Raymond’s Run

**Summary**

**The Fastest Thing on Two Feet**

The protagonist [Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Hazel) introduces herself and her life to the reader. Hazel—called Squeaky, on account of her squeaky voice—is a young girl who lives in Harlem, in New York City, with her family. Her father works, her mother takes care of the house, and her oldest brother George runs errands to earn extra money. Hazel is the youngest of her family, but her job is to take care of the middle child, her brother [Raymond](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Raymond), who has a developmental disability. Hazel protects Raymond from anyone who makes fun of him, fighting if necessary and running away if forced.

Hazel is "the fastest thing on two feet" and has come in first in every race she has entered. The only person who can beat her is her father, who is faster, even with his hands in his pockets. Tomorrow, Hazel is signed up to run the 50-meter dash at the May Day races. Her mother wants her to be like the other girls, dancing in beautiful May Day dresses, but Hazel thinks it is silly to dance around pretending to be a fairy or a flower. She prefers the grit and perseverance it takes to train her body for the races. Hazel has been working hard for months, practicing her breathing and her running so that she can win. This strong work ethic is part of her personality; she does not care for people who pretend that things come easy to them. Hazel explains that she dislikes girls like Cynthia, who works very hard in secret and then pretends that her accomplishments come without any effort. Cynthia's feigned surprise at her "effortless perfection" annoys Hazel, who displays her passion and determination in order to show her victories are hard won.

**Gretchen and Her Sidekicks**

As Hazel walks down Broadway practicing her breathing exercises with Raymond at her side, she sees another girl who has claimed that she will beat Hazel in the race tomorrow. The girl, [Gretchen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Gretchen), and her sidekicks, [Mary Louise](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Mary_Louise) and [Rosie](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Rosie), confront Hazel and Raymond on the sidewalk. Mary Louise, who used to be Hazel's friend, teams up with Rosie to try and provoke Hazel by taunting her about the races, then they try to taunt Raymond. Hazel taunts back and then threatens them. The girls finally go on their way, and Hazel and Raymond continue down the street, Hazel doing her breathing exercises and Raymond driving an imaginary carriage team.

**May Day**

Hazel and Raymond reach the May Day festivities late in the day because Hazel would prefer to avoid the May Pole dancing. She does not care for the expensive and frilly dresses that the girls are required to wear for the dance nor for the way that the girls are supposed "... to act like a fairy or a flower ...." Hazel would prefer to act like herself, a girl who likes to run.

**The Races**

When her race is about to begin, Hazel puts Raymond in the swings and checks in with [Mr. Pearson](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/symbols/#Mr._Pearson), who is in charge of the races. Mr. Pearson wonders aloud whether Hazel should let someone else have a chance to win the race this year. Hazel shuts him down with merely a look. Hazel watches the races of the younger kids and then lines up for her own. She notes Raymond lining up with her on the other side of the fence but lets him stay there, saving her focus for the race. As Hazel "zooms over the gravel in the track," she notices Gretchen keeping nose to nose with her and Raymond on the other side of the fence. Hazel and Gretchen finish so close they are not sure who won.

As they catch their breath and wait for the announcement, Hazel thinks about Raymond's run, noticing that "Raymond would make a very fine runner." She begins to consider retiring from running—whether or not she has won the race—and coaching Raymond as "a great runner in the family tradition." The announcement comes over the loudspeaker that Hazel has won and Gretchen came in second place. Hazel and Gretchen smile at each other, signaling their respect for one another. Hazel thinks that their smile is "about as real a smile as girls can do for each other" because girls are usually too busy pretending to be things they are not.

**Analysis**

**Proud and Self-Assured**

From the moment that Hazel introduces herself to the reader, she is confident and competitive. She knows exactly what she wants to do, and she works hard to do it. She does not hide her individuality, even though it makes her different from the other girls.

Bambara wrote characters like Hazel in an unapologetic attempt to promote a vision of what African American girls can be. Bambara's engagement with social activism during the black liberation and women's movements informed her approach to writing characters who were sure of themselves and rebellious. Hazel's rebellion is tied to societal expectations for young women; she intentionally avoids the May Day dances, where she would have to wear a fancy dress and pretend to be someone she is not. Instead, she creates an identity based on the power of her own body and the diligence of her training. She is fast, but she becomes faster thanks to her hard work. Bambara writes Hazel's character as the kind of girl who should inspire other girls. Hazel works for what she wants and does not expect or seek the aid of friends or adults.

**Girls: Friends or Enemies?**

In the beginning of "Raymond's Run," Hazel is a bit of a loner who sees the challenges that female friendship entails. She does not have many friends, spending most of her time protecting Raymond. She used to be friends with Mary Louise, but mostly because Mary Louise was also under her protection. Hazel is not like most girls; she does not fit in with their traditional preferences of dresses and dancing, nor even with the fake smiles that they give to each other. Hazel's outlook is constantly defensive. She defends her brother, she defends Mary Louise, and her bravado defends her pride and herself.

Instead of reshaping herself to make friends with girls, Hazel stands apart and insists that girls meet her on her level. Throughout the story, she constantly critiques the damage that girls do to one another by pretending to be something that they are not, whether it is Cynthia pretending to be effortlessly perfect, the girls in May Day dresses pretending to be fairies or flowers, or Mary Louise pretending that she was never friends with Hazel. Even when the girls smile at each other, Hazel makes the mature observation that girls do not really know how to smile at each other. No one has taught them because even adult women do not smile at each other; all they do is compete and try to protect themselves. Hazel is just as guilty of this as the others, except that she has the unusual ability to see through the false appearances and fake smiles. Her observations about the true nature of girls' and women's interactions with one another are wise beyond her years.

Gretchen is the only girl who earns Hazel's respect, opening up the possibility of earning her friendship. Gretchen's skill in running and her hard work at it earn Hazel's admiration because they are not falsified. Even then, however, Hazel says that the smiles they give each other are "about as real a smile as girls can do for each other." Even though Hazel wants her smile to be real, she is not sure how to engage this friend who is also an enemy.

Bambara's treatment of the complex relationships among girls as well as adult women challenges the reader to consider the nature of their own friendships. How can females support one another instead of competing with one another? What qualities are worthy of respect and friendship?

**Between Dreams and Reality**

In the story, Hazel tries several times to step outside of herself and her life. As she waits for the races to begin, she tries to imagine she is in the countryside, but she has difficulty overcoming the reality of the "concrete jungle" around her. As she prepares for her run, she feels like she is in a dream, transported away from her reality. The adrenaline takes her away. She only comes down as she steps to the line and hears the beginning of the race announced. Bambara writes Hazel as living between dreams and reality, powered by her own expectations.

By contrast, most of the other girls she knows live in a reality composed of societal expectations. The girls who dance around the May Pole in their dresses pretend to be what society expects of girls. Mr. Pearson encourages Hazel to conform to societal expectations, but she resists. Bambara's powerfully written character, defying what is expected of her, challenges the reader to ask how such expectations rob girls of the opportunity to reach their dreams. What potential greatness are girls and women missing because they conform rather than excel?

# Raymond's Run | Context

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## The Black Liberation Movement and the Women's Movement

The black liberation movement was an activist movement that fought for social equality for African Americans, while the women's movement fought for gender equality. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s had established legal equality for African Americans, but black communities continued to fight against prejudice and for social equality under various movements that are collectively referred to as the black liberation movement in the subsequent decades. At the same time, in the 1960s and 1970s, the women's movement was organizing to overcome the cultural obstacles to gender equality that persisted, despite women having earned the right to vote decades earlier in 1920. [Bambara](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/author/)'s writings gave voice to a group that felt excluded by both of these movements: black women. Although black women were a crucial part of both movements, their concerns were marginalized from the black liberation movement by sexism and from the women's movement by racism.

