

STUDENT WRITING EXEMPLAR: YUKO'S MENTOR

In the story, "Raymond's Run," by Toni Cade Bambara, Squeaky, the protagonist, is a hard person to love. She is a hard person to love because she has a negative outlook on life, because she is always looking for a fight, and because she is conceited.

The most obvious reason why Squeaky is hard to love is because she has a negative outlook on life. Whenever she mentions someone, it seems like they are always "stupid," or a "fool." Also, Squeaky thinks that everyone is out to get her and Raymond. For example, when she is walking down the street and runs into some girls she knows, right away she starts thinking awful things about them, like that Mary Louise isn't "grateful" and that Rosie is "too stupid to know that there is not a big deal of difference between her and Raymond." Squeaky doesn't think kind thoughts about people, and she doesn't act kindly towards them either. We have all heard the phrase—"you can't love anyone else until you can love yourself." In this story we see that the opposite might be true too—it is impossible to be loveable if you don't show any love to others.

Furthermore, Squeaky is hard to love because she is combative—she is always looking for a fight. There are many times in the text where Squeaky mentions that she is ready to fight someone, that, in fact, she would "much rather just knock you down and take my chances" rather than talk about anything. At the beginning of the story, Squeaky says that if anyone has something to say about her brother, they have to come through her first. And then later on in the story when she and Raymond see the girls on the street, when Mary Louise asks Raymond what grade he is in, Squeaky says right away, "You got anything to say to my brother, you say it to me, Mary Louise Williams of Raggedy Town, Baltimore."

While as a reader, you kind of understand why Squeaky is so combative, that doesn't make it any easier to love her as a character. Sure, people are probably really mean to Raymond. And she definitely has a lot on her plate as a young kid. However, that doesn't make it right for her to always think about using violence and conflict to get her way. Just because we can understand why she is angry doesn't mean we agree with how she deals with her anger. Squeaky doesn't even give anyone a chance to be nice—it's as if she would rather fight than make friends. This also makes her a very hard character to love.

Finally, Squeaky is a hard character to love because she is pretty conceited. It seems like she is always bragging about her running in this text. Right away she says "There is no track meet that I don't win the first place medal." And even if this is true, the way she says it sounds kind of cocky. Like when she mentions that Gretchen even thinks she has a chance in beating her she calls the idea "ridiculous." And later, when she is talking to Mr. Pearson and he suggests that maybe she could let someone else have a chance this year, she is not gracious about it, she is not kind. Instead she gives him a nasty look and acts like he said something awful. She is so conceited about her running that she doesn't notice that he was just looking out for some of the other girls. Squeaky's ego is so big that it pushes all the love and compassion you might feel for her right out of the way. Her ego is like a force field protecting her, but that force field is also keeping everyone out.

As you can see, Squeaky is tough to love, because she sees the worst in people, she is always ready for a fight, and she is conceited. While at the end of the story she starts to change a little, by smiling at someone for like the first time ever, she is still a hard person to love.