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10/29/23

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Essay #2

Growing up, almost everyone has issues fitting in, making friends, struggling with expectations from their parents, and overall struggling with their identity and figuring out who they are. These problems are typical in any coming of age story in most forms of media. Many of these problems have been experienced by children of immigrant parents living in hardship. In Henry Roth's "*Call It Sleep*" Roth spends the novel exploring the hardships of a David Schearl. David is a young Jewish kid living in New York City. He neglects his Jewish heritage out of fear. He has a fractured relationship with his father, but remains extremely close with his mother. David often struggles to fit in with other children. The Schearl family lives in a poverty-ridden area around the lower east side of Manhattan. **Henry Roth spends the novel exploring the various hardships immigrant families face through David and his family in "*Call It Sleep*".**

An issue for all children with recent immigrant ties in the 21st century struggle with assimilating to American culture and face cultural clashes and even having an identity crisis. David struggled with this in the early 20th century. The setting in which the novel takes place is also very culturally diverse and could add to David's confusion since he is very naive and innocent at times. Things that contribute to David's identity crisis involve having a language barrier with his peers while trying to balance living with his Yiddish-speaking family. David also experiences a language barrier throughout the novel, as Yiddish is his primary language his family speaks. Making it very difficult for him to fit in with his peers. "I'm Albert Schearl's son. He wants you

to give me the clothes in his locker and the money that's coming to him. Do you understand? When they've given it to you, bring it down here. I'll be waiting for you. Now what will you say? He demanded abruptly. David began to repeat his instructions in Yiddish. "Say that in English you fool!(Roth page 25) David barely knows English and has trouble when speaking to his mother and father, versus everyday life. The language barrier sets up David for a difficult time in school and makes it tough for David to make friends with the other kids in the neighborhood. Along with David's classmates which are primarily American born and not Jewish, unlike David making him the odd one out often creating the opportunity for cultural differences.

David has to navigate the unfamiliar parts of New York City on his own, while trying to live up to the example that his parents set for him. David's fractured relationship with his family mainly contributes to his interactions with his father. "As far as he could remember, this was the first time that he had ever gone anywhere alone with his father, and already he felt desolated, stirred with dismal forebodings, longing desperately for his mother. His father was so silent and so remote that he felt as though he were alone even at his side. What if his father should abandon him, leave him in some lonely street. The thought sent shudders of horror through his body(Roth, page 24). It is very hard to find a specific reason why Albert Schearl is so cruel to his son. A reason could be his struggling financial situation and having to provide for his family as an immigrant. Or it could just be because he is a cruel evil man who takes out his frustration on his son. David is extremely close with his mother so he sometimes struggles to sometimes adhere to how she wants her son to behave and certain morals his mother believes in. These sometimes

conflict with American customs and norms. Making things more confusing and difficult for David.

In conclusion, **Henry Roth spends the novel exploring the various hardships immigrant families face through David and his family in “*Call It Sleep*”**. From trouble assimilating to American culture and fitting in with peers so he can make friends, to trouble navigating his fractured relationship with his father, and trying to live up to his mothers example. This story is able to relate to many kids with immigrant ties. This story has sometimes even mirrored points in my life to a much smaller degree. But at times I have faced similar issues David has in the story, like neglecting my heritage and struggling to sometimes assimilate to other kids since things would be different at home. David is a perfect character for portraying a 1st generation immigrant son struggling to find his place in the world, and finding out who he really is. Henry Roth knows how to get the reader to relate to “*Call It Sleep*” and empathize with David’s struggles, as the Jewish immigrant experience in this novel mirrors many real life experiences a majority of immigrant families have experienced including my own.