ENGLISH CONTEXT SUMMARY NOTES

“Encountering conflict”

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Understanding the context

Conflict is inevitably encountered by all humans in different ways. Consider the types of conflicts faced by individuals: personal conflict, interpersonal conflict and extra-personal conflict. The study of this context requires an understanding of a range of conflicts including moral dilemmas, differences with immediate others and social unrest, such as war. However, it is imperative to also consider the various ways in which people ‘encounter’ conflict in their lives and how they deal with and resolve the battles and challenges they face as a result of particular conflicts.

It is necessary to define the phrase ‘encountering conflict’. ‘Conflict’ may be defined as a clash, disagreement or battle between two or more parties. It may be driven by the need to survive or by contrasting opinions, principles, ideologies or modes of survival. It may be constituted by psychological distress, contradictory political views or armed warfare. Also, it is valuable to consider the antonyms of ‘conflict’, such as peace, harmony, agreement and reconciliation.

To ‘encounter’ conflict may be an unexpected or chance meeting with an adversary in confrontation or combat. The people involved in conflict may be perpetrators or victims. Whether they cause or are consequently affected by conflict, individuals are largely influenced by their values and beliefs. Culture, religion, history and family actively manipulate the behaviour of individuals in both their contributions to conflict and their reactions to conflict.

Conflicts occur on many levels. In film and literature they are often characterised by a clash between good and evil. However, in real life the distinction between good and evil is not always clearly defined and a conflict may arise from a difference of opinion or a varied angle of perception. Individuals must understand and make choices between hate, arrogance, intolerance, superiority, greed and anger or compassion, tolerance, empathy, kindness, love, kindness, generosity and peace.
Encountering conflict

Conflict

- Personal (inner)
- Extra-personal (with environment & institutions)
- Interpersonal (between characters)
Personal Conflict

The inner conflicts of an individual may embody a personal dilemma of a moral nature. Inevitably the individual will have to make a choice in order to resolve and shed the emotional residue of the personal conflict or pursue an emotional battle. The decisions made by individuals may not only create a personal struggle but may change the direction of their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. Internal conflict arises from making personal choices and can lead to feelings of indecisiveness, confusion or anxiety. An individual may find themselves in an arena of inner conflict when they feel a need for others to recognise that something is important to them.

Personal beliefs and values contribute to shaping the identity of an individual, which influences personality, cognitive and physical behaviour. There is less potential for conflict when people share complementary value systems. In contrast, people who believe strongly in a value may welcome confrontation. Individual priorities and preferences may also lead people into conflict of a personal nature, such as a battle of conscience or a concern for displeasing others. At the ethical core of personal conflict is trust.

The dispositions and temperaments of individuals may influence their decisions and behaviour which will inevitably impact on those around them. Dispositional tendencies and established personality traits, such as being agreeable or harbouring high levels of personal negativity, will impact on the conflict management styles preferred by an individual. Those who have a personal negative view may easily become dominated in interactions or appear detached from dispute resolutions. Some may acquire greater confidence and a clearer sense of identity. Through personal conflicts, people learn more about themselves and others, thus they grow. Furthermore, personal reactions to trauma and change as a result of conflict may lead to greater personal strength and may alter the values that have been guiding factors.

When people pursue private and personal interests, the consequences may benefit the individual and their family. Conversely, the personal objectives of individuals may clash or one’s personal goals and desires may affect the extent to which they accept or neglect their responsibilities. Personal interests may influence and interfere with judgements with beneficial or detrimental effects on the lives of individuals and their loved ones. An individual’s capacity to make objective judgments may be reduced when personal interests cloud obligations, reason and objectivity. People may act on their personal interests when changing their job or career for more income or for greater satisfaction and the consequences may provide some improvement to their lives. However, when people neglect or disregard their responsibilities and ethical duties in their pursuit of personal interests, a situation of conflict may arise.

The desire for power is an aspect of our inherent competitive human nature. Individuals may strive for power in any setting in which there are competing interests. Conflict may arise as individuals or groups try to gain advantage over one another. In order to survive, humans will make sacrifices and act in their own best interests. Human instinct dictates that one acts to preserve one’s own human life.
One’s conflict management style is deemed to have a proportional impact on the extent to which they experience conflict in their personal environment. The strategies an individual utilises in managing conflict largely depend on emotional intelligence, stress management and capacity to accommodate compromise and stand firm. Individuals may encounter inner conflict in their relationships with family and friends, in their professional life or in their civic life. On a personal level, if an individual is open to additional possibilities, factors such as miscommunication, fear and assumption may be less pervasive and damaging. The resolutions of ongoing tensions may stimulate either cooperative or antagonistic behaviour.

**Interpersonal Conflict**

Interpersonal conflicts may occur between family members, between neighbours or within groups in the community. Relationships may be weakened or strengthened by conflict. In resolving interpersonal conflict, both parties must collaborate to find an acceptable solution that is mutually satisfactory. Approaches that embody fairness and equal participation are most likely to last. Effective communication and empathy are essential.

Conflicts between loved ones, such as family and friends, parents and children and between marital spouses, may stem from an inner conflict. Personal issues may be projected into the relationship and exacerbate interpersonal relationships. One’s behaviour can contribute to interpersonal problems when an individual’s focus on their personal interests damages a personal or professional relationship. Opposing beliefs, opinions and values may also be sources of conflict within relationships.

Conflict occurs in healthy relationships, but can force a relationship to come to a painful end. External conflict can lead to feelings of anger, hurt, fear, jealousy, resentment and hostility. Honesty, respect and trust are core factors that contribute to the resolution of interpersonal conflicts. The end of relationships may cause further conflict, particularly if there has been a betrayal, a battle for pride or disappointed expectations.

Methods of resolving interpersonal conflicts will impact significantly on relationships. Individuals may choose to avoid a conflict if they perceive confrontation will cause them significant loss or change. People who find it difficult to assert themselves or control their emotions may be reluctant to acknowledge that a conflict exists. Individual differences and opposite character traits may also hinder the resolution of conflict within relationships. However, avoidance strategies will eventually cause further tension in interactions and denial can lead to even greater conflict in the future.

More competitive approaches involve the use or abuse of power to manipulate the conflict in their favour. This can exacerbate distrust between parties and hinder long-term conflict resolution. In a school or work setting, conflict in the form of bullying may arise as a result of a struggle for attention from peers, family members or colleagues. Alternatively, bullying may be the manifestation of a power struggle. The duration of the victimisation of an individual by a bully depends on the way in which the conflict is managed and resolved. Often, a third party can help to assuage the personal issues impacting on the negative relationship.
Extra-personal Conflict

Conflicts which have an impact on society may stem from the political, religious, cultural and social beliefs of the people. Political conflicts in which national sovereignty and interests are defended at the expense of other nations may have international, national and local impacts.

Competing national interests may culminate in battles of war to attain resources, particularly oil. This was demonstrated during the Gulf War of the early 1990s when Iraq invaded Kuwait. This led to a multinational response led by the United States of America, who also had a vested interest in the outcome given their reliance on oil for their industrial needs. Economic and trade factors can have a significant impact on both triggering and resolving wars between nations.

