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The Importance of Choice

In the short story “The Skating Party”, the main theme that evolves is that a person must learn to make decisions carefully because he/she will have to live with the consequences for the rest of his/her life. The central character, Nathan, cannot choose between the job he has always wanted, farming, and that of which he knows he is capable, teaching. Also, he has spent 30 years reliving the incident of his youth, which occurred at a skating party, contemplating the decision he made regarding whose life to save, Eunice’s or Delia’s. Further, Delia herself, has to live with her own choice to skate off with Nathan during the celebration of her sister Eunice’s engagement and the events that followed. For these reasons, it becomes evident that the theme of this short story centers around the importance of making decisions carefully with the potential aftermath in mind.

This theme is first introduced through Nathan’s struggles to choose an occupation. Having been raised on a farm, Nathan grows up with the dream of someday becoming a farmer himself, with a devoted wife at his side. However, he enrolls in all of the required schooling to become a teacher and this is the path he primarily chooses. He ultimately quits his teaching job and moves back to Willow Bunch to attempt to build a farming career after all. He becomes engaged to Eunice and does in fact, begin a life farming, although without much success. His dream is almost realized. After the death of his fiancé Eunice, however, his aspirations dissolve and he moves once again to the city. Throughout the duration of the story, Nathan never settles

on either job. His inability to select and stay committed to one career prevents him from ever having stability in his life.

The second factor that reinforces the theme of “The Skating Party” is that Nathan chooses to save Delia over his fiancé Eunice. He never feels certain that he has made the right choice, pondering it constantly. He reflects upon his options at the time and wonders how the outcome would differ had he made a different choice. This perpetuation prevents Nathan from ever feeling a true connection to anyone and disables him from experiencing true inner peace. If a person is not certain or careful with his/her decisions, he/she may well end up doing what Nathan does, reliving the pivotal moment, again and again, each time changing his/her ‘choice’ and anticipating how the outcome might have changed.

Lastly, the central theme of “The Skating Party” is strengthened through Delia’s decision to skate off with Nathan at the skating party. Their lengthy departure infuriates Eunice and leads to the two sisters skating off together to continue their argument which, in turn, results in them falling through the ice and ultimately, in Eunice’s death. Delia struggles to deal with the outcome of her own choices and the role she played in her own sister’s death. In order to cope, she moves out of Willow Bunch, thus isolating herself from her family and friends. Once again, the theme of the importance of choice is underscored through Delia’s dilemma.

As is evident, the theme of “The Skating Party” is that a person should make important decisions with confidence and assurance because the outcomes may well lay the foundation of the rest of his/her life. Nathan cannot decide on a career thus denying himself the ability to feel secure and settled. Following his decision to save Delia and not Eunice, he is burdened with a heavy conscience. Also, Delia will have to live with the fact that she was saved or ‘chosen’ over her sister. Her own part in this reality haunts her and leads to her departure. Together, these

occurrences reinforce the author's theme of the critical importance of making important decisions carefully and with caution in order to live a complete and fulfilling life.