

Professor Becker
English 102

The Boss

We have all experienced traumatic incidents in our lives. Some of us have endured more than others. But the question remains: How much is enough? At what point is a person tired of fighting? When will a person give up hope for survival? Such is the question that confronts the boss in Katherine Mansfield's short story, "The Fly." The boss is an intelligent and determined individual who has overcome many obstacles in his life. However, he is now confronted with an insurmountable barrier that he is frightened of facing --the death of his only son. The boss in this story, although resilient, has come to realize that people do have limits.

The boss is an extremely resilient individual. He has endured a great amount and is able to use these experiences to catapult himself to the top. A business is extremely difficult to start and once started, there are many obstacles to face. The road to a successful business is a very treacherous one that leaves many people heartbroken or hopeless. The boss is an example of someone who has traveled this treacherous road successfully, and therefore has a thriving business.

The boss is shown to be intelligent through his success and also by the way he contemplates a situation before making a decision or an assumption. For example, when the boss is confronted with the fly, he doesn't merely think of the fly as insignificant. On the contrary, the boss examines the fly's actions, questions them, and experiments to find out more. It is also shown that the boss likes to prepare for the future through how the boss had been building up his business for the sole purpose of leaving it to his only son.

So, as you can see, the boss was a fighter. He was a survivor. He was the type of person to face all obstacles with a positive mind and resolve within himself to overcome these barriers. However, the boss had now come to an obstacle that is not so easily overcome --the death of his one and only son.

The boss loved his son dearly. Early on, while his son was still alive, the boss would bring him to work and they would spend much time together coming to work and going home together. If the boss had other children, they were not as important to him because the boss makes no references to them. The son is evidently his pride and joy.

Now, six years after his son's death in the war, the boss is still trying to confront the problem of dealing with the loss of his son. The boss doesn't want to face this problem, or even want to think of his late son. He hasn't visited his son's grave site since the loss and whenever Mr. Woodifield brings the subject of his son up in a conversation, the boss seems to ignore what Mr. Woodifield is saying.

Then comes this fly. While the boss sits at his desk a fly just happens to land in his inkpot. The boss picks the fly out of the inkpot and places it on his blotter. The fly being resilient, starts to clean himself of the ink. The boss being curious, douses the fly with an inkblot to see what would happen. The steadfast fly begins once again to clean himself off. The boss, even more curious now, repeats this three more times. The first two times, the fly fights back, but after the third time, the fly lies still, unable to fight.

Why is the fly so important to this piece? The boss sees himself in the fly. Like the boss, the fly is resilient. Although the fly has gotten into a situation that seems impossible to escape, the fly fights to survive. Several times the fly is put in the same situation, but the fly still endures. Similar to the fly, the boss has fought back from impossible circumstances.

How much is enough, though? For the fly, there was a limit to how much it could take. When the fly finally dies, its death raises a serious question within the boss. How much is enough? The fly's death makes the boss question his own resiliency and makes him ask himself how much he can really endure. The boss has

taken so much and is able to thrive, but when will he no longer be able to endure? That is why the fly's death leaves the boss feeling wretched and frightened.

In the end, the boss doesn't want the incident with the fly to leave a lasting impression on him. The boss needs to go back to being "The Boss". He feels that he can't sit and ponder these questions or the death of his son. In order for him to survive, the boss needs to get back into the state of mind that got him to where he is. As much as the incident with the fly and the memories of his son have an affect on him, the boss feels that if he thinks about these things too much, he will regress.

For the boss, the question of "how much is enough?" is never answered. The fly leaves him with the realization that everybody has a limit. The boss though, is not able to recognize his own limit. The fly is extremely significant in this piece because it gives the boss an understanding of human nature and human resiliency. The boss in this story is like many people. Through this story comes a realization that life has its "ups and downs". It makes an individual think about his or her own ability to endure. What is YOUR limit?