Citizenship entails both social rights and responsibilities, generally instituted by political and security forces which are expected to bring perpetrators of the law to justice. Authoritative institutions such as governments and police bodies carry a social responsibility to defend the human rights of citizens. Denial of essential human freedoms, including constitutional rights to freedom of expression, privacy and ‘a fair trial’ may be adversely or advantageously affected by one’s social class. Denial of opportunity may be afforded to those of lower social status. Nonetheless, conflict that may ensue from refusal of justice may bring individuals within a community together in a common cause, but cause further dissention against the governing body.

Historically, religious faith has inspired much persecution of those who share a certain faith. The Protestants were perceived as a threat to the Catholics in the seventeenth century and Jews and Palestinians continue fighting in the twenty-first century. The cultural customs and values of a people may clash with those of different nations, hence a possible clash between new settlers in a foreign land and the natives. This conflict is evident in The Secret River between British convicts and Aborigines during the colonisation of Australia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

 Millions of civilians, especially women and children, were killed as a result of use of sophisticated weaponry in bloody conflicts, both between and within countries, in the twentieth century. The tragic impact of such conflict on children is evident in statistical evidence of children making up half the number of refugees in the last two decades.

In global conflicts, a mediating party can be necessary in reaching agreement and resolution. Different cultures and societies hold diverse interests and values. When these are challenged and defended, compromise and negotiation can be difficult. The United Nations is the result of international commitment to peace-keeping, justice and equal rights. The United Nations provides a forum for political debate and assists in negotiating disputes and ceasefires between nations.

The role of diplomacy is paramount in negotiations and communication between different nations and groups. Miscommunication, misinterpretation and misunderstanding can cause cultural and social conflicts to escalate. Acceptance, rather than assumption, is required to facilitate positive communications that may lead to the resolution of an extra-personal conflict.
Encountering conflict

Background

Religious Conflict

Since the beginning of civilisation, religion has been an instrument used by humans to make sense of their existence. Early Egyptians, Greeks and Romans worshipped many gods though did not share the same gods. Such beliefs in different gods continue to be the source of much global division in our current world. Conflicts stemming from opposing religious beliefs have marred human history through the ages. Major international religions are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. All have been involved in battles for superiority at some point in history.

Religiously-motivated conflict has brought oppression, intolerance and unjustified discrimination for many innocent civilians, who have been victims of violence, discrimination, violation and forced exodus from their homelands. However, the peace-building and humanitarian efforts of religious groups have also impacted on our world significantly. World Vision is a Christian organisation that provides relief services and increasingly, development strategies and assistance for third world countries. The Quakers are a religious society recognised largely for their commitment to non-violent conflict resolution strategies.

Commitment to religious faith is inextricably intertwined with personal identity. Thus, a perceived attack or threat to one’s beliefs is equally a threat to their central being. In religious conflicts, compromise can be very difficult or near impossible when the parties involved seek to protect their right to ‘eternal salvation’. Furthermore, the insular expectation that followers will accept the dogmas of their religion without question leaves little room for negotiation and compromise.

Religions are based on interpretations of scriptures, thus conflict and debate can arise as a result of different interpretations. The interpretation that attracts the majority of followers is usually victorious in such conflicts. The moderate views of most religious followers contrast with the views of extremists whose literal interpretations and radical measures can cause conflict to escalate.

Fundamentalist religious groups uphold the most conservative aspects of their respective religions with little tolerance and are dedicated to the preservation of their religious traditions. Evangelical Christianity is often deemed fundamentalist. The Taliban are fundamental Muslims who enforce highly conservative rules which particularly oppress Afghani women and individual freedom. It is often the case that such fundamentalist groups are largely dissatisfied with modernity and seek some form of purification.
Some religious wars are listed below:

- The Israeli and Palestinian conflict is a battle between Jews, Muslims and Christians for ‘Holy Land’.
- ‘The troubles’ in Northern Ireland stemmed partly from the clash between Catholics and Protestants.
- The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was a clash between Muslims, Roman Catholics and Serbian Orthodox.
- Cyprus has been divided between Christians and Muslims.
- ‘Religious cleansing’ in East Timor killed many Christians as Muslim Indonesia sought power.
- Various conflicts in Indonesia have been battles between Christians and Muslims.
- Conflict in India is rife among Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Animists.
- In Sri Lanka, Buddhists and Hindus fight each other for independence.

Political Conflict

The role of the government is to create policies that will benefit and protect the people that it represents. Governments have a great responsibility to enforce the rules that ensure justice and security for all citizens. Types of government include republican, democratic, communist, monarchy and dictatorship. All Governments are entrusted with the task of acting in the best interests of the nation and the individuals within it, although some do not. Within nations, political parties and organisations debate opposing views and voices. Coalitions are often created in response to a conflict of interests in the direction of governmental policy.

Governments largely seek sustainable approaches to human security. Some invest heavily in military and weaponry defence systems, both as a warning to other nations and civil groups within the nation itself. However, use of police or military force may motivate resentment and civil unrest in the form of protests and civil wars. Threats posed by terrorists trying to achieve their political goals have exposed political judgements and government responses that have led to both greater conflict and peace agreements.

Greed, power and grievances have often marred the actions of governments, which subsequently have been a source of suffering for individuals and social groups. Historically, in periods of political instability, governments have been guilty of discrimination against minorities within their powers. Oppression and persecution that has ensued has caused denial of basic human rights to those most vulnerable.

Economic factors have been both causes of conflict and sources for negotiations of peace. World trade changed and expanded substantially after World War II. Though treaties and legal arrangements were made at this time to reduce trade barriers, the trade of goods and services has increased the divisions between wealthy, industrialised countries and developing nations. Though trade is an important means of raising the living standards within a nation, such benefits have not always spread through the populations of poorer, commodity-trading nations where there has been little industrial development. In developing countries, conflict has stemmed from the inequitable transfer of resources to rural and urban populations.
Peace and cooperation between countries can be enhanced by trade agreements, particularly when mutual dependence exists. Trade can act as a deterrent to conflict between nations as conflict can make trade difficult. International trade policies are inextricably connected to national welfare, thus loss of positive international economic relations would pose a threat to the welfare of a population and contradict standard economic theory, which dictates that nations maximise their social welfare.

The position of individuals within their society will inevitably impact on the positions Governments take in relation to the evolution of trade and economic policies. Factors such as economic class and the industry in which they are employed will play a major role in how individuals and groups experience and contribute to relevant conflicts. The opposing interests of parties involved in conflicts such as industrial disputes are largely founded in the wealth and class of individuals affected. This has been evident in periods of intense industrialisation. Hence, the unequal distribution of wealth within a national population can exacerbate conflict and hinder negotiations and compromise.

Political battles have created victims in the following countries:

- Britain and Northern Ireland
- The Soviet Union and the United States of America (the ‘Cold War’)
- North Korea and South Korea
- Iraq and the United States of America and their allies

Satellite channels broadcasting the besieged Iraqi leader among cheering crowds as US-led troops push toward the capital city.
April 4, 2003

Saddam Hussein
5th President of the Republic of Iraq
2003 Invasion of Iraq

Source: Iraqi News Agency, an organ of the defunct old regime (Wikipedia)
Robert Mugabe in 1991
President of Zimbabwe

Author: Mangwanani

A rare studio photograph of India's "Father of the Nation" Mahatma Gandhi taken in London at the request of Lord Irwin, 1931.

