

ENGLISH: ENCOUNTERING CONFLICT

We should be more concerned about the damage conflict does to people than the reasons for the conflict.

Connex trains are notorious for running late. They are the source of ongoing conflict between angry commuters, the government and the Connex train company. Dishevelled workers, restless school students, tutting business men are all victims of a failing transport system. As a consolation implemented by the Victorian government, a free daily transport ticket is issued to customers on a mensual basis if Connex fails to meet a quota of on-time trains and percentage of trains delivered. This is a way in which Connex and the government 'apologizes' for the inconvenience caused, showing their 'concern' for the damage caused. However, apart from a formally flippant apology, often over the PA system of a train station, Connex spokespeople remain tight-lipped, thus failing to disclose reasons for the late running of trains and subsequently, the scenario follows a vicious cycle, where many consolation tickets are issued to soothe commuters. Subtle similarities of this almost daily catastrophe can be made with conflict. Evidently, it is imperative to be concerned about the damage conflict places upon individuals, however the reasons for the conflict are equally important, in order to advance our society.

As we are a sensitive society, a promoter of sympathy and empathy, we should be concerned with the damages caused by conflict and its effect on individuals and communities. Acts of care and kindness can immensely appease the pains of grief and trauma and promote recovery. In recent news events, the disastrous 'Manila hostage crisis' shocked many around the globe. 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 25 Hong Kong tourists as hostages on the tourist bus, he naively believed that he would be able to resurrect his esteemed career. The terrifying hijack situation resulted in the appalling carnage of 8 tourists, 3 of which belonged to the same family. The traumatised mother of the family now prays for the survival of her critically injured son, the sole surviving member of her family. Although immediately after the incident, teams of experts were sent to investigate the disastrous handling of the situation, the Hong Kong government ensured that the livelihood of the survivors was addressed. Teams of psychologists were sent to console family members, the national flags of many countries were flown at half mast, one minute silence tributes, candle light vigils and marches to commemorate the victims were performed. Although, these acts do not undo the tragic consequences of the event, these acts show concern, thus comforts the traumatized victims and suffering families. Furthermore, the sentimental apology delivered by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on 13th of February 2008 signified reconciliation, acknowledging the adversity experienced by the Indigenous community. After previous governments' refusal to 'say sorry', Rudd's words symbolized a new beginning, away from the horrendous era of the "Stolen Generation". This apology demonstrated concern about the damage this horrific epoch imparted on the Indigenous people and was publicly well received. Thus, it is imperative to recognise the difficulties experienced by victims of conflict.

The film Omagh directed by Pete Travis depicts the atrocious bombing of Omagh and the reverberating damage on the residents of the town. Travis juxtaposes the conflicting grieving process of Michael Gallagher and his wife Patsy over the tragic death of their 21 year old son, Aiden.

The softly-spoken Michael admits himself to be 'not very good at public speaking' and frantically seeks to find justice for his son's death. He courageously leads the "Omagh Self-help and support group". Symbolized by the incessant shrill ring of the telephone, Michael's preoccupation with finding justice and reason becomes his grieving process much to the detriment of Patsy and his daughter, Cathy. In contrast to Michael, an exasperated Cathy exclaims that, "Aidens dead, you should be looking after us Daddy!" illustrating Cathy's concerns about the damage exerted by conflict on victims, in precedence to the reasons for the conflict. During the denouement of the film, this familial struggle gradually dissolves, as Michael finds a compromise between grieving with his

family and launching legal action against the IRA terrorists. Thus, Travis stresses the importance of not only finding reasons but also being aware of the consequences through the struggles of the protagonist, Michael and the Gallagher family.

Therefore, to progress society, the reasons for conflict must be explored. As illustrated by the film, following years of IRA terrorism in Northern Ireland, the Omagh bombing was the final catalyst for recognition that violence can only beget more violence and no resolution to conflict. The Good Friday Agreement, which brought peace to the region, illustrates the capacity for individuals in a community to learn from mistakes. In understanding the reasons that contributed to conflict, cooperating, bravely and humbly putting aside pride to resolve conflict, a whole community's effort in rebuilding from tragic circumstances was initiated. Thus from understanding the causes of conflict, growth of individuals may eventuate and consequently, may lead to the affirmative transformation of a community.

Moreover, the exploration of the origins of conflict, grants valuable lessons for future generations. In Kate Grenville's novel, The Secret River, Grenville depicts the chaotic maltreatment of Indigenous Australians. Upon their arrival in Sydney, the protagonist William Thornhill and his wife, Sal, are bombarded with rumours of 'the savages'. The European settlers held preconceived ideas about Aborigines and Grenville depicts the settlers' notions as a mechanism which triggers discord. 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. Additionally, 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. Grenville's novel, illustrates life consumed with struggles on the Australian colonial frontier. Will 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 have newly acquired. Thus, understanding the causes does not excuse the atrocious actions of Thornhill and the participants of the bloody massacre; however it reveals the weakness of the human spirit and provides a cautionary tale, that may hopefully prevent future disasters.

Early this year, Connex was finally 'sacked' from its esteemed position. Apart from the conclusion of Connex's contract, the government finally realized the damage and the reasons behind the criticism made by angry commuters. Metro Trains was instated as being the new transport giant, renewing hope in Melbourne commuters that maybe chaos with train lines could finally be eradicated. The damage inflicted upon individuals as a result of conflict must be considered, however it is equally imperative to be concerned about the reasons for the conflict in order to improve societal conditions.

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. I have separated my essay into four paragraphs, with paragraph one exploring the importance of recognising the damages of conflict, the second paragraph as a transition, exploring why we should be equally concerned about the damages and reasons of conflict, and finally, my third and fourth paragraphs stress the importance of investigating the causes of conflict, in order to improve societal conditions.

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 Manila Hostage Crisis, Kevin Rudd's Apology, Omagh and

The Good Friday Agreement to expand and illustrate my contention. I chose not to refer to the The Secret River until the second half of my essay as I believed it was more appropriately mentioned in the latter half of my contention.

My utilisation of the hypothetical technological devices scenario 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 humorous and familiar everyday situation. 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, Kevin Rudd's Apology and the Omagh bombing and also some textual understanding of the novel, The Secret River and the film Omagh.