In 1970 Bambara published The Black Woman: An Anthology, which collected socially conscious writings of thinkers on politics, race, gender, and sex. Her subsequent collection of short stories, Gorilla, My Love (1972), featured powerful, relatable African American characters and tangibly described the complexity of their lives and communities. Bambara's particular focus on female protagonists as complex characters—like [Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Hazel) in "[Raymond](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Raymond)'s Run"—situated her stories at the intersection of the issues facing African American communities and women in this time period.

## Harlem

Harlem—the setting of "Raymond's Run"—is a predominantly African American neighborhood in New York City. The neighborhood and its strongly African American character arose around the turn of the 20th century. Situated in the northern area of the island of Manhattan, the neighborhood was overdeveloped in the 1880s, resulting in an overabundance of available housing. In the 1910s and 1920s hundreds of thousands of African Americans moved from the in what is now known as the Great Migration. Many landed in New York and filled the empty apartments in Harlem, creating a thriving black neighborhood that heightened the sense of pride in African American culture.

From the 1910s to the 1930s African American culture flourished in all art forms as racial and cultural pride became focal points of the movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. After the Great Depression (1929–39) and the deindustrialization of New York City after World War II (1939–45), poverty and crime rose significantly. The transformed neighborhood, with its powerful cultural history, provided a stage for the trials and achievements of the civil rights movement. The urban African American community that this history created provides the setting for "Raymond's Run."

## May Day

May Day is an annual celebration on May 1 that is today associated with International Workers' Day. May 1 has been celebrated as a holiday since the festival of Beltane was held by the ancient Celts, an ethnic group living in the British Isles since the 7th or 8th century BCE. Under Roman rule of the British Isles, the rituals associated with the fertility goddess Flora were incorporated into the May 1 festival. The incorporation of flowers and other fertility symbols had established the tradition of the May Pole dance by late medieval times (c. 1400 CE). In this ritual, dancers grasp colorful ribbons that are attached to the top of the pole and move around one another and the pole, weaving a ribbon pattern around the pole as they move.

The celebration of May Day and the maypole dance came to be associated with International Workers' Day in 1884, when the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Union declared that, as of May 1, 1886, a workday would consist of eight hours. This marked a crucial moment in the history of the labor movement, vastly improving the lives of workers and their families by ensuring a fair wage for a feasible number of work hours.

# Raymond's Run | Quotes

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**1.**

*All I have to do in life is mind my brother Raymond, which is enough.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

Although Raymond is Hazel's older brother, he has a developmental disability, and Hazel is responsible for taking care of him. She takes him with her almost everywhere. In the beginning of the story, she tends to view him as a responsibility more than as a person in his own right. She prioritizes her desire to run and do her breathing exercises and expects Raymond to keep up. She does not realize until the end that she has been training Raymond as well as herself.

**2.**

*And, as anybody can tell you, I'm the fastest thing on two feet.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

These words express Hazel's pride in being fast and in how hard she works to be fast. Because she is not a girl who likes to dress up and dance around the May Pole, she defines her identify around running and being the fastest runner. The only person faster than Hazel is her father, who can beat her with his hands in his pockets. No one else knows that he can beat her, however, because he only races casually with her on the street.

**3.**

*That goes for Gretchen too, who has put out the tale that she is going to win.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

Gretchen is Hazel's rival, even though the two have never raced one another. In the beginning of the story, Hazel describes how Gretchen's boasts fuel her hard work. Gretchen has claimed to be fast, and because Hazel's identity is founded on her pride in running, Hazel feels threatened. She responds by asserting that she will win and by practicing even more. The competition makes Hazel more determined than ever to excel.

**4.**

*I've got Raymond walking on the inside close to the buildings.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

Raymond is Hazel's responsibility because of his developmental disability. Although she prioritizes her running and her breathing exercises, she makes sure to do so in a way that keeps Raymond safe. As she describes here, when they walk down the street, she keeps Raymond on the side close to the buildings so that he will not stray off the curb.

**5.**

*Now some people like to act like things come easy to them.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

Hazel works hard to practice her breathing in order to improve her running, so she does not like people who pretend that things come naturally to them. A girl at her school, Cynthia Procter, pretends to be naturally good at everything, but she secretly practices at home. To Hazel, this is a selfish and deceptive thing to do because it undervalues the work it takes to achieve excellence.

**6.**

*I never walk if I can trot, and shame on Raymond if he can't keep up.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

Hazel prioritizes running above everything else. She practices at all times. Nothing can stop her from achieving her goals, not even caring for Raymond. These words reflect the way that she pushes him to keep up with her, not realizing that she is training his lungs and legs to be as fast as she is.

**7.**

*I much prefer to just knock you down right from the jump.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

Hazel is the kind of girl who prefers to confront her problems directly, as she says with these words. She confronts Gretchen and her sidekicks without fear, even though its three against one. She silences Mr. Pearson with a look when he suggests that she should give the win to Gretchen. As Hazel describes herself, she is not the kind of girl to shrink away from a challenge.

**8.**

*Act like ... whatever you're supposed to be when you should be trying to be yourself.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

When Hazel sees the girls that wear May Day dresses and dance around the May Pole, she thinks that they are silly. They act like flowers or fairies, molding themselves into exactly what society would like them to be. Hazel refuses to be like them. She wants to act like herself, not like what the world tells her girls should act like.

**9.**

*I run. That is what I am all about.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

Running and working hard to be faster are Hazel's acts of rebellion against society's expectations. She defines herself with an athletic pursuit that is about real physical strength instead of external appearances. Her identity as a runner expresses her view of how girls should be in the world.

**10.**

*Wouldn't it be a nice gesture if you were ... to ahh.*

[Mr. Pearson](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Mr._Pearson)

With these words, Mr. Pearson begins to suggest to Hazel that she give up the victory so that someone else can win because it would "nice." Mr. Pearson's words represent the way that society pressures girls to sacrifice their own dreams and desires in order to please others. Hazel stops him from completing his suggestion with a single, powerful look.

**11.**

*I am solid again and am telling myself, Squeaky you must win.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

Before the race, Hazel's mind soars away, and she feels like she is flying. Her dreams can float above her, but when it is time for the race to begin, she is grounded in her body. With these words, Hazel communicates the strength of her body and the power that she possesses. Hazel has the strength to achieve her goals; she is independent and capable.

**12.**

*On the other side of the fence is Raymond ... running in his very own style.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

Hazel is shocked to see Raymond running. While she was practicing, she never paid any attention to Raymond's running. She is surprised both that he can compete and that he does so without following the strict rules of running that she has followed. If Hazel bucks societal rules for women by devoting herself to running, Raymond bucks society's expectations of runners by competing with his own individual style. They are both rebels in their own way.

**13.**

*It occurred to me that Raymond would make a very fine runner.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

As Hazel's perspective about Raymond changes, her perspective about what makes a very fine runner also changes. Hazel had thought she needed to have good form, good breathing, and a lot of practice to become an excellent runner, but Raymond shows her that he can be an equally good runner with his very own style. Raymond does not need to conform to be amazing.

**14.**

*But what has Raymond got to call his own?*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

As Hazel realizes that both Gretchen and Raymond are also skilled at running, she begins to see that her identity as a runner is not harmed by sharing it with others. She even thinks about evolving her identity to become a coach so that she can pass on to Raymond the identity of "best runner" and the rebellious confidence it has given her to live life on her own terms.

**15.**

*It's about as real a smile as girls can do for each other.*

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/characters/#Hazel)

Throughout the story, Hazel makes unusually mature critiques of the relationships among girls and the impact of those relationships. Hazel notes that girls are frequently pretending to be something instead of simply being themselves. With these words, she highlights the difficulty that girls have in supporting one another because girls are socialized to be competitors in every arena.