Cultural Conflict

Culture underscores the lives and relationships of individuals, thus it influences both conflict and conflict resolutions. Culture may be defined broadly as a particular race, ethnicity or nationality that shares a set of values, which shape the attitude, perceptions and behaviour of people. Culture contributes to one’s identity and provides a sense of belonging. Conflicts may arise when cultural identity and belonging is seen to be threatened or misunderstood. Generalisations and stereotypes regarding particular cultures may form the basis of intractable conflicts. Cultural conflict is inseparable from political and religious conflict because the ways individuals perceive their circumstances is grounded in their own cultural beliefs. Generational conflicts such as those between adults and children are influenced by temporal cultural values. Conflicts in the workplace may stem from differing disciplinary cultures. Cultural values influence views on gender roles and define acceptable methods of communication between individuals.

In resolving cultural conflicts, it is necessary to recognise and accept shared and different identities. Immersion experiences within other cultures may alleviate intolerance and ignorance that cause cultural conflicts if those involved are able to accept cultural differences, rather than make judgements of superiority. Familiarity with other cultures may be a means of taming some conflicts that arise within homes, organisations, communities and nations. Such cultural fluency may reduce suffering as a result of cultural clashes.

The struggle for harmonious relations between the vastly different Aboriginal and British/European cultures within Australia continues today. The differences in concepts of land ownership meant that the British failed to acknowledge that Aborigines see the land as owning them as it is their library, that is, the source of all their customs, ceremonies, laws, food and medicine. Grenville’s novel describes the beginning of the destruction of the indigenous civilisation’s library, hence their culture.
In Australia each wave of immigrants has been challenged and persecuted to some extent. The post World War II European migrants were put down with derogatory names such as ‘wogs’ and ‘spicks’. In the 1970’s and 1980’s Asian migrants encountered similar insults with terms such as ‘gooks’ and ‘chinks’. While some of this cultural tension still exists, the use of such racial slurs is thankfully far less tolerated by the majority of society today. This may be partly explained by a greater exposure to the ‘new’ culture and a recognition and greater acceptance of difference between the ethnic groups.

Such cultural conflicts occur all over the world. An example of a recent cultural conflict that has created victims is in Zimbabwe where the government led by Robert Mugabe has uprooted many white farmers and their families from their land. The history of the United States of America is littered with examples of cultural confrontations: from the North versus South battles of the American Revolution through to segregation issues between ‘whites’ and negro/African-Americans and in some cities problems between Hispanic groups and other ethnic groups.

Consider similar conflicts which have occurred or are still occurring in the following countries:

- Germany
- Afghanistan
- South Africa
- Ireland
- Rwanda
- Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Cambodia
**Social Conflict**

Within social relationships, conflict may involve a clash between opposing powers operating in a particular society. Social conflicts stem from the values upheld by individuals and social groups and the interests they support and defend against a social authority. The basis for individual judgement of situations is largely dependent on social class and status, through which social power is also attributed. Needs and instincts may fuel social conflict and dissention when the needs of members of minority groups are perceived as insufficiently met. Social conflict yields psychological distress and possibly physical ramifications.

Social structures, such as hierarchies and class systems, have often given way to rebellion with tragic outcomes. Traditional patriarchal and theocratic social systems no longer dominate the social arena evidencing positive changes and growth can occur in the long-term aftermath of social conflicts. The freedoms we enjoy in society today have been the result of conflicts between minority and majority groups. Changing attitudes have liberated future generations from oppression. The experiences of social conflict have strengthened communities and families that have found themselves at odds with social authorities.

The resolution of social conflict is largely dependent on compromise, but threats may be used as a method by which to gain speedier resolution. However, physical violence can be manifested in social conflict when threats are used to create a sense of fear as a tactic of intimidation to gain agreement. Violence may lead to further violence in acts of retaliation and revenge.

Riots are outbreaks of lawlessness where a crowd may erupt in violent public protest, anger or disgust in response to the actions and decisions of authorities or individuals. Racial tensions erupted during the Los Angeles riots in the 1990s, and the Cronulla riots. Grief and fear were motivating factors in the riots in response to the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Resolutions reached in circumstances of bargaining, particularly with terrorist organisations, may not last or prevent the conflict from resurfacing in the future. The volatile nature of social conflict means that it is difficult to permanently and peacefully resolve.

The power of collaboration in confronting adversity may be used or abused by those who yield power. Leaders may take advantage of their power in society to manipulate others to serve their own personal agendas. This is exemplified by Abigail Williams in *The Crucible*. In direct contrast, leaders may use their power to improve attitudes and address public issues with reason and honour as evidenced in *Omagh* by Michael Gallagher. Communities and groups may gain strength and hope through collaborative campaigns, such as the Omagh Self Help and Support Group.
One of the positive outcomes of social conflict may be the union and solidarity that creates new bonds between individuals and victimised or marginalised social groups and provides some hope of moving forward. Also, interpersonal relationships may be strengthened through experiences of social conflict. Issues in the marital relationship between John and Elizabeth Proctor in *The Crucible* are resolved as their ordeal climaxes. Furthermore, resolution to social conflict is largely dependent on individuals finding peace within themselves and pride in their personal sense of honour and integrity. Social conflicts pose particular challenges for individuals who are forced to choose between conformity and silence, and resistance to oppressive and corrupt authorities.

Prime Minister of Pakistan
Assassinated December 27th, 2007
*Source: Wikipedia*

David Hicks outside his family home in Salisbury Park, South Australia.
Released from Yatala Labour Prison December 29th, 2007
*Source: Wikipedia*
Themes and issues related to the context

Causes of Conflict

Conflicts commonly stem from a clash of beliefs, ideas, ideologies, principles, expectations or interests.

The different *views and values* that pertain to certain social groups and individuals fabricate the inevitability of social conflicts. When views and values are repressed, defence mechanisms are manifested in the form of conflict as strategies to uphold personal or collective ideals are implemented. Cultural fluency is an increasing phenomenon in our modern world in which globalisation has brought greater familiarity among nations through the acceptance of multicultural societies. Historically, the limited opportunities and strategies to learn about other cultures caused many conflicts. Difficulties in communication meant that much was unknown, thus a fear of the unknown was the cause of much hostility particularly for settlers to new countries, such as America and Australia. When cultural difference is the subject of attack, there is need for acceptance and compromise in order for the needs of opposing parties to be met satisfactorily.

History has demonstrated an inherent need in humans to strive for power. Due to competing interests individuals or groups will try to gain advantage over others for their own benefit. In power struggles, the strong are able to survive whereas the weak are exploited and defeated. Majority groups may initiate conflict to defeat minority groups, who are often victims of religious and political persecution. Power can be asserted in different ways. Physical power and strength is used in battles of war and violent confrontations or for the purposes of intimidation. Intellectual power can be a method of manipulation and assertiveness to exercise influence over others and gain social power. Both threats and force may be used in attempts to coerce individuals and groups to relinquish their efforts to obtain superiority. Minority groups often lack the physical and intellectual resources and power needed to protect themselves, thus the more powerful may control the conflict. Power can also be used to enact change, thus the powerful have a capacity to have significant impact on a state of affairs. Battles for power can result in a cycle of conflict in which parties clash at numerous stages in the process of resolving conflict between them.

