into an unknowing warrior against "the Man".

Sammy's place among the tribe of A&P allows him a negative view of his coworkers and customers. In the early 1960's, a young man of his age would have been expected to secure a job and marriage. Updike provides hints to Sammy's hesitation to follow said path through the strong usage of contrast. The character of Stokesie serves as a glimpse into a possible future, described by Sammy as "married with two babies chalked up in his fuselage already, but as far as I can tell that's the only difference. He's twenty-two and I was nineteen this April" (411). Despite their similarities, Sammy seems to view him as a chump because of his marital status, and scoffs at Stokesie's managerial aspirations, suggesting a lack of satisfaction in that possibility. Lengel, the store's manager, also provides an important contrast as the embodiment of traditional values. Painted as "pretty dreary, teaches Sunday school, and the rest" (412), Updike sculpts a figure that represents the humdrum results of the 9-5, the religious influence that permeates through 1960's America, and a suggestion that the whole package- imagine the button-up shirt, the white picket fence, the meat loaf awaiting in the oven- comes vacuum-sealed within a simple series of choices (See Stokesie). However, most of Sammy's displeasure is concentrated on the customers of A&P whom he dubs "sheep". Being a member of the staff, coupled with his dislike of the day-to-day American lifestyle, gives him a vantage point where he observes their repetitious cycle of behavior in an almost comedic light: "the sheep pushing their carts down the aisle- the girls were walking against the usual traffic (not that we have one-way signs or anything)- were pretty hilarious [. . .] I bet you could set off dynamite in an A&P and the people would by and large keep reaching and checking oatmeal off their lists [. . .] But there was no doubt, this jiggled them" (410-411). But all jokes aside, it is important for the reader to acknowledge the derogatory connotation attached to the term "sheep": people on auto-pilot, going mindlessly about their business. Sammy's attitude allows the reader to see not only the fallacies in this lifestyle, but also how he is different from these people.

Because he is different, Sammy is better able to sympathize with the girls much more so than with the staff and customers of A&P. Both Sammy and the girls are misfits in their own renown. Important to the context of the story is time; women in the 1960's were still largely regarded as domestic objects. By referring to women as "houseslaves" (and, at one point, a "young married"), Updike illustrates through Sammy how women, by social standards, lack identity outside of their marital status (410, 413). These women contrast the three girls, who are young, unmarried, and, physically and socially, "ripe". Their almost naked bodies initially draw the attention of Sammy and Stokesie, however Sammy's view begins to change when he sees Old McMahan, the butcher, lustfully gazing after them. This sympathy is enhanced when Sammy is witness to Queenie's embarrassment near the end of the story; as stated by literary critic Toni Saldivar, Sammy has both an "ability to respond erotically to the beauty of a young woman's body; second, to respond sympathetically and imaginatively to the individual person alive in that body." Lengel's actions are the opposite of that sympathy; he rigidly stands up for his- and presumably everybody else's- puritanical and patriarchal views. By deeming the bathing suits indecent,

he is by extent judging the display too nubile, distracting, and amoral. In censoring their bodies, he is also censoring the people inside those bodies and restricting their power of expression. Having Sammy as an unapologetically sympathetic narrator, one can better relate to a perspective more concerned with the individual rather than the uniformity of the whole.

In his final act of martyrdom, Sammy tries to stand up to the majority by standing up for the girls and quitting his job. Updike's choice of words beautifully constructs the subtle power struggle between two schools of thought: dubbing the prettiest, most confident of the three girls "Queenie", and Lengel as the "kingpin." Old vs new. Queenie is both a literal and figurative leader; she is the most confident, the one willing to stand up to Lengel, but also the most visually provocative; like the goddess Nike, she is youthful, supple, and almost naked, walking around in a flesh-toned bathing suit with her straps down. For Lengel, the usage of "kingpin" alludes not only to his position but to what Sammy perceives as a source of oppressive power. When Queenie and Kingpin go to battle, Sammy dutifully and chivalrously aligns himself with her- a knight faithful to his queen- for three very important, subconscious reasons: first, he does not belong within A&P, second, because his beliefs are more similar to those of the three girls, and lastly, remaining a member of A&P would mean supporting what he sees as a demeaning authority. Once on the outside, Sammy acknowledges "how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter" (414). With imagination, a reader can compassionately slip into Sammy's shoes and appreciate his choice to renounce the 9-5, the eventual marriage, the doldrums of suburban life, and yet still fearful at the uncertain future of the unbeaten path. Despite hesitation, never once does Sammy retrospectively express any remorse over his choices; rather, he takes pride in his dissention.

While Sammy is no hippie or beatnik, the struggle of his character is representative of the quarrel between two perspectives in America: the young and the old. While the Vietnam Draft is a good seven years away from when the story takes place, his actions at the very end act as a small metaphor to draft dodging; a refusal to fight and represent beliefs not aligned with the individual. A lack of satisfaction in the American lifestyle- especially the socially accepted formats of personal expression, and the economic choices for youths- was very much at the root of counterculture in the 1960's. Perhaps a reader would not be surprised to find a few years later, in an imaginary world, a Sammy who has completely renounced the corporate world, remained unmarried, and gone off the grid. Perhaps a reader can see the three girls as future mods in vibrant short dresses. Perhaps, most importantly, a reader can discern that this movement was not entirely fashioned-based but rather based on a world clawing to become more individualized, desiring more respect for the experience of one rather than many, a world rebelling against the 9-5, and a generation helpless under the weight of the future.

Work Cited

- Updike, John. "A&P". *Norton Introduction to Literature*. 11th Edition. Kelly J. Mays. New York, London: W.W Norton & Company, 2014. Pg. 409-414. Paperback.
- "The Art Of John Updike's "A & P." *Studies In Short Fiction* 34.2 (1997): 215. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 24 Mar. 2015