# Raymond's Run | Symbols

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## Mr. Pearson

Mr. Pearson represents the strictures that society places on girls by encouraging them to please others at their own expense. [Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Hazel) is a proud, independent girl who excels at running. From her perspective, a girl should practice hard and give 100 percent all of the time, or else it would cheapen the victory of whoever won. A girl should not make herself smaller to please others. Mr. Pearson does not like that Hazel excels in running above all others. He believes that she should hold herself back in order to give other girls some time to shine. Mr. Pearson's request that she sacrifice her own victory—regardless of all of the hard work she has put in—reflects the socialization that girls endure as children, which asks them to put aside their wishes in the service of others. Hazel confronts this socialization without flinching, taking pride in her achievements and challenging the reader to wonder why it would ever be suggested that she should do otherwise.

## Hazel's May Day Race

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Hazel)'s May Day Race represents a transformation in Hazel's pride and arrogance. Hazel works hard to excel at running, always practicing to improve her breathing and speed. Her goal is to win the race. She takes as an enemy anyone who would dare to question her status or compete against her. In this respect, Hazel does not display very good sportsmanship. Hazel's pride in her running accomplishments even supersedes her concern for [Raymond](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Raymond); she cannot see that Raymond is also a good runner. During the race, however, when Hazel sees both [Gretchen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Gretchen) and Raymond competing with her, Hazel releases her pride. Gretchen earns her respect. Raymond earns her attention, and she transfers her own pride in running into a pride in the family's tradition of running. In this moment, Hazel outgrows a childish pride and transforms her relationship with the world by way of her race with Gretchen and Raymond.

## Cynthia Procter

Cynthia Procter is a girl in [Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Hazel)'s school who appears to do everything well without any practice while actually practicing very hard in secret. She represents the type of femininity that is based on falsified appearances. From Hazel's perspective, a person should be proud of the hard work they put in to achieve something. Hazel works hard to be a good runner, and she lets everyone see the hard work that gets her the first place medals that she earns. By contrast, Cynthia only works very hard in secret, making herself appear naturally flawless. Her falsified surprise when she does well at something is a deception and an insult to everyone who works hard to achieve something. Although Hazel and Cynthia both excel, they achieve their goals with opposing tactics. Hazel values the work she undertakes to achieve her goal; Cynthia values the appearance of effortless perfection.

# Raymond's Run | Themes

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## Pride and Identity

The theme of identity is central to [Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Hazel)'s story. In the beginning of the story, Hazel identifies herself almost exclusively as a runner. She is also [Raymond](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Raymond)'s caretaker, but although she takes that responsibility seriously, she is not particularly attuned to how he feels about accompanying her on every training run. Hazel prides herself on being strong-willed and a hard worker, but this leaves her isolated from the other girls. She sets herself apart from the other girls who dance around the May Pole and pretend to be fairies and flowers. Hazel does not pretend; she is honest about who she is.

Hazel's identity begins to change in the last scene. Although she had believed herself to be one against the world, Hazel begins to respect [Gretchen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Gretchen) and considers whether she needs to set herself against the girl as a rival. She also notices Raymond's abilities; instead of simply being someone in her care and protection, he becomes someone with his own identity, his own skills and potential. As Hazel opens herself up to the potential of connecting with others instead of outshining them as the best runner, her identity evolves from runner into coach and from rival into potential friend.

## Femininity and Female Friendship

The theme of femininity and female friendship plays a central role in [Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Hazel)'s understanding of her world. Society and her mother have told her that girls like to wear frilly, expensive dresses and dance around the May Pole. Hazel does not like to do these things, so she feels that she is not typically feminine. Hazel does not see the point of what she sees as the societal expectation that girls should pretend to be beautiful, dancing manifestations of perfection. She understands this approach to femininity as being false and useless. Hazel, however, is also guilty of a type of falsification. She acts tough and as if she is willing to fight [Gretchen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Gretchen) and her sidekicks. While Hazel would likely fight them, she is covering up the pain of being excluded and isolated by a group of girls. In both cases, Hazel's conclusion is that girls should stop trying to be something they are not and just be themselves.

## African American Urban Life in the 1970s

[Hazel](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/character-analysis/#Hazel)'s inner monologue and the engagements that she has with the outside world draw a picture of the urban life of her predominantly African American community in Harlem. Hazel and the other girls feel the pressures of this society all around them. They strive to fit in with a group of girls. They are expected to dance like perfect flowers around the May Pole. Finally, they have to make their dreams smaller to fit the needs of others, such as when [Mr. Pearson](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Raymonds-Run/symbols/#Mr._Pearson) asks Hazel to give up her hard-earned victory. At the same time, Hazel experiences feelings more common to all members of her community. As she waits for the races to begin, she lies on her back looking at the sky and tries to pretend she is in the country, but "there's just no pretending" that she is anywhere but the "concrete jungle." With parents busy working and caring for the home, Hazel is charged with the care of her brother, even though she is still a child herself, and she faces violence if her parents are displeased with her care. The totality of her life draws a picture of the urban life in Harlem, where the simple dreams and pleasures of childhood are mixed with the difficulties of a community plagued by poverty and violence.

# Gorilla, My Love Summary and Analysis of "Raymond's Run"

## Summary

This story is narrated by [Squeaky](https://www.gradesaver.com/gorilla-my-love/study-guide/character-list#squeaky), a young girl whose main responsibility in her family is taking care of [Raymond](https://www.gradesaver.com/gorilla-my-love/study-guide/character-list#raymond), her mentally disabled older brother. She explains that many people insult Raymond, referring to him as her “little brother,” but she tries to hold herself above the taunts (23). Squeaky is the fastest runner in the neighborhood (except for her father), and runs track at her school. She is currently preparing for a quarter-meter relay at the park the next day. Though she has always won this race, she is now facing a new rival, [Gretchen](https://www.gradesaver.com/gorilla-my-love/study-guide/character-list#gretchen).

Squeaky explains that she runs everywhere, and does breathing exercises to stay in shape. Unlike her classmate [Cynthia Procter](https://www.gradesaver.com/gorilla-my-love/study-guide/character-list#cynthia-procter), who pretends that she does not study, Squeaky does not mind if people know how hard she works to be successful.

Squeaky is walking down the street with Raymond when she bumps into Gretchen and Gretchen's entourage, Mary Louise and Rosie. They tease her about Raymond and about the relay race the next day, but they leave once Squeaky threatens to beat them up.

The next day, Squeaky arrives at the May Day celebration, where the race will be held. Her mother wants her to dress up and dance around the May Pole like the other girls, but Squeaky thinks that such activities are a silly waste of money. The teacher who organizes the race, [Mr. Pearson](https://www.gradesaver.com/gorilla-my-love/study-guide/character-list#mr-pearson), encourages Squeaky to throw the race in Gretchen’s favor because Squeaky has already won several years in a row. She ignores his suggestion and runs as fast as she can, with Raymond running along with her on the other side of the fence. Though Squeaky believes she wins the race, the judges have to confer before announcing a winner.

While the judges confer, Raymond climbs over the fence to be with his sister. As she watches him, she thinks to herself that from now on, she will focus on coaching Raymond, since “I’ve got a roomful of ribbons and medals and awards. But what has Raymond got to call his own?” (32). She also decides she will focus more on school, and less on running. When the judges announce that Squeaky has won, Gretchen gives her a genuine smile and word of congratulations. Squeaky wonders if Gretchen would like to help coach Raymond, and she smiles back.

## Analysis

In “Raymond’s Run,” Bambara continues to develop the concept of platonic connection between people based on empathy, rather than on family relationship or a common identity. In “My Man [Bovanne](https://www.gradesaver.com/gorilla-my-love/study-guide/character-list" \l "bovanne),” Bambara shows how a middle-aged woman befriends a blind mechanic based on nothing more than a sense of shared loneliness. This kind of relationship also develops at the end of “Raymond’s Run,” when Squeaky resolves her differences with Gretchen. Although Squeaky does not discover much in common with Gretchen, her concern for Raymond encourages her to try and find common ground with her adversary.