Conflict may escalate for individuals in the aftermath of major social conflict. Individuals may be thrust into moral dilemmas and be motivated to pursue a conflict as a symptom of their suffering and pain. Vengeance and the pursuit of justice may fuel conflicts further. Resentment and hostility may linger as an individual tries to comprehend the reasons a conflict escalates into violence.


**Responses to Conflict**

Individuals and groups respond to conflict in different ways depending on their religious beliefs, cultural and social backgrounds and personal experiences. Appropriate behaviour is after all determined by one’s customs and their personal understanding of social norms. State laws and social rules also have some influence on the ways in which people respond to conflict when they encounter it.

In large-scale conflicts, **violence** and aggressive behaviour, such as fighting, beating or killing an opposing party, creates tragic and devastating consequences for nations, communities, families and individuals. Violence may be used against a perceived enemy with the intention of defeat and victory. However, history has shown that the use of violence in attempts to resolve conflict may lead to more violence, thus such reactions to conflict are problematic. The aftermath of bloody battles in war and terrorist attacks can lead to renewed conflict or facilitate peace processes and changes in social attitudes.

In small-scale conflicts between individuals, such as parents and children or marital spouses, responses may vary depending on the nature of the individuals involved who may either fuel or pacify the argument. When couples seek only to please their partner and concede their own personal interests, they may relinquish opportunities for relationship and individual growth.

Conflict management involves the capacity to solve problems and accept differences. Collaborating involves sharing one’s own views and listening to the views of others. Collaborative responses to conflicts can allow individuals to recognise contrasts and tensions in relationships and viewpoints. In a process of collaboration to resolve a conflict, the primary aim is to reach a mutual agreement. Though constructive discussions take time, effort and commitment, conflict may be prevented in the future if all parties are satisfied. Through compromise and cooperation, parties in conflict may be able to meet in the middle. Compromise reached during negotiations may be facilitated by a mediating party.

Accommodating or obliging by yielding to the opposing view may serve to keep peace, but the potential for a lasting resolution is unlikely through such responses. The option to avoid, delay or withdraw from conflict leaves at least one party with largely unmet needs that originally caused the conflict to arise. In contrast, responses to conflict that attempt to solely control the outcome through manipulation, force or influence may result in victory, but may fuel further conflict in the future by creating latent resentment and hostility.
**Consequences of Conflict**

The suffering and tragedy that ensues from violent conflict causes lasting traumatic effects on those involved. In violations of the basic human right to life, the families and communities of deceased victims are left to try to make sense of their loss and seek justice and retribution. The plight of such people may incur further conflict as they encounter obstacles to resolving the inner and interpersonal conflict they subsequently face.

Nonetheless, conflict can serve as a catalyst to improving relations between nations and cultural, political or religious groups. Conflict can have positive impacts on societies and can bring about social change that enriches the lives of individuals. Much of the freedom we enjoy today has been borne of past conflicts. Thus, it is worth considering whether conflict has been a necessity at times. Growth and development of humanity and civilisation is instigated by challenges to social norms, especially those standards which oppress minority groups. Shelter from different ideologies and views may have more detrimental consequences than overt confrontation. The outcomes of challenges and conflicts can often be increased strength and renewed peace within personal relationships, communities and nations.

![Image](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fd/National_Park_Service_9-11_Statue_of_Liberty_and_WTC_fire.jpg)

The towers of the World Trade Centre burn shortly after United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower on the right. To its left is the still smoking North Tower, struck earlier by American Airlines Flight 11.
**Resolutions of Conflict**

In order to resolve conflict, agreement must be reached between opposing parties. In each of the set texts for this Context, the authors present conflicts on different levels and offer messages about resolution of conflict.

Solutions are dependent on accommodation or compromise as the nature of conflict is often that vastly different views are defended. Methods of persuasion to gain agreement from opposition in conflict vary from violent battles to the pacifist protest, such as that of The Quakers. Such groups prefer to avoid conflict on the basis of religious beliefs that uphold the value of pacifism. Individuals may prefer to avoid confrontation because of their own personal nature.

A third party may be required when conflict has reached a stalemate. The United Nations has played a fundamental role in the capacity of providing peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance to achieve some resolution of global and national conflicts. Resolution and peace can only be achieved when there is alleviation of perceived threats. Truces and treaties, such as the International Declaration of Human Rights, are instruments designed to achieve resolution of conflict.

Conflict resolution requires communication. Family and friends have a greater chance of resolving interpersonal conflict if grievances and concerns are aired. On an extra-personal level, nations may cease conflict through negotiations and the signing of peace agreements. Through debate and reconciliation, conflict can be a catalyst for change rather than a source of death and destruction.

The durability of the resolution is largely dependent on whether core differences between conflicting parties have been resolved sufficiently. If both parties are satisfied with the outcome of negotiations, the resolution is more likely to last into the future and prevent the conflict from resurfacing in the future.
TEXT 1: PARADISE ROAD

Themes

Conflict in war

Before looking at how WWII influenced the women held captive in Sumatra, it is important firstly to look at the broader spectrum of this war and its effect on the entire world.

Many WWII films focus on Hitler’s attempted genocide of the Jewish race, *Paradise Road* is based on female Prisoners held captive by the Japanese in Sumatra. This film demonstrates, through war, human’s desire for power and control. Conflict can also arise in war based on either different political beliefs, religious beliefs, or disparate ideologies. When two countries or groups both desire this power for their own benefit, it is always so that one will achieve while the weaker falls. Between the 14th of February to the 28th of March, Sumatra was invaded by the Imperial Japanese forces. The Pacific War (a part of WWII) was occurring in South-East Asia at this time and the invasion of Sumatra was part of this.

*Paradise Road*, though focusing on WWII, looks primarily at Australian, British and New Zealand women and their conflict with Japanese Prisoner of War Camps. The conflict of war in this film is primarily set in a female Prisoner of War camp, and therefore displays these women as victims of inhumane and sadistic treatment by the Japanese. Here we see these women stripped of their social rights and freedom.

In 1942, after dining and dancing at a gala ball in Singapore, these women were crammed aboard a boat headed to Australia as the Japanese were about to take control of the city. After the Japanese attacked and sank the boat in which the women were travelling on, some of the women who survived made it to the shore of Sumatra (a Japanese-occupied island). It was here that they were rounded up and were held captive for three and a half years.
Encountering conflict

**Personal conflict**

Not only does *Paradise Road* examine conflict in war, but it observes how individuals face conflict within themselves. Often this conflict is based on a dilemma of moral or ethical consciousness. In *Paradise Road* many women are forced to make a decision of whether or not to go with the Japanese men. Here they face the personal conflict of having to decide what takes precedence; whether to choose survival, sanitary living conditions, nutritious and plentiful food and safety with the Japanese; or staying in the terrible conditions of the camp but keeping their dignity. This personal dilemma of a moral nature, presents a struggle where the women’s beliefs and values effect their decision. Through this conflict these women learn more about themselves and others; discovering either their strength or frailty, hope or submission. The conflict and trauma faced, and the decisions made in these circumstances; greatly effects and changes the person- altering their values or attaining strength and self-assurance.

