

ENGLISH

Experience of conflict build an individual's sense of identity.

Experiences of conflict play a crucial role in building an individual's sense of identity. Such conflict may include war, different types of abuse, debates and inner conflict, and may have either positive or negative effects, depending on the way the conflict is faced and how personal it is.

One of the most common examples of conflict is war. Its effect on the individual's sense of identity depends largely not only on the type of war, but the individual's role in the war. For the common soldier, his sense of identity may be largely impacted by the grime, the ugliness and the terror retired soldiers often retain in their dreams and how this impacts their day to day lives. The father of Sally Morgan, the renowned author and artist, took from WWII mental trauma which led to drunkenness, abuse, and ultimately him hating himself as a worthless drunk.

But war can also serve to create rifts between nations, and plant a sense of 'them and us' between, say, the Australian and the Japanese who pass each other on the street. More positively, war can serve to draw a people together, stirring patriotism within the individual and helping him or her realize their national identity. WWI made Australians feel Australian, whereas the Battle of Thermopylae largely annihilated Sparta from the other Greek city-states.

Abuse is another example of conflict that has a massive impact on an individual's sense of identity. Whether physical or mental, its effects are generally the same; an increasing sense of inferiority in the victim, and an eroding of self-respect. A form of abuse rarely considered is abuse because of faith – persecution. Often, persecution for a belief that is woven inextricably into one's heart will strengthen the individual's commitment, not weaken it, as he or she finds himself or herself identifying more and more closely with their faith. Evidence of this can be seen in Foxe's Book of Martyrs where the horrendous trials of the early Christians deepened their commitment to, and love of, Christ.

Similar in effect to this latter type of abuse is the conflict of formal debates. Often over politics, religion, ethics, science, or some other topic deeply important to those involved, such arguments increase the individual's sense of alliance with their position, multiplying their need to defend it adequately. In such cases, not only the individual's belief but the individual himself, his identity, is on the line. For if he is forced to admit error he not only forfeits a measure of self-respect but a major belief that ordered his life. A prime example is the modern-day controversy of creation science versus evolution. Because it is such a fundamental issue, opponents may resort – rather improperly – to logical fallacies and abuse to make their position look credible, but because of pride will rarely admit checkmate.

Probably one of the most agonizing experiences of conflict is inner conflict. It may take the form of battling a fear or vice, smothering an obsession or feeling, or killing an idiosyncrasy, but essentially it is fighting some aspect of your identity in order to create a new. This heightens one's knowledge of and sense of identity, and with success can make you feel like a winner. Repeated failure, however, may make the individual feel shoddy and a loser, and perhaps totally unworthy of love, friendship, or even mere acquaintance. For example, there are times when the daily grind to discipline oneself, to handle many roles, to cope with the many aspects of life followed only by failure after failure, makes an individual feel absolutely worthless, regardless of success in other areas.

Conflicts such as war, abuse, debates and inner conflict all build an individual's sense of identity, in ways both positive and negative.

Written Explanation

Written as an essay in the persuasive mode, this piece is meant not only to persuade but to inform. It seeks to persuade the reader of the influence of conflict on an individual's sense of identity by elaborating on the different types of conflict and their different effects.

The audience is thoughtful teens because the teenage years are when much of what we think about life, conflict and identity is consolidated. Because of this it is important to understand crucial concepts about these things as our knowledge shapes the way we face conflict and therefore our sense of identity and our identity itself.

The context is primarily personal identity, but early on in the essay I also deal with the part a sense of national identity plays in our sense of individual identity. Examples from history, the present and life greatly increase the credibility of the persuasive piece. While I did not reference True Blue, 'Mate', the story of Will Bashford, greatly stimulated my thoughts.

In the essay I employed an assertive tone and refrained from using hedging expressions such as 'I mean' and 'I think' which undermine the impact of statements. The language was formal, but used a certain amount of colloquial expressions like 'them and us'. I also employed imagery ('the terror soldiers often retain in their dreams') and emotive language ('agonizing experience') to involve the reader more and give the essay more impact. This involvement of the reader suits the essay's direction to a teenage audience, as does the use of colloquialisms and the direct manner in which it is written. The range of different examples would also appeal to a more informed, thoughtful teen audience because it demonstrates the great range of issues and concepts related to identity.