Although Bambara features unexpected friendships in this and other stories, she also focuses on family relationships. Some family relationships in this collection are dysfunctional – for example, there is the neglected main character of “Happy Birthday” or the narrator’s alcoholic great-grandmother in “[Maggie](https://www.gradesaver.com/gorilla-my-love/study-guide/character-list#maggie) of the Green Bottles.” However, Bambara usually depicts family as a source of strength and support for her characters. This story is no exception. Although Raymond is often an inconvenience to Squeaky because of his disability, she loves him fiercely, and learns from his simple goodness and enthusiasm for life. Her innate competitiveness is mediated by Raymond's simple joy, and one gets the sense that she could be far more antagonistic if his presence did not balance her out.

Unlike many of the other stories, this story follows a fairly conventional narrative and character arc. Over the course of the story, Squeaky changes as a result of both the plot events and her interaction with Raymond. This is appropriate to her character; because she is a young girl, it is plausible that a few mundane events over the course of a weekend could completely change her outlook on life. This might explain why Bambara tends to favor young narrators: they are suited to short stories because they can be influenced deeply by single events.

Bambara is deeply interested in feminism, and the way women relate to one another. “Raymond’s Run” is one of her most powerful explorations of these themes. In this story, Squeaky challenges traditional conceptions of femininity by refusing to wear dresses or dance around the maypole, as well as by running and doing breathing exercises in front of other people. This behavior is off-putting to her peers and to her parents, but Squeaky is stalwart in expressing her femininity in her own way. Although the narrator of “The Hammer Man” seems to believe that maturity entails wearing dresses and acting in a traditionally ‘ladylike’ manner, Squeaky in this story never submits to her mother’s ideas about how women should behave.

Although the race scene is certainly dramatic, the most important action in “Raymond’s Run” is internal. Bambara expresses the story’s themes not through the plot events, which are mundane, but rather through Squeaky’s thoughts and emotions. Like “My Man Bovanne,” this story ends with the narrator deciding upon a future course of action, rather than upon her actually performing the act. This kind of ending reappears throughout the collection. It suggests that Bambara believes that life’s most important changes are not in one’s circumstances, but in how one responds to those circumstances. The story here is not that of the race, but rather that of what the race made Squeaky realize.

Summary Part 1:

Unlike most girls, [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) doesn’t have many household chores—her [**mother**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother) does most of them. Squeaky also doesn’t have to earn pocket money by running errands or selling Christmas cards the way [**George**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/george) does. Squeaky’s [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father) takes care of most everything else the family needs—all Squeaky has to do is look after her brother [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond).

Analysis Part 1:

The story begins with Squeaky describing her caretaking duties, which suggests that looking after Raymond is central to her identity within the family. Each of her family members seems to have a distinct role in the household, and Squeaky’s primary responsibility is Raymond.

Summary Part 2:

A lot of people refer to [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond) as **[Squeaky](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky)**’s little brother because he’s “not quite right” and needs supervision, but he’s actually older and much bigger than she is. People would often mock Raymond for his “big head” when [**George**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/george) was the one who looked after him, but Squeaky isn’t afraid to stand up for Raymond; she isn’t one to stay quiet when someone is speaking out of turn. Squeaky isn’t afraid to take risks and push people down, even if she’s a skinny little girl with a squeaky voice (which is how she got her nickname). If a confrontation gets too intense, Squeaky just [**runs**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) away—she’s “the fastest thing on two feet.”

Analysis Part 2:

Squeaky clearly takes her role as Raymond’s protector seriously. It doesn’t matter to her that he’s “not quite right” and has a “big head”—Squeaky loves Raymond regardless of his disability (the exact nature of which is unspecified) and is willing to stand up to whoever bothers him. Squeaky’s boasting about being unafraid to fight and being “the fastest thing on two feet” establishes the reputation that Squeaky has made for herself in the neighborhood. Though she’s small and physically unintimidating, she projects toughness to the world as a means of defending Raymond and herself.

Summary Part 3:

[**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) wins first-place medals in every track competition she participates in. In private, though, Squeaky’s [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father) races against her and effortlessly beats her, even when Squeaky gets a head start. But this is a secret, since racing against kids is embarrassing for Squeaky’s father. As far as everyone else knows, Squeaky is the fastest person in the neighborhood—certainly faster than [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen), who’s been bragging that she’s going to win the first-place medal this year. Squeaky thinks this is ridiculous, since Gretchen has short legs and freckles, and no one ever beats Squeaky.

Analysis Part 3:

Squeaky is clearly a talented runner, yet her father’s embarrassment at being seen racing her implies that he doesn’t take her passion seriously. Whereas Squeaky is willing to stand up to anyone who insults Raymond, their father doesn’t extend that same pride and protectiveness to Squeaky. The reader thus begins to see that Squeaky’s abrasive attitude is at least partially rooted in a lack of support and care from those around her. Meanwhile, Squeaky’s disapproval of Gretchen hints at a general atmosphere of competitiveness and hostility among the girls in the neighborhood.

Summary Part 4:

One day, [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) sets out on a walk down Broadway while doing breath training for [**running**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running). Raymond walks with her on the side closer to the buildings, since he’s prone to “fits of fantasy.” If Raymond pretends he’s a circus performer and gets his pants and shoes wet when he steps off the curb (his makeshift tightrope) into the gutter, Squeaky is the one who gets hit as punishment when they return home. Sometimes, Raymond even darts into the street to scare the pigeons, which causes a commotion and upsets the neighbors. When this happens, Squeaky always has to apologize on his behalf. But Squeaky doesn’t mind looking after Raymond while he makes believe, as long as he doesn’t interrupt her breathing practice.

Analysis Part 4:

Raymond’s “fits of fantasy” and the ruckus he causes in the neighborhood suggests that his intellectual disability is rather severe and that he’s difficult to control. It seems unfair, then, that Squeaky is soley responsible for supervising him at such a young age, especially since Raymond is older and bigger than she is. Plus, given that Squeaky is the one who gets hit when Raymond misbehaves, she’s clearly under an immense amount of pressure from her parents to keep Raymond in line. And yet Squeaky doesn’t resent this role—she seems to take pride in being Raymond’s caretaker and to enjoy his company rather than viewing him as a burden.

Summary Part 5:

[**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) is unashamed of training in public, even though this embarrasses her [**mother**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother). Squeaky’s classmate [**Cynthia Procter**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/cynthia-procter), on the other hand, likes to let on that she doesn’t need to prepare for things like tests or the school spelling bee. But Squeaky knows better: Cynthia also pretends to be naturally gifted at the piano, but whenever Squeaky passes by Cynthia’s house, she hears her practicing scales. Squeaky resents this, since she herself studies hard and is unabashedly serious about [**running**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running). Presently, as Squeaky does her exercises, [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond) keeps pace with her because people will harass him if they see him hanging around.

Analysis Part 5:

Like Squeaky’s father, her mother is embarrassed rather than supportive of Squeaky’s passion for running. And again, it’s likely that this lack of support contributes to Squeaky’s feelings of inadequacy and her subsequent need to push people away and assert herself. In this vein, Squeaky’s bitterness toward Cynthia Procter is another indicator that the girls in the neighborhood see one another as competition rather than potential friends or allies.

Summary Part 6:

As [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) does her breathing exercises, she spots [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen) and her sidekicks [**Mary Louise**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mary-louise) and [**Rosie**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters) walking up the street. Squeaky used to be friends with Mary Louise when Mary Louise was new in Harlem, defending her from bullies, but now Mary Louise talks bad about Squeaky. Rosie is mean to [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond), although Squeaky doesn’t think Rosie has room to talk since she’s fat and unintelligent. Squeaky considers going into the candy store to avoid the girls, but she decides that would be cowardly—she has “a reputation to consider.” Squeaky is ready for a fight.

Analysis Part 6:

The way in which Mary Louise has backstabbed Squeaky adds context to Squeaky’s resentment toward other girls: it seems that the norm among the girls in the neighborhood is to put one another down in order to social climb and make themselves feel superior. Squeaky, too, emulates this norm through her insulting thoughts about Rosie and her prior comments about Gretchen’s short legs and freckles. However, this mean streak seems to be a front—Squeaky has “a reputation to consider” that drives her to be tough, even when she’d rather run and hide.

