

## ENGLISH: ENCOUNTERING CONFLICT

**At the heart of conflict is fear.**

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Fear is a fundamental and common human emotion, even an emotion encountered by animals. The popular elementary fairy tale, 'The Three Little Pigs' illustrates conflict at a grassroots level. The conflict experienced by the little pigs is caused by fear of the Big Bad Wolf. They initially sought to protect their homes, that is, their material livelihood, each one respectively made of straw, sticks and bricks, by chanting 'not by the hairs of my chinny-chin-chin'. However, as each of their houses collapse, by the Wolf's 'huff and puff', they become more fearful for their lives. In contrast, the Big Bad Wolf's encounter with conflict is driven by gastronomical purposes. His desire to devour the pig siblings is the cause of his tragic demise. Thus, from this familiar fairytale, we can fondly draw subtle comparisons with the conflict encountered in reality. Fear can encourage the promotion of conflicting circumstances. Despite the courageous façade and war-cry-like chant assumed by the pigs, if the pigs had not been scared they would have stood against the Big Bad Wolf and reenacted a 'David and Goliath' battle. Thus the longer, perhaps more tedious, battle of wit and endurance encountered by the wolf and pigs is a consequence of fear. However, the conflict from the wolf's perspective is perceived differently. Hence, conflict may also be stimulated by miscommunication, misconceptions, or physical desires (as exemplified by the wolf). Thus, fear may often be the central catalyst for conflict, although cultural barriers and false preconceptions may also exacerbate the situation.

Fear can become an obsessive force that inhibits rational thinking and promotes the deterioration of an unfortunate circumstance. In general, the things of utmost importance to our secular society are our own personal livelihood, family, friends and financial security. When an individual or community fears that an outside force is threatening the existence of these 'objects', anger, 'rage' and consequently, conflict may ensue. Kate Greenville's novel, The Secret River, illustrates life consumed with struggles on the Australian colonial frontier. William Thornhill, the protagonist, apprehensively perceives the Aborigines as a threat to his livelihood. His newly found freedom as an emancipated convict with the opportunity to economically improve his life well beyond what he could have imagined in England, is symbolized by his humble abode, 'Thornhill's Place' and he adamantly states, "No call to give up on account of a few savages." Thornhill is fearful that if he loses this materialization of freedom ('Thornhill's place'), subsequently, his life will once again dwindle to poverty. The inner turmoil experienced by Thornhill is heightened by the emotion of the other settlers and their similar fear of losing the foothold they and Thornhill. Sal desperately pleads with Thornhill to not be an accomplice to an ambush with the local aborigines and wants to 'be miles away by dinner-time' so they will not need to fear ever again "A spear in the back". The ultimatum delivered by Sal, 'With or without you Will, take your pick' results from her fear for the physical security of herself and her children, 'better even Butler's bloody Buildings than creep around the rest of our lives waiting for a spear in the back.' Thus, Sal and Will's encounters with conflict are evidently a derivative of varieties of fear.

Furthermore, fear promotes the presence of a hostile and angst-ridden atmosphere. Further, accompanied with a desperate, directionless society, panic may exponentially manifest from the tense ambiance and advance an unfavorable situation. Senator Joseph McCarthy thrived on the suspicious mood of the Cold War, creating and fertilised a potential for mass hysteria and instilling 'prodigious fear' in 1950's America, against the threat of Communist infiltrators into American society and government. Fortunately, due to the rationale of logical individuals and changing public sentiments, McCarthy and McCarthyism gradually dwindled to its demise. In Arthure Miller's allegorical parable, "The Crucible", the young Puritan girls, fearful of a beating for foolish wasting of work-time in dancing in the woods, fuel each other's blasphemous lies prompted by the vindictive Abigail Williams. These scurrilous accusations spread alarmingly, revealing the frightening flourishing of lies in the face of conflict. The Salemites are similarly gripped by fear, fear of the unknown in the supernatural. The witch hunts became a superb opportunity to capitalize on

the confusion by accusing others of vague or imaginary crimes. Thus, a vicious circle of accusation and conviction is executed under a cloak of righteousness and driven by sheer panic.

However, misunderstanding, miscommunication, misconceptions and false expectations may also contribute to the outbreak of and ensuing conflict. Additionally, cultural and language barriers may detrimentally encourage divergence. White settlers held preconceived ideas about Aborigines. In The Secret River, Grenville depicts the white settlers' notions as a mechanism which triggers discord. Sal and Thornhill are bombarded with rumours of 'the savages' upon their arrival in Sydney. Thus this prejudice ~~platitude~~ thrust upon the Aborigines, as not human, degrades the Aborigines as 'wild animals' and justifies the white settler's maltreatment of them. Furthermore, the language and cultural barrier experienced by both parties aggravates the tension. Misinterpreted gestures and body language ensures misunderstanding and accentuates the settler's ill view of their indigenous counterparts, eventually leading to the bloody and tragic massacre of innocent Aborigines.

Furthermore, in recent current events, the disastrous 'Manila hostage crisis' epitomizes conflict derived from miscommunication and misconceptions. A gunman, former senior inspector Rolando Mendoza, hijacked a bus in a crazed attempt to clear his name from charges of extortion that led to him being dismissed from the police force in 2008. In taking hostages on the tourist bus, he naively believed that he would be able to resurrect his esteemed career. Instead, his unsatisfactory negotiations with the Filipino Government and police resulted in the unnecessary massacre and carnage of eight Hong Kong tourists. Frederic Gallois, commander of the 'Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale' criticized the poor negotiating team and skills, as a cause of the bloodbath. Thus aside from the absurd ideologies of the gunman, this conflict was advanced by miscommunication.

The denouement of the fairy tale, The Three Little Pigs - the awful death of the wolf by boiling water - signifies the execution of justice, the conclusion of conflict and the eradication of fear, thus, the stereotypical happily ever after. Although this hypothetical clash driven by fear and the ravenous desires of the Big Bad Wolf is resolved, the unfortunate reality is that many conflicts do not function as fairy tales. Conflicts in reality ensue primarily as a consequence of fear, misguided expectations and many incidents are simply are 'lost in translation'.

### **Statement of Explanation**

I have chosen to construct a hybrid piece that encompasses both expository and persuasive elements to explore in detail the implications of the prompt. The text I mainly refer to is The Secret River as I believe it addresses the ideas encompassed within the prompt. I also included references to The Crucible, McCarthyism and the Manila Hostage Crisis to expand and illustrate my contention. My utilisation of the Three Little Pigs fairy tale in both the introduction and the conclusion (as a book end) provides a personal voice and juxtaposes the serious implications of worldly conflicts with a neat fairy tale that doesn't exist in reality. However, the basic ideologies of conflict, while present, are merely simplified.

I adopted a sophisticated and informative register for a mature audience that has some understanding of worldly events, such as the Manila Hostage Crisis and McCarthyism and also some textual understanding of the novel, The Secret River and the play, The Crucible.