They also face personal conflict when trying to decide whether or not to take part in the choir. Many women fear their lives will be endangered if they partake, however others believe they need that sense of freedom and hope in order to survive. The character of Topsy also faces the personal conflict as to whether or not she should try to escape the camp. Another woman faces a personal dilemma in risking her own life in order to save another. She decides to crawl under the fence to trade goods with the men, in order to get medicine to help a fellow prisoner. Many of the other women become furious stating she is risking all of their rations being taken away if she is caught, while others commend her on such a brave and selfless act. This noble act leads to her death, having petrol poured all over her and being set alight. Although her decisions lead to her demise; it brought some women closer, making them realise the importance of helping one another, however it made others believe they should only fend for themselves. One woman states “You know we’ve got buckleys chance of getting through the war in that camp. You think I want to end up in some shallow grave in Sumatra?” Another woman named Topsy Merritt asks if there is hot water and soap and goes to join the Japanese men. When questioned by the other women she states "Are you asking me to give up food and soap and god knows what else, to starve and sing?” Despite this the other women had great influence on her, insisting she remain dignified, and she decided to remain in the camp. After Adrienne strikes the Japanese soldier having being taken in the middle of the night, she is consequently punished by having to kneel in front of wooden stakes. Therefore she faces a personal struggle of survival, having the strength and will power to stay kneeling, and as a result alive.
Extra-personal conflict

Extra-personal conflict is that which impacts on society as a whole. This is often attributed to the political, cultural, religious, political or social beliefs of the people (especially those with power). When national interests differ, holding opposing views, battles of war often result. Society and community members have social responsibilities which are often enforced by political (government leaders) and security forces. Offering authority and power to these institutions, it can be said that the public’s freedom and safety is taken from them, yet it can also be said that they are protected. Depending on one’s social class and the country in which they live, their freedom; of expression, privacy, constitutional rights and fair trial will be different.

The women in Paradise Road face extra-personal conflict as they are not only exposed to war but bound and confined by it. Being trapped in a Prisoner of War Camp, these women have little to no freedom. They have been stripped of their human rights and therefore face great extra-personal conflict. It is not only these women in the camp who face this form of conflict, but people all over the world are affected by WWII.

For most of the female protagonists in this film, survival was the outcome. The allied soldiers did not arrive in Sumatra for over two weeks after the war was over. This shows how the prisoner of war camp was one of the most remote. Women and children were taken to Jakarta for medical treatment and then returned to their homelands. In the face of war, these women formed lifelong friendships.

Consequences of conflict

The consequence of war on individuals, families, cities and whole nations can be immense and vary in many ways. Paradise Road observes how people of a Prisoner of war camp ultimately try to survive through World War II.

This film does more than look at the global effect of the war, but rather the struggles individuals’ face and the strain it has on their relationships. The women in this film lose a lot (as have those in real life), however it is important to note that the effect of the war on others results in the gaining of some positive aspects.

Many of the women in Paradise Road lose their innocence; especially those that are either young or have led an aristocratic life. Other women lose their loved ones, while others lose the hope of ever escaping and leading a normal life. However in Paradise Road we see others grow stronger, become more assertive and believe they can accomplish their dreams. We see many female characters transform from being naive and innocent to hardened and resilient due to the tough circumstances they have endured. Susan for example learns, not only from the war but other women, to follow her dreams. Adrienne learns she is a leader and has a maternal side to her. Dr Verstak also discovers her maternal side, greatly influencing Susan. Daisy realises she can’t offer herself to the Japanese men yet she can raise the spirits of many through her strength and positivity. Rosemary learns how much she loves her partner, so much so that she dies from a broken heart and loss of hope.

In this film, these character changes are not necessarily a willing choice on their part, rather they have been forced into physical and psychological change brought on by the conflict of war.
Structure

Chronology

Chronology shows how the action of the film is arranged in respect of time. Linear is when the storyline is continuous. The plot of Paradise Road is seen is linear as it starts at a certain point in time and ends at a certain point in time. The film follows the action and events in order beginning on the 10th of February 1942 at a ball in Singapore and ends on the 24th of August 1945 with the women being set free. Therefore the action takes place over a period of nearly four years. Unlike a novel, a film is divided into scenes rather than chapters, but each containing the same purpose.

Continuity

Films do not tell everything that has happened in a certain period of time, and the director will only include information or detail that he/she deems to be important or relative. Nevertheless, there must be continuity within the narrative. This means the viewer perceives consistency in the characters, events, experiences and places. This allows the events in the film to flow logically and smoothly despite breaks of time. Paradise Road possesses continuity as the experiences, characters and events have been grouped together according to thematic relevance and experience. Some scenes protract the time, giving emphases to a specific event or conversation; whereas other scenes compress the time, condensing many events into a short scene.
**Style**

**Orientation (Point of View, Voice)**

This is about who is telling the story. The film *Paradise Road* is told in first person, with the narrator referring to herself as ‘I’. The audience therefore are only privy to the information the narrator shares. Being Australian herself, the Australian point of view is presented. This allows the narrators insight, experiences and opinions to be presented and this therefore can be seen as a way in which to persuade the reader. It may be said that this form of narrative is biased as other points of views are omitted.

**Impartiality**

Writers aim to influence their readers in a variety of ways. Some may aim to influence favourably, while others unfavourably. They achieve this through making assertions or assumptions about the subjects or people they address. It is important to note that they choose what information is given and in how much detail. Writers can omit what they don’t want to address. *Paradise Road* shows some true reflections of life in a prisoner of war camp, the story can be told in such a way that the reader’s emotions are brought to the forefront. Here the reader can empathise with characters or feel a sense of disgust towards characters. In this film the Japanese are presented as the Antagonists and the women in the camp the Protagonists.

**Non-fiction vs. Fiction**

*Paradise Road* is classified as non-fiction. This means that the stories are not inventions of the imagination, but the events of the story have actually happened. The purpose of the narration is to give facts about the events that have happened. Here, the writer does not choose the incidents of the story because the events have in fact taken place. However, the writer has the choice in how they depict or represent events, situations or characters. This is still a cinematic technique as it has a purpose, allowing a bias effect on the way the reader interprets the story. For example, a major historical event was the shooting of people when arriving on the shore of Sumatra. However, the director has chosen to exclude this from the film, and rather, focus on experiences inside the Prisoner of War Camp.