Summary Part 7:

As [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) does her breathing exercises, she spots [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen) and her sidekicks [**Mary Louise**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mary-louise) and [**Rosie**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters) walking up the street. Squeaky used to be friends with Mary Louise when Mary Louise was new in Harlem, defending her from bullies, but now Mary Louise talks bad about Squeaky. Rosie is mean to [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond), although Squeaky doesn’t think Rosie has room to talk since she’s fat and unintelligent. Squeaky considers going into the candy store to avoid the girls, but she decides that would be cowardly—she has “a reputation to consider.” Squeaky is ready for a fight.

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Summary Part 8:

As the girls approach, [**Mary Louise**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mary-louise) and [**Rosie**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters) taunt [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) about losing the upcoming May Day race, but Squeaky knows that they’re just parroting what [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen) told them to say. As Gretchen smiles disingenuously, Squeaky thinks that “girls never really smile at each other” because adult women don’t either, so there’s no one to teach them how. Mary Louise and Rosie begin to bully [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond), but Squeaky is quick to tell them off. Gretchen tries to look tough but has nothing to say back, so she and her sidekicks walk away. Raymond and Squeaky exchange a smile and carry on down the street.

Analysis Part 8:

Though Squeaky claims to be unafraid to fight, it’s significant that she shies away from actual violence and instead tells the girls off verbally. Her posturing seems to be defensive rather than offensive—she just wants people to let her and Raymond be themselves and walk in peace. Squeaky’s insight that “girls never really smile at each other” because that behavior isn’t modeled to them suggests that the issue of cattiness and competitiveness is widespread among adult women and young girls alike in their neighborhood. Gretchen and her sidekicks don’t know any better—they’re merely emulating a social norm in being cruel to Squeaky and Raymond.

Summary Part 9:

On May Day, [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) is in no rush to get to the park since the track meet is the last event of the day. The main attraction of the celebration is the May Pole dance, which Squeaky’s [**mother**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother) wishes she would participate in. But Squeaky is adamant that she doesn’t want to wear fancy clothes and dance around pretending to be a fairy—she’s more interested in being herself, a “poor Black girl” who can’t really afford new clothes. Squeaky remembers playing a dancing strawberry in a nursery school production of Hansel and Gretel, feeling foolish just so that her mother and [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father) could watch proudly. But Squeaky isn’t a dancer—she’s a [**runner**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running).

Analysis Part 10:

Squeaky’s reflections about the May Pole dance and the play reveal another layer to her parents’ disapproval: her mother and father clearly wish that Squeaky was more traditionally feminine. Squeaky’s rejection of prescribed gender roles and commitment to being herself, a “poor Black girl” who loves to run, disappoint her parents. Squeaky’s tough posturing, then, seemingly stems from feeling hurt at others’ disapproval and wanting to shut people out and avoid judgment about her identity and passions.

Summary Part 11:

When [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) arrives late to the May Day program, she puts [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond) in a swing and looks around for her teacher [**Mr. Pearson**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mr-pearson-beanstalk), who pins the race numbers on. Truthfully, Squeaky is really looking for [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen), though she doesn’t see her anywhere in the crowded park. Eventually, Mr. Pearson fumbles over, clumsily dropping things as he towers over the crowd on stilts. Mr. Pearson greets Squeaky by her nickname, which she resents because she’s not allowed to call him Beanstalk (his nickname among Squeaky and her classmates) to his face—so she corrects him that her name is Hazel Elizabeth Deborah Parker.

Analysis Part 12:

Even though the May Day race is incredibly important to Squeaky, her parents are seemingly absent. Again, their lack of support despite the responsibility for Raymond that they delegate to Squeaky likely makes Squeaky feel unappreciated and ashamed of who she is. It logically follows, then, that Squeaky has created a formidable persona in order to protect herself from getting hurt emotionally. Her insistence that Mr. Pearson call her by her full name underscores this: she bristles whenever she senses that someone is trying to make her feel inferior. Meanwhile, Squeaky’s preoccupation with finding Gretchen in the park shows the extent to which she’s motivated by besting other girls rather than simply focusing on her own performance.

Summary Part 13:

[**Mr. Pearson**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mr-pearson-beanstalk) hints that [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) should purposely lose the race this year—it would be a nice gesture to let [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen) win, since she’s new to the neighborhood. Squeaky just gives him a dark look and stomps away after pinning on her lucky number, seven. She thinks that adults can have a lot of nerve. Squeaky goes to lie down in the grass next to the track, imagining that she’s back in the country instead of the “concrete jungle” of the city. After the younger age groups [**run**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) the 20-, 30-, and 40-yard dashes, Squeaky and Gretchen take their places at the starting line for the 50-yard dash. Squeaky sees [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond) on the other side of the fence, mimicking the runners’ crouched positions, but Squeaky doesn’t have the energy to yell at him to cut it out.

Analysis Part 13:

Here, Mr. Pearson reinforces the competitive attitude that Squeaky and her female classmates harbor toward one another. Rather than encouraging Squeaky to do her best, he frames her winning as a disservice to other girls like Gretchen. Squeaky’s daydream, meanwhile, adds yet another layer to the persona she puts on: it seems that she feels dissatisfied and alienated in the “concrete jungle” where she lives and longs to go back to the countryside. Thus, she acts tough and abrasive to prevent others from seeing her emotional pain or vulnerability. Squeaky’s decision not to yell at Raymond also implies that being his caretaker wears on her despite how much she loves him—it’s simply too big of a responsibility for a girl her age.

Summary Part 14:

Whenever [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) is about to [**run**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) a race, she feels like she’s in a fever dream, flying weightlessly over a beach. In the dream, she smells apples like the ones in the orchard near where she used to live in the countryside. She feels herself getting lighter and lighter until she crouches over the starting line and snaps out of the dream. Feeling solid again, she encourages herself that she has to win because there’s no one faster than her—she could even beat her [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father) if she really tried.

Analysis Part 14:

Here, the symbolism of running is fully established: though Squeaky uses winning races as a means of impressing others, running also represents escapism, a break from the judgment she constantly faces from other people. But again, this inner peace is interrupted, as even Squeaky’s private inner monologue reveals a deep-seated need to win in order to maintain her reputation.

Summary Part 15:

Whenever [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) is about to [**run**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) a race, she feels like she’s in a fever dream, flying weightlessly over a beach. In the dream, she smells apples like the ones in the orchard near where she used to live in the countryside. She feels herself getting lighter and lighter until she crouches over the starting line and snaps out of the dream. Feeling solid again, she encourages herself that she has to win because there’s no one faster than her—she could even beat her [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father) if she really tried.

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Here, the symbolism of running is fully established: though Squeaky uses winning races as a means of impressing others, running also represents escapism, a break from the judgment she constantly faces from other people. But again, this inner peace is interrupted, as even Squeaky’s private inner monologue reveals a deep-seated need to win in order to maintain her reputation.

Summary Part 17:

The gun goes off, and [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) flies past everyone else and tunes out the world around her. She sees [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen) to her right and [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond) keeping pace with them on the other side of the fence, [**running**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) in his own style with his arms at his sides and his hands behind him. Squeaky, awestruck, has never seen this before; she almost stops and watches Raymond on his very first run. But she stays focused on the finish line and wins the race, garnering congratulatory pats on the back from everyone on the sidelines.

Analysis Part 18:

Seeing Raymond running is a turning point for Squeaky: despite desperately wanting to win the 50-yard dash just before this, she actually considers quitting the race just to watch him. Raymond isn’t motivated by accolades or other people’s opinions—running alongside the racers seems to be a way of expressing himself and doing something he enjoys, regardless of how he looks while doing it. Squeaky’s admiration of him, then, suggests that she may come to a similar conclusion about unabashedly pursuing her passions regardless of what people think of her.

