

Key themes in **Sonny** by **Lucy Shepherd**

Themes

1	Identity
2	Parenthood
3	Friendship
4	Technology
5	Growing up and independence

Summary	Themes	Analysis
From the start, we sense Sonny's struggle with himself, friendships and his place in the world around him. We learn there has been a cyber-attack, changing the world as we know it. Sonny's mum, knowing his difficulties in making friends, encourages Sonny to have a pen-pal. Sonny is horrified at the thought of writing and another doomed friendship.		Sonny is clearly ill at ease with himself, school and friendships, and is unable to communicate this to his mum. He assumes a new friendship would be doomed so thinks there is no point in even beginning one. Using technology is not an option after the cyber-attack, so writing letters is the only way to conduct a long-distance friendship and as Sonny struggles with his schoolwork, this is yet another hurdle to overcome.
At school, the effects of the cyber-attack are evident not just in the lack of technology available but also resources such as water and variety of food stuffs. Sonny's group of 'friends' discuss the upcoming history presentation which will compare life in the digital age and life after the infrastructure was brought down. Sonny is ill at ease with his schoolwork as well as friendships, unable to see how he might be able to contribute.		We sense Sonny's unease at fitting in at school. He is clearly interested in the history project, but his fear of failure means he is paralysed into not being able to begin. Sonny is unable to organise his many thoughts so it is easier not to try.
Sonny is too intrigued by the letter written by Sam to ignore it any longer. He is drawn in by his curiosity and the warmth of her tone. Eventually, he tentatively succumbs to writing his own reply. We are also introduced to Mouse, who lives under the floorboards in Sonny's room.		Mouse becomes a symbol of Sonny's personal growth in friendships. As Sonny embarks on his letter writing friendship with Sam, we also see Mouse grow more and more brave.
The reader is now introduced to Kannan, who is from a different culture. We later find out his family had been asked to come to Britain to share their expertise in growing tea, which in the past would have been imported. Kannan takes Sonny under his wing, supporting him both as a friend and in maths. This friendship begins to grow and Sonny even receives an invitation to Kannan's house one weekend. Despite these encouragements, Sonny is periodically haunted by flashbacks to his past which hint at a past trauma he is not free from.		Kannan and Sonny are drawn to each other, perhaps because they are both different from their peers. Sonny finds comfort in Kannan's kindness and Kannan enjoys being able to share his skills to help Sonny. Sonny is delighted with this newfound friend and this gives him confidence to grow his friendship with Sam through writing letters. Mouse, meanwhile, is becoming progressively more tame.
Through Sam's letters, we learn that she has struggles with her appearance, hinting that she is restricted in her love of performing arts, despite her talent. Later this is evidenced by the fact she is not chosen for a lead in the school show, even though her audition clearly earned it. Sonny's reaction to this news surprises him. It is his father who is able to put into words that the emotion Sonny is feeling is		Sonny's father plays a key role in helping him make sense of, and name, his emotions, rather than everything being labelled as anger. Similarly, Sam's father is clearly key to how confident she feels in herself. Despite her upset, she is able to process her set back well.

<p>disappointment at the injustice of the way his friend has been treated.</p>					
<p>Kannan invites Sonny over to his house, a rare social occurrence for him. This fuels more heightened emotions: pleasure, excitement but also fear of messing it up. Sadly, despite the positive start to the day, Sonny is unable to cope with the social pressure, and a small mishap sends him running away from the situation, leading to a lingering sense of shame. This is now the lens he is viewing every aspect of his life through, his history project and even his pen pal friendship with Sam. He stops writing, despite her endeavours to encourage him.</p>					<p>Feeling shame and then fleeing from a situation is a pattern in Sonny's life. Fuelled by flashbacks from his past, he seems unable to break the cycle and this threatens to sabotage even the positive aspects to his life. He is unable to voice his misery, even to his loving parents or a trusted friend.</p>
<p>Sonny's discomfort culminates in the pressure of the looming history presentation at school and he is unable to cope with the combination of this and his feelings of having messed up his friendship with Kannan. He truants from school, something he has never done before. However, Kannan finds him and demonstrates that the friendship is still intact. His truanting has not gone unnoticed by his teacher and during his addressing the situation, we find out that Sonny has been adopted as a young child, explaining his flashbacks.</p>					<p>Sonny defaults to reacting in flight mode when things get too out of his control or he thinks he has failed. This is demonstrated through his silence with Sam, avoiding his parents and Kannan and finally, truanting from school. His teacher understands him as he was adopted too. It is the unwavering acceptance of those around him (Kannan, Sam, Grandad and most importantly his father) that help him to get back on track.</p>
<p>The day of the presentation arrives and Sonny, despite his interest in the subject and Grandad's anecdotes, has still not planned his part. It is dad who comes to the rescue, placing a smart phone as an artefact in his hand for him to talk about. Using his chats with Grandad, Sonny delivers a thoughtful speech, reflecting on the digital age and particularly how technology changed relationships. Sonny demonstrates a depth of understanding which dad knew was there.</p>					<p>Dad is able to rescue Sonny's situation without him losing face or feeling shame. He shows a trust and confidence in his son's abilities which even Sonny does not know he is capable of.</p>
<p>Sonny builds on the success of the presentation and the unwavering acceptance from his family and friends by accepting an invitation from Sam to go and meet her in person and stay with her in the countryside. He travels by train by himself and Sam is waiting at the station. We find out in the final paragraphs that Sam is disfigured by scars from burns, the fire she was rescued from as a baby (see prologue) but Sonny barely notices these as his friendship with her is so strong through his letter writing. We are left with a feeling that this is a unique and life changing friendship for both of them.</p>					<p>By now Mouse has disappeared, symbolically showing that Sonny's real friendships are deepening and he is growing stronger and more independent as a young person. He has found a connection with his friend Sam; Sam's outward scars are not seen by Sonny as a hindrance to her friendship and likewise, Sonny's inward scars begin to heal through her unconditional friendship. As readers, we are left feeling optimistic about their futures.</p>

If you would like to discuss a scheme of work, or would like a visit from the author for a creative writing workshop or Q&A session, please contact:

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