**Pathos**

The director evokes pathos for his characters as their pain and struggle are heavily woven into the plot and events that occur. The director presents these characters with sensitivity and compassion. *Paradise Road* stirs pathos in its viewers, wanting the women to be set free, transcending the misery and ill health they endure from the Japanese.
**War film**

There are many film genres, one of which being war film. All film genres include dramatic elements and focus on the in-depth development of realistic characters dealing with emotional struggles. The War films genre however, is concerned with warfare (naval, air or land battles), often focusing on prisoners of war or other related subjects. War films either focus on military or civilian life in wartime, and in the case of *Paradise Road* the film genre focuses primarily on civilian life in the POW camp. War films may be based on fiction, history, or docudrama. A sub-genre of war films is *Anti-war* films. *Anti-war* films portray war in a negative way, showing the horror and pain, often from a political or ideological perspective. Most films that show prisoners of war are seen in this light and therefore come under this classification. Often war films can also have the sub-genre of *historical drama* as the events and characters are based on historical events and famous people. Here the film attempts to accurately portray these real life events, though often add an element of fiction in order to make the story more appealing to the viewer.

**Music**

Music permeates the film and becomes a symbol of the grief and triumph the characters face. The music in the film is also emblematic of the emotions characters are experiencing. The songs which they sing are a testament to the serious, miserable and desperate emotional state they are in. Though their music is also their inspiration and tool to enhance their determination, hope and willpower to survive; while also being a form of escape. Furthermore, their choir is a manner in which they can confront the Japanese, demand some rights and gain some dignity.
Major and Minor Characters

A character is a person who exists in a text, narrative or film. There are two types of characters- major characters and minor characters. Major characters are involved in the central and most often climatic point of the action. The viewer therefore learns about these characters in more depth. They learn of their attitudes, approach to life, motivations and typical behaviour. Minor characters however, are not focused on exclusively. They are often there as a foundation to help establish the story of the main character. Nevertheless, they are important as they help shape and extend the plot.

Protagonists and Antagonists

Films often have characters who oppose each other and experience conflict or tension in some way. These characters are often seen as foes or enemies, and can often be seen as the good guy and the bad guy. The one driving or creating the conflict is seen as the antagonist. The character who is the victim of this conflict is seen as the protagonist. The storyline and major events in Paradise Road present the Australian, New Zealand and British as the protagonists and the prejudice of the Japanese enemies as the antagonists.

Author’s attitude

The director uses specific words and descriptions to present their attitude or stance on the action taking place or towards other characters. This may be presented covertly (secretly) or overtly (openly). Through the words and phrases chosen, many connotations are brought forth, and these strongly influence the point of view of the reader. The director of Paradise Road has written the narrative in such a way that the viewer clearly observes who is ‘right’ and who is ‘wrong’. As stated above, it is important to note that the captive held women are portrayed positively.
**Major characters**

Adrienne Pargiter

**Status**

When she first arrives in Sumatra and is taken by the Japanese, Adrienne states the laws of the Geneva Convention. This immediately displays her knowledge and confidence to stand up for what is right. We soon find out Adrienne is a British graduate from the Royal Academy of Music, she becomes the conductor of the orchestral women’s choir. She is also a British wife of a tea planter. One night on the way to the privy she is grabbed by a Seargant Tomiashi who is drunk. In trying to fight him off she causes him to fall in the privy which brings others running to witness his embaressment. Consequently Adrienne is locked in a wooden cage. The next morning Captain Tanaka instructs Adrienne that a Japanese soldier would never treat a lady in this way and offers the alternative story that she refused to bow to Seargant Tomashi who ‘rightfully’ struck her and when she retaliated he fell into the privy. She refuses to endorse this version of events so is beaten resulting in broken ribs. She demonstrates her strength of character and integrity by still refusing to lie and hence is sentenced to be executed. The other girls intervene on her behalf visiting Colonel Hirato and berating him for the treatment of prisoners and appealing to him to exerceise control and intervene which he does. After becoming closer to Margaret Drummond she apologises for her snobbery and states, "We never mixed with missionaries in Singapore, we were told to look down on them."

**Circumstances**

Her leadership and defiance towards the Japanese (based on her insistence to carry on the choir despite the expected consequences) offers the other women hope and inspiration not to give up. After the concert, Seargant Tomashi leads her into the woods, suggesting to the audience she will be raped or killed, finishing off what he had attempted previously before being exposed by her and for organising the choir. Yet we soon discover he wants to sing for her approval.

**Motivations**

Her motivation is to lift the morale of the camp and offer them hope and power through the choir.

**Behaviour**

Adrienne is enthusiastic, hopeful, passionate, brave, courageous and knowledgeable.
Encountering conflict

Susan Macarthy

Status

An Australian nursing student.

Circumstances

Susan, with the help of Dr Verstak discovers her true inner strength. Susan then made to kneel in front of sharp wooden stakes in the hope of her fall and consequential death. She manages to survive but is left exhausted, humiliated and nearly killed, she maintains her manners, self-confidence and humour, stating “I knew he was bluffing.” Her determination and persistence is used as inspiration for the women prisoners and elicits sympathy and respect from the Japanese soldiers. Susan’s holy aura when singing at the concert softens the hearts of both the Japanese captors and fellow women.

Motivations

In the first scene in Singapore Susan was motivated to help with the war and can’t comprehend why nurses are being sent away when they could be helping. After their ship is bombed and the women make their way to the shore, Susan displays pessimism stating “at least the water isn’t cold.” Susan’s motivation is to be set free from the camp, continue her studies in nursing, and to gain the courage to stand up to her parents and follow her own dreams. Dr Verstak questions why after the war she won’t go to medical school and it is revealed that it is because Susan’s father wants her back at the station to work on the land. We realise that her father never wanted her to do nursing and by the end of the film she has been given the guidance and courage to follow in her own dreams.

Behaviour

Timid yet finds her voice and soon displays strength, predominantly in scenes where her dignity or life is at stake.
She displays strength when yelling at the Japanese stating, "You’re starving and beating women and children, you steal our Red Cross parcels for yourselves, you don’t give any medicine for the sick. You make us work like slaves, you don’t let us write to our families, and you have the cheek to lecture us on good manners!"
While singing in the choir Susan cried for their freedom.
Dr Verstak

Status

Dr Verstak is a German Jew refugee. Within the confinements of the camp, Doctor Verstak becomes the doctor of the Prisoner of War camp. We realise later in the film she is not actually a doctor of medicine but a doctor of philosophy.

Circumstances

When the other women find out she is German, they treat her as an outsider stating, “so you’re on their side.” Throughout the movie they question her loyalty but soon trust her. She extracts gold teeth from dead women’s mouths in order to sell to the Japanese in exchange for medicine and whiskey.

When Susan is placed in front of the wooden stakes, Dr Verstak talks to the Japanese translator. She asks him to tell Captain Tanaka, "If the Japanese lose, the treatment of this young woman may mean they may hang him.” She explains that by being German she is an Ally to the Japanese; however her loyalty lies with Susan and the women of the camp. After this Captain Tanaka decides not to behead Susan.

Motivations

To obtain the necessary medicine, alcohol and other items needed in order to help the women’s survival. She is also motivated to offer guidance and strength to Susan. Dr Verstak’s is motivated to act as a medical doctor as the Japanese gain trust in her and the women hope in her ability to save lives.

Behaviour

Strong, charismatic and brash.
Dr Verstak is no-nonsense, tough, stiff and cynical. She becomes a maternal figure who offers good advice to Susan. She scoffs at other women when they state the war will be over by Christmas, showing her maturity and worldly knowledge.
Margaret “Daisy” Drummond

Status

A Christian missionary who copies the orchestra’s sheet music from memory.