Summary Part 19:

Then, just as the race announcer says “In first place,” the loudspeaker cuts out. [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) sees that [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen) overshot the finish line, too, and is now walking back while breathing steadily like a professional would. Seeing this, Squeaky thinks that she actually likes Gretchen a little. [**Beanstalk**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mr-pearson-beanstalk) argues with the announcer and a few other men about the times on the stopwatches while Squeaky and Gretchen look at each other, wondering who actually won.

Analysis Part 19:

It’s significant that Squeaky’s change of heart toward Gretchen happens just after witnessing Raymond’s run. It suggests that loving and supporting him as his caretaker is spilling over onto Squeaky’s attitude toward others, making her more cooperative and supportive rather than competitive. Instead of viewing Gretchen as an enemy, Squeaky begins to feel solidarity and even admiration toward Gretchen as a fellow female runner.

Summary Part 20:

Just then, [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond) rattles the fence to get **[Squeaky](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky)**’s attention, eventually climbing over it in a graceful way that makes Squeaky think of how Raymond looked while he was [**running**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running). She thinks that Raymond would actually make a good runner—he always keeps up with Squeaky when she practices and even mimics her breathing exercises. Squeaky thinks that it doesn’t matter if she’s won or lost against [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen), since she could always retire as a runner and coach Raymond instead. She could even beat [**Cynthia**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/cynthia-procter) in the spelling bee if she studied hard enough, or she could become a star on the piano if she could convince her [**mother**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother) to get her lessons. Squeaky’s room is full of ribbons, medals, and awards—she wonders what Raymond has of his own.

Analysis Part 20:

Again, it seems that Squeaky’s care for Raymond has given her a sudden shift in perspective. Having realized the things she’s been able to achieve while Raymond has been left out, Squeaky’s sole motivation is no longer just beating peers like Gretchen or Cynthia—she is more concerned with bettering herself, cooperating, and helping lift others up. Squeaky even thinks that she’ll give up racing, forfeiting her need to constantly project an image of success and strength to the world. Instead, Squeaky is inspired to pursue other hobbies and to help Raymond realize his own untapped potential.

Summary Part 21:

[**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) laughs aloud with joy at all of her plans, jumping up and down with excitement as [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond) scales the fence and [**runs**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) over to her. She thinks that Raymond will be an excellent runner, just like Squeaky and their [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father). Everyone else thinks that Squeaky is excited because the judges have just announced the final results of the race: Hazel Elizabeth Deborah Parker in first place, [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen) P. Lewis in second. Squeaky looks over at Gretchen and smiles, thinking that Gretchen is a good runner and that she could even help Squeaky coach Raymond. Gretchen nods to congratulate Squeaky and smiles back—as real of a smile as a girl can manage, Squeaky thinks, given that girls don’t usually practice “real smiling.” She thinks that maybe girls are preoccupied with being fairies or strawberries instead of being “something honest and worthy of respect […] like being people.”

Analysis Part 21:

It’s a big deal that Squeaky is more excited about her new plans than about winning the race—watching Raymond run for the simple joy of running seems to have rid Squeaky of her constant need to best and impress others. The “real” smile that Squeaky shares with Gretchen further implies that Squeaky is ready to drop her tough persona and be vulnerable, supporting others even when she’s not sure if her kindness will be reciprocated. By extending respect to others in this way, the story suggests, one will garner sincere respect (rather than fear or intimidation) in return and even forge new friendships. In caring for Raymond, Squeaky is ready to cooperate with other girls as fellow human beings who are “worthy of respect,” treating people in the way that she hopes others will treat Raymond.

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| CaretakingTheme Analysis | **[Next](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/themes/reputation-respect-and-identity)**  [Reputation, Respect, and Identity](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/themes/reputation-respect-and-identity) |

In “Raymond’s Run,” [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) is responsible for looking after her disabled older brother, [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond), despite being a child herself. While her family’s expectation that she will care for Raymond gives Squeaky a sense of pride and identity, it’s also overwhelming: she is constantly fighting with and insulting Raymond’s bullies (which puts her at odds with her peers), and whenever Raymond gets into trouble, Squeaky’s family blames her. Meanwhile, nobody seems to be caring for Squeaky. Her parents and teachers are largely absent, and when they do appear, they often undermine her sense of security and self-worth. Neither Squeaky’s intense care for Raymond nor her parents’ failure to care for her is an ideal model for caretaking, but the story suggests definitively that it’s better to relate to others with care than with hostility or neglect. In the end, Squeaky’s relationship with Raymond becomes a model for her relationships with others, helping her to adopt a more positive and caring attitude.

Despite being a child, Squeaky has a tremendous amount of responsibility, as she is her disabled brother’s primary caretaker. Squeaky clearly loves Raymond, whom she is seemingly expected to look after each day while her parents are busy. She defends Raymond against neighborhood kids with “smart mouths” who often ridicule Raymond for his “big head” and his erratic behavior (he’s “subject to fits of fantasy”). Squeaky adopts a tough persona in order to defend him, and she is proud of this toughness. Taking care of her brother in this way gives Squeaky a sense of purpose, even at a young age—she’s quick to point out that Raymond is safer with her than he had been in the past, when their brother [**George**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/george) was in charge of caring for him. But caring for Raymond, who is older and bigger than her, is undeniably hard on Squeaky: when Raymond has “fits” and aggravates their neighbors, Squeaky is the one who must subdue him and apologize on his behalf. And if Raymond acts out of line—sloshing around in the gutter and getting his clothes wet, for instance—Squeaky is the one who “get[s] hit when [she] gets home.” It’s clear that Squeaky is forced to take on far more responsibility as Raymond’s caregiver than is fair for a girl her age.

But while Squeaky displays responsibility and maturity beyond her years in caring for Raymond, none of the adults in Squeaky’s life take good care of her. Squeaky’s parents are notably absent from the story. They appear primarily in her recollections, typically in instances when they have failed to understand her or declined to show her support. Her [**mother**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother), for example, “thinks it’s a shame” that Squeaky doesn’t participate in the May Pole dancing (ignoring Squeaky’s vehemence about not wanting to dance), yet she does not show up at the track race—the activity at the center of Squeaky’s identity—to cheer Squeaky on. Furthermore, while Squeaky’s [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father) occasionally [**runs**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) with her (thereby affirming and participating in her passion), even this support is limited. They conduct this father-daughter ritual in secret, which Squeaky interprets as a sign that he’s not proud of her skill but is instead embarrassed to be “a thirty-five-year-old man stuffing himself in PAL shorts to race little kids.”

Beyond her parents, other adults in her life fail Squeaky. For instance, her teacher [**Mr. Pearson**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mr-pearson-beanstalk)—who organizes the May Day track meet—actively tries to undermine the pride Squeaky takes in running. Squeaky has won this event for the past several years, and she expects this year to be no different. But rather than celebrating her talent and hard work, Mr. Pearson cruelly insinuates that it would unfair for Squeaky to win again, and he seems also to blame the race’s poor turnout on the fact that Squeaky is participating. Mr. Pearson, a runner himself, is presumably someone who might nurture Squeaky’s passion. Instead, his comments leave her so “burnt” that she can only stomp away and prepare for the race on her own. The way in which adults in Squeaky’s life treat her shows that she is continuously neglected, unsupported, and misunderstood—a stark contrast to the level of care that Squeaky provides for Raymond.

Despite the repeated failure of parents, teachers, and other adults to nurture and care for Squeaky, the story ends with a moment of profound optimism, as Squeaky begins to understand caretaking as a model for good relationships. As Squeaky runs the race, she sees Raymond running on the sidelines, which makes her realize that Raymond could be “a great runner in the family tradition” if she were to coach him. This idea is so powerful that Squeaky loses interest in the competition itself, which was previously her central concern. She no longer cares if she won or lost the race, because she realizes that it might be more fulfilling to “retire as a runner and begin a whole new career as a coach with Raymond as my champion.” This signals a major shift for Squeaky; she now understands that she would rather help someone else succeed than continue to worry about her own achievements.

This realization of the value of caretaking carries over to Squeaky’s relationship with a classmate named [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen), which has been hostile and competitive throughout the story. As Squeaky thinks about helping Raymond run, she finds herself smiling at Gretchen, and she realizes that their shared passion for running could be a point of common interest rather than fuel for competition. In a moment of epiphany, Squeaky fantasizes that she and Gretchen could actually unite and coach Raymond together, showing her shift to a more cooperative and compassionate attitude toward others. In this way, Squeaky’s relationship with Raymond—a relationship of care, compassion, and cooperation—becomes a model for Squeaky’s other relationships, even with her most bitter rival. By realizing how fulfilling it is to care for Raymond, Squeaky is able to stop emulating the competition and neglect that surround her and instead choose to be supportive and helpful moving forward.

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| Reputation, Respect, and IdentityTheme Analysis: | **[Next](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/themes/gender-roles-and-female-solidarity)**  [Gender Roles and Female Solidarity](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/themes/gender-roles-and-female-solidarity) |

[**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky) is an independent, headstrong girl who’s at odds with a society that values strict adherence to social norms. While her parents and teachers expect her to be docile and feminine, Squeaky insists on being herself: she won’t wear dresses, she has rituals that seem odd to others (like constantly practicing [**running**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) and performing breathing exercises in public), and she spends all her time with her disabled brother, [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond), whose appearance and behavior expose both him and Squeaky to ridicule. To defend Raymond and to garner the respect of others, Squeaky adopts a mean and tough reputation, someone willing to trade insults or brawl when challenged. She presents herself as formidable and willing to fight, but for all her tough talk, readers never actually see her engage in violence in the story. From Squeaky’s narration and actions toward others, it’s clear that she’s actually a thoughtful, sensitive young girl—far from the abrasive persona she projects to the world. Through Squeaky’s inner thoughts and her change of heart at the end of the story, Bambara makes the case that often, seemingly tough individuals are putting on a false persona to protect themselves and win others’ admiration—and that such people are better off being honest about their true selves if they want to earn people’s sincere respect.

Squeaky postures as tough in order to protect herself and Raymond. From the start, readers get the sense that Squeaky is compensating for the fact that she’s a self-described “little girl with skinny arms and a squeaky voice.” Others seem to view her the same way, given that these qualities are what led to her nickname.  Because of Squeaky’s size and voice and Raymond’s disability (he’s “not quite right” mentally), the siblings are at risk of being ridiculed, and so Squeaky is quick to boast that she’s “the quickest thing on two feet” and that she’s not afraid to “knock you down right from the jump” if anyone tries to harass her or Raymond. Squeaky’s eagerness to fight is, at least partially, a reaction to the neighborhood bullies who torment Raymond and the trio of girls—[**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen), [**Mary Louise**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mary-louise), and [**Rosie**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters)—who are rude to Squeaky. In this way, her tough persona seems to be a defense mechanism, a way of protecting herself and Raymond and of earning respect from others.

But as the story progresses, it becomes evident that the reputation Squeaky tries to project stems out of a general feeling of being unaccepted. It’s gradually revealed that people misunderstand and mistreat Squeaky because they disapprove of her behavior: her [**mother**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother) is embarrassed when Squeaky does her exercises in public, both her parents seemingly ignore her because they’re disappointed that she’s not feminine enough, and her classmates taunt her because they’re jealous of her talent as a runner. Squeaky’s teacher [**Mr. Pearson**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mr-pearson-beanstalk) even suggests that Squeaky should purposely lose the annual May Day race in order to give the other girls a chance. The story also alludes to the fact that Squeaky used to live in “the country” surrounded by nature, and that she hates “the concrete jungle” of Harlem where she now lives. Readers can infer, then, that Squeaky’s toughness is really a front for her fears and feelings of dissatisfaction and alienation. Her persona is defensive rather than offensive—she projects bravado and aggression because she feels the need to shield herself against other people’s disapproval. Squeaky is adamant that she only wants to be herself: “a poor Black girl” who is wholeheartedly dedicated to running rather than more traditionally feminine activities like dancing. Thus, the expectations and pressure to conform that others place on Squeaky drive her to close herself off and adopt a façade of toughness to protect the identity and passions that she holds dear.

Ultimately, though, Squeaky realizes that she doesn’t have to be tough and antagonistic to protect Raymond or to have an identity of her own. The reader can infer that she’s actually somewhat timid—after all, Squeaky never actually fights anyone in the story. She even considers ducking into a nearby store when she sees Gretchen and her sidekicks approaching rather than facing them directly, a reaction that contradicts Squeaky’s fearless persona. And in the end, Squeaky, too, seems to realize that the false reputation she tries to convey isn’t helpful to her or to Raymond. During the 50-yard dash at the May Day celebration, Squeaky is awestruck when she sees Raymond running on the other side of the fence, gracefully keeping pace with her. This inspires Squeaky’s sudden desire to quit running altogether and to coach Raymond instead—she seems to understand that helping Raymond embrace his talent will be more productive for both of them than trying to intimidate bullies or garner bragging rights through winning races. After the race results are announced, Squeaky even smiles at Gretchen (who narrowly placed second)—and Gretchen briefly smiles back. The girls were bitter enemies up until this point, but both seem to genuinely respect and admire each other in this moment. Through this simple but significant gesture, it’s clear that Squeaky has come to realize that living in fear of others’ opinions of her and intimidating people into respecting her is a hollow pursuit. Rather, genuine respect and a true sense of identity are found when one shows *others* respect, celebrates other people’s triumphs, and pursues one’s own passions honestly and unabashedly—just like Raymond does.

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| Gender Roles and Female SolidarityTheme Analysis | **[Next](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/quotes)**  [Quotes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/quotes) |

The protagonist of “Raymond’s Run”—a precocious young girl nicknamed [**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky)—hopes that she’ll win the 50-yard dash at the local May Day races. Her main competition is a girl named [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen)—a feud that reflects Squeaky’s broader estrangement from women and femininity. Leading up to the race, she narrates her discomfort with the traditionally feminine role that her community expects her to play: instead of wearing a frilly dress and dancing around the May Pole, Squeaky is a serious [**runner**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) who is unapologetically competitive. She also brawls with anyone who mocks her disabled brother, and she is hostile to other girls her age. As she runs the race, though, Squeaky has an epiphany: while she still insists on being herself (even if that means bucking social norms), she realizes that she actually likes and respects Gretchen. In the story’s climactic moment—a shared smile between Squeaky and Gretchen—Squeaky realizes that part of being true to herself means extending kindness to other women. For Bambara, then, division between women is just another social norm that should be defied so that women can thrive.

Squeaky’s refusal to “act like a girl” is rooted in her strong sense of self; to her, playing a traditionally feminine role would be a betrayal of who she is. Squeaky learned this in nursery school when she dressed up as a strawberry for a pageant. While this pleased her parents, she says the pageant was “nonsense” and that she was a “perfect fool” for participating. “I am not a strawberry,” she insists, “I do not dance on my toes. I run. That is what I am all about.” Squeaky’s memory of the strawberry costume connects to her refusal to wear a dress to the May Day celebration. Even though this is a norm in her community that her [**mother**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother) begs her to follow, Squeaky insists that wearing the dress and participating in the May Day dance would mean “trying to act like a fairy or a flower or whatever you’re supposed to be when you should be trying to be yourself.” To Squeaky, then, insisting that girls follow feminine norms is equivalent to training them not to be themselves, and she wants no part in this. Importantly, though, this does not mean rejecting *all* feminine norms; she never rejects the label “girl,” for example, and she embraces being her disabled brother’s caretaker, a role that is traditionally gendered female. Instead, Squeaky prefers to think critically about the expectations others place on her and decide for herself whether following a norm would be true to who she is.