Circumstances

Toward the end of the movie Daisy passes away and her friend Adrienne is very distraught. Adrienne reads her a bible passage and Daisy replies “That is all I wanted” before her untimely death. There is a funeral for her and we see the Japanese men take their hats off in respect for the one who sang. The Japanese still tell them they can’t sing, the women clap and pick up rocks to hit together and some even use their shoes, making music using such objects.

Motivations

To raise the spirits of the women in the camp.

Behaviour

When Adrienne and Daisy talk about the Japanese soldiers, Adrienne asks Daisy, "You don’t hate them do you? Why not?" Daisy replies “I’ve tried but I just can’t bring myself to hate people. The worse they behave the sorrier I feel for them." This displays Daisy’s kind, sympathetic and humble nature towards all people.
Rosemary Leighton

Status

A stunning young model who dreams of being reunited with her true love Dennis.

Circumstances

After being taken out of the camp and put on a train, Rosemary sees Dennis being beaten, bashed and captured. She then loses all hope, stating "You’ll never get out of this. None of us will ever leave Sumatra." She believes she has no reason to live as he was her motivation to keep up hope. The other women try to raise her spirits telling her "Don’t give up now. Dennis wouldn’t want that." The women go to tell Dr Verstak that Rosemary is ill. Dr Verstak states she is dying because she no longer wants to live "Sometimes God reaches down and pulls the wings off his butterflies." They decide that in the next few days she will be down Paradise Road, their expression for death. One of the women states that “If I fall in love I hope it is like that.”

Motivations

To be reunited with her lover Dennis.

Behaviour

Gentle, quiet, smitten with Dennis, easily persuaded, survives only through the hope of seeing Dennis again.
Minor characters

Often the minor characters in these short stories help to establish the story and events that revolve around the main character. Some examples of how these minor characters help extend and enhance the narrative are as follows:

**Topsy Merritt**

Topsy Merritt is an American socialite - the only American in the camp. At the ball in Singapore, Topsy seems less naive than the other characters stating that the Japanese are powerful and should not be underestimated as they conquered Pearl Harbour. She is tempted to go with the Japanese as a means to survival asking if there is hot water and soap. When the other women put her down for even considering going with the men she questions them, "Are you asking me to give up food and soap and God knows what else to starve and sing?" Convinced by the women she chooses to ‘starve and sing’ and hold on to her dignity. At one point Topsy also contemplates escaping the camp but is convinced by the other women it is too risky.

**Mrs Roberts**

Snobby upper-class woman who clings to her beloved dog which is eventually shot by the Japanese. Endearingly insufferable woman. We realise she is very quick to judge others, stating that the Asian girl killed was probably trading in some oriental business. Yet Mrs Roberts is put in her place by her daughter Cecilia who tells her that she was trading to get medicine for her. When told by Adrienne she sang too early she denies it and blames the other women. Dying on the train, Mrs Robert’s says to her daughter "I am sorry I won’t get to see your dear father again. I have so much to tell him." This suggests she has developed compassion and realises her flaws.
Important Quotations and Passages

- Topsy Merritt: “You want me to give up food and soap and God knows what else, so I can starve and sing?”
- Margaret Drummond: “I just can’t bring myself to hate people. The worse they behave, the sorrier I feel for them.”
- Sister Wilhelminia: “Well I’m a nun not a saint!”
- Margaret Drummond: “The will to survive is strong, stronger than anything.”
- Dr Verstak: “Sometimes God reaches down and pulls the wings off his butterflies.”
- Other female Prisoner of War: “If I fall in love I hope it is like that.”
- Mrs Roberts: "I am sorry I won’t get to see your dear father again. I have so much to tell him.”
- Rosemary Leighton: "You’ll never get out of this. None of us will ever leave Sumatra."
- Daisy: “That is all I wanted.”
- Dr Verstak: "If the Japanese lose, the treatment of this young woman may mean they may hang him.”
- Other female Prisoner of War: “Well then you’re on their side aren’t you?” (To Dr Verstak in reference to her being German).
- Susan Macarthy: "You’re starving and beating women and children, you steal our Red Cross parcels for yourselves, you don’t give any medicine for the sick. You make us work like slaves, you don’t let us write to our families, and you have the cheek to lecture us on good manners!”
- Adrienne Pargiter: "We never mixed with missionaries in Singapore, we were told to look down on them."
- Susan Macarthy: “I knew they were bluffing.”
- Susan Macarthy: “I said nice weather we are having.” (Mocking the Japanese when caught talking).
- Pompous man at the Singapore ball: "They're crossed eyed and can’t even see into their guns." (In reference to the Japanese).
- Susan Macarthy: "He can’t mean us, they're gunna need us.” (When told they had to leave Singapore for safety).
- Pompous man at Singapore ball: "Now we know. They can see which we were told they couldn’t, they can fight which we were told they couldn't and they’re here which we were told they would never be."
- Susan Macarthy: "We have been in Singapore for two months and now that they really need nurses we’re leaving."
- Topsy Merritt: "I saw the reports on what the Japs did to the nurses in Hong Kong."
- Susan Macarthy: "Could be worse I suppose. The water could be cold."
- Susan Macarthy: "Must be Sumatra. It’s amazing how everyone has just disappeared."
- Japanese Soldier: "What can I say but attacking the enemy is a characteristic of war."
Colonel Hirota: "I am Colonel Hirota and I am in command of this place."

Dr Verstak: “The English don’t invite Jewish refugees to the cricket club. My husband and me we are doctors in asian hospital.”

Daisy Drummond: "It is our Paradise Road."

(repeated) Adrienne Pargiter: "Our appreciation of the Japanese culture is at a low ebb."

Mrs Roberts: "What kind of people will be in this group dear?"

Mrs Roberts: “Who knows what kind of contraband she was trading in.”

Japanese soldier: "Japanese officer look for volunteer to walk him proud. They will have plenty of food."

Japanese soldier: "Ladies who stay in beautiful house are told to walk in certain direction."

Topsy Merritt: "You know we’ve got bucklies chance of getting through the war in that camp. You think I want to end up in some shallow grave in Sumatra."

Dr Verstak: "It will keep the ladies busy and that is good."

Other female Prisoner of War: "There’s going to be trouble. The Japs won’t take this lying down."

Captain Tanaka: "American imperialists have been removed from many pacific islands. Australia bombed many time and government want to make peace with Japan. Churchill and Roosevelt number ten. Emperor Hirohito son of heaven number 1."

(repeated) Adrienne Pargiter: "That’s one to tell your grandchildren"

Daisy: "We need the orchestra up and started again. Show the Japanese we are still alive, still got some spirit left.”

Japanese soldier: "Once more we can be friends. I have done my best for you. I know not enough, but I could do no more."

Dr Verstak: "Yes and no. My husband is a medical doctor. I am a doctor of philosophy.”
TEXT 2: THE RUGMAKER OF MAZAR-E-SHARIF

Themes

Reasons for international conflict

Mazari refers to different conflicts Afghanistan has been involved in and these can be broken into three distinct areas – the time before Afghanistan became a country in its own right; the decade-long war with Russia which Mazari lives through; and the attacks by the United States government following the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre.

Afghanistan has endured a conflict-ridden history. It was continuously subjugated by invading forces, as Mazari documents early in his text:

Thousands of years ago, the Persians ruled Afghanistan…then the Macedonians of Alexander took the land from the Persians, followed by the Mongols and a whole host of tribal warriors from all over Central Asia. The British in India always wanted to make Afghanistan a secure neighbour, without any success at all; the Russians wanted an Afghanistan friendly to Moscow. And at various times, almost every tribal and ethnic group in the region has staked out its own little piece of the country. Afghanistan was not even recognised as a country in its own right until 1919… (p34-35).

Afghanistan has long been an area at the whim of outside forces. Coupled with the civil conflict that has characterised its recent history, the country has long suffered violent and aggressive occupation and internal frictions.

Mazari starts his story by stating that, ‘like almost every Afghani, [he has] witnessed a number of explosions in [his] lifetime’ (p7). Afghanistan, after achieving independence from Britain following World War II, saw a number of military coups through the 1970s. In 1979, Russian-supported Babrak Karmal, a Marxist, took control of the country. For the nine years the Russians remained in Afghanistan, the mujahedin, anti-Marxist militia, opposed their presence.

The reasons for the Russian invasion (known as the United Soviet States of Russian [USSR] at that time) are many. Since the 1950s, they had been aiding Afghanistan by building roads, oil pipelines and irrigation. The invasion at the end of the 1970s sought to expand Russia’s influence in Asia. Also, Russia wished to protect their influence in Afghanistan from Western nations. Further, after a communist party gained control of Afghanistan in the mid-1970s, communist Russia wished to cement the Afghani communist party’s leadership, which was flailing without the support of the general populus.
Encountering conflict

Because of Afghanistan’s proximity to the Persian Gulf, which contained at that time around 66 per cent of the world’s oil reserves, coupled with a revolution in Iran that saw a new leader, hostile to the United States, installed, the United States took an interest in the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. This was partly due to their desire to protect their ally in the area, Pakistan, and possibly to prevent the spread of influence of their Cold War rival, Russia. The United States covertly supplied weapons and finances to enable the mujahedin to provide opposition to the Russian troops. For their part, the mujahedin had as their motivation a belief that the atheist or Christian Russians ruling Afghanistan was a defilement of Islam. They used guerrilla tactics in their attacks, utilising the American weapons as well as what they managed to take from the Russian military forces.

The fighting between the Russians and the mujahedin raged over a period of about eight years. About five million civilians – around a third of Afghanistan’s entire population – fled to neighbouring Pakistan or Iran. The Russian bombs destroyed crops and livestock, leaving millions of the civilian population dead, homeless, or starving. As Mazari states, ‘neither the Russian-backed government forces nor the mujahedin cared much about innocent bystanders’ (p12).

The civilian population of Afghanistan were essentially caught in the middle of bigger forces that cared nothing for the welfare or wellbeing of the Afghani people.

Russian troops left Afghanistan in 1989 because of their inability to overcome the mujahedin, as well as pressure from the United Nations and the rest of the world.

Mazari also refers to the war initiated by the United States of America on Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks on their Twin Towers. The Taliban, the ruling party of Afghanistan at the time, had been harbouring Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind behind the September 11 attacks. As Mazari describes, ‘many people who had nothing to do with the Taliban’ (p7) were bombed by the United States army. Note the switching of alliances – the United States of America supported Afghanistan against the Russians and then attacked them later.
Figure 1 – Afghanistan and surrounding areas.
Civil conflict

The earlier part of Mazari’s time in Afghanistan focuses on life under the tension of the Russian-backed Afghani government, the latter part of his experience there occurred under the regime of the Taliban government, from around 1994 onward.

The Taliban came out of India, in the days when the British ruled that country. The Muslims of India feared that the British would destroy their religious culture, so they set up schools, very strict schools, to educate Muslims in Muslim culture. They were known as Deobandi schools… (p193)

Following the invasion by the Russians, a substantial number of Afghani people fled to Pakistan. Here, the Deobandi mullahs took the young people into their schools and made their hatred and disgust [of corruption … and provincial governors and politicians (p174)] stronger than ever. These young people, these scholars, became the Taliban, and when they were old enough, they left the Deobandi schools, swore a vow and made the journey westwards back into Afghanistan with Kalashnikovs in their hands (p174).

The ultimate reason for Mazari seeking refuge in Australia was because of the treatment inflicted on the Hazara people by the Taliban. The Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 1994, reigning until 1998. They instituted Islamic law known as Sharia law, instituting rules which included regulating what music people could listen to, what Western films were allowed and, most severely, effectively restricted women to the home. Women were denied education and required to follow a strict dress code. Mazari mentions of what he saw in Australia that ‘if this were Afghanistan, every woman I see would be whipped and beaten, and most of the young girls with no clothing around the middle of their bodies would be put in jail or shot’ (p184).

Because much of the opposition to the Taliban came from the Hazara people, a minority ethnic group in Afghanistan, the Taliban harshly punished the Hazara.

The Taliban returned to Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998, and when they came, they came like wolves in the ancient story…the Taliban were not fighting street to street, but were all firing at once on the Hazara they had rounded up. A massacre was taking place…Wherever I turned, I came upon dead Hazara. Blood ran down the gutters and filled the gaps between the street cobbles…the Taliban soldiers struck a match, locked the door on my uncle and his son, and waited while they burned to death (p193-197).

Though he relays stories of his own torture and the massacre occurring against the Hazara people, Mazari does not go in to detail about the extent of the repression inflicted on the people of Afghanistan by the Taliban government. He goes as far as to report that they, made all sorts of things illegal that had once been accepted as a normal part of life. Music was gone, singing was gone, instruments that made music were gone, dancing was gone, laughter was gone, books were gone except for the holy book (p172).
Impact of international and civil conflict on ‘ordinary’ citizens

The early period of conflict between the Russian-supported Afghan government and mujahedin marks the start of Mazari’s story when, in 1985, a rocket hits his home, killing his brother Rosal Ali and brother-in-law Hassan. His brother, Gorg Ali, had been killed by a sniper the previous year. Mazari’s realisation that, in a way, war had become normal in Afghanistan; it was peace that was strange’ (p163), indicates the degree to which his life had constantly been impacted by the warring. As he related,

The whole category of ‘innocent bystander’ didn’t exist in Afghanistan in the years of civil war. Both sides expected that it would be necessary to kill civilians, or at least that it would be too troublesome to avoid killing them. Neither side acted with any real conscience (p12).

Indeed, Mazari’s family was devastated by the deaths of his brothers. Other Afghani families were presumably similarly affected. The little credence the Russians and the mujahedin gave to the lives of the Afghani civilians illustrates the single-mindedness of war, as well as the far-reaching and long-lasting destruction conflict brings.

Following the retreat of Russian forces from Afghanistan, civil factions fought for control of the country. The triumphant Taliban persecuted those people groups they felt had attempted to suppress their rise to power. Because the ‘oath of revenge the Taliban had sworn was against Hazara of fighting age’ (p