However, the story emphasizes one norm that Squeaky uncritically follows: that women should relate to one another through competition and animosity rather than learning to be friends or allies. When Squeaky reflects that “girls never really smile at each other because they don’t know how to […] and there’s probably no one to teach us how, cause grown-up girls don’t know either,” she acknowledges that unkindness between women is a social norm passed between generations. Squeaky emulates this norm: she constantly insults other girls, calling them out for their freckles or weight, and the girls around her are aggressive and insulting in return. Squeaky’s former friend [**Mary Louise**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mary-louise), for example, now talks about Squeaky “like a dog.” Underlying this outright hostility is a pervasive sense of competition among girls. Many of the school activities that Squeaky mentions—such as the spelling bee, music class, or the May Day Races—are inherently competitive, and the there is an obvious struggle among Squeaky’s female peers to be the best. Her classmate [**Cynthia Procter**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/cynthia-procter), for instance, is so competitive that she pretends that her skills come without effort, insinuating that she has aced tests without studying, or that she can play the piano without practice. Even though Squeaky’s competitive posture is different (she prides herself on her hard work and practices running constantly in public), she shares Cynthia’s competitive spirit, bragging about her “big rep as the baddest thing around” and her “roomful of ribbons and medals and awards.” It’s clear, then, that Squeaky and the other girls in the neighborhood feel the need to best rather than support one another.

However, Squeaky’s non-competitive and caring relationships with men—particularly with her intellectually disabled brother [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond)—become a model for rethinking her attitude toward women. Squeaky’s only positive relationships in the story are with men: she enjoys racing her [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father) (even though he always wins), and she shows a tenderness toward her intellectually disabled brother Raymond that she never shows other women, caring for and defending him despite the social difficulty it brings. It’s Raymond who finally makes Squeaky begin to question the value of her competitive spirit. As Squeaky waits to find out whether she or Gretchen won the May Day race, she realizes that she would find more meaning in teaching Raymond to run than in winning races herself. This is a shift in her attitude: she no longer wants to prove herself superior to other women but instead wants to help Raymond (who has nothing “to call his own”) find success. In this moment of epiphany, Squeaky looks from Raymond to Gretchen and realizes that her kindness toward Raymond could extend to Gretchen. For the first time, Squeaky sees Gretchen as an ally rather than a rival; maybe Gretchen would even help her coach Raymond, she thinks, showing that they could perhaps work together rather than trying to tear each other down. When Gretchen and Squeaky then share a “real” smile (even though girls “don’t practice smiling every day” because they’re “too busy being flowers or fairies or strawberries instead of something honest”), Bambara implies that Squeaky has learned a new way of relating to women. In practicing kindness as Squeaky once practiced competing, she defies the silly norm that women should be hostile and competitive toward one another.

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| SqueakyCharacter Analysis | **[Next](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond)**  [Raymond](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond) |

Squeaky, whose real name is Hazel Elizabeth Deborah Parker, is the narrator and protagonist of “Raymond’s Run.” She’s a skinny little girl with a squeaky voice (hence her nickname) whose greatest passion is [**running**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running). Squeaky lives with her [**mother**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother), [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father), and brothers [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond) and [**George**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/george) in Harlem. It’s Squeaky’s responsibility to look after Raymond each day, a role that she doesn’t mind but that wears on her given that Raymond is intellectually disabled and often causes a scene in public. A self-described “poor Black girl” who misses the countryside where her family used to live before moving to the city, Squeaky feels misunderstood and alienated. People (including her own parents) look down on Squeaky because she isn’t particularly feminine and does unusual things, like performing breathing exercises in public. At her core, Squeaky just wants to be herself: to work hard and pursue her passions unabashedly without being judged by others. To protect herself and Raymond from being bullied for their differences, Squeaky adopts a tough, combative persona and intimidates people into respecting her. Her foremost rival is [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen), who, along with her sidekicks [**Mary Louise**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mary-louise) and [**Rosie**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters), bullies Squeaky and Raymond. But Squeaky experiences a shift in perspective at the annual neighborhood May Day race after she sees Raymond running skillfully alongside her: she becomes inspired to coach him rather than dominating all of the neighborhood races herself. Squeaky does win the 50-yard dash, but the story ends with her exchanging genuine smiles with Gretchen (the second-place winner) rather than boasting about her own victory. Squeaky’s change of heart embodies how being one’s genuine self, and lifting others up in the process, is more meaningful than garnering respect through intimidation.

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| RaymondCharacter Analysis | **[Next](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen)**  [Gretchen](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen) |

Raymond is one of **[Squeaky](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky)**’s brothers. Though the exact nature of Raymond’s disability is never specified, the story implies that it’s primarily intellectual: he has an unusually large head and is described as “not quite right” mentally and “subject to fits of fantasy.” It’s Squeaky’s job to take care of Raymond every day while their [**mother**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother) and [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father) are busy, a responsibility that she doesn’t mind but that sometimes overwhelms her given her young age and the way in which Raymond acts out in public. He often accompanies Squeaky as she trains for track races, keeping pace with her and even emulating her breathing exercises. Kids in the neighborhood tend to harass Raymond when they see him around, but Squeaky does her best to defend him from cruel bullies like [**Gretchen**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/gretchen), [**Mary Louise**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mary-louise), and [**Rosie**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters). As much as people mock Raymond for his differences, they also underestimate him: toward the end of the story, Raymond surprises Squeaky at the May Day celebration when he effortlessly [**runs**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) alongside her on the other side of the fence during the 50-yard dash. Though no one thinks of Raymond as particularly talented, Squeaky recognizes that he’s an excellent runner and is in awe of his grace despite his physical limitations. He even inspires a sudden desire within Squeaky to quit running and coach Raymond instead. Raymond’s free spirit serves as an inspiration for Squeaky to be her genuine self rather than put on a false persona that people will respect, and his untapped potential is a cautionary tale against underestimating those who are differently abled.

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| GretchenCharacter Analysis | **[Next](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother)**  [Squeaky’s Mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-mother) |

Gretchen is a new girl in **[Squeaky](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky)**’s neighborhood who, along with her friends [**Mary Louise**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/mary-louise) and [**Rosie**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters), bullies Squeaky and her brother [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond). Squeaky describes her as having short legs and freckles. Despite Squeaky’s anxieties about Gretchen and her sidekicks, Gretchen doesn’t seem to be as tough as she lets on: readers never see her directly harassing Squeaky or Raymond (though she stands by complicity while Mary Louise and Rosie do so), and she walks away without responding when Squeaky stands up to her. Like Squeaky, Gretchen is a [**runner**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running), and she’s adamant that she’s going to beat Squeaky in the 50-yard dash at their neighborhood’s annual May Day celebration. Squeaky laughs her off, since no one ever beats Squeaky, but Gretchen holds her own in the race, keeping pace with Squeaky and coming in a close second place. After Squeaky is announced as the winner, she realizes that she actually admires Gretchen and gives her a genuine smile—and Gretchen smiles back. Squeaky even thinks that Gretchen could help her coach Raymond to become a great runner. Thus, Gretchen and Squeaky’s tentative resolution at the end of the story shows the good that can come about when people mutually respect and uplift one another rather than constantly trying to best and dominate others.

[**Squeaky**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky)’s mother takes care of most of the family’s household chores. Along with Squeaky’s [**father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/squeaky-s-father), she delegates the daily care of [**Raymond**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/raymond) to [**George**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/characters/george), and later to Squeaky. Squeaky’s mother wishes that Squeaky would be more feminine and participate in the May Pole dance at the neighborhood’s annual May Day celebration instead of [**running**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/raymond-s-run/symbols/running) in the races. She’s especially humiliated by Squeaky’s tendency to practice breathing exercises for her running in public. Like Squeaky’s father, Squeaky’s mother is notably absent from the story, implicating them as somewhat neglectful parents. Squeaky’s parents’ disproval, as well as the undue responsibility they places on their young daughter, contribute to Squeaky’s feelings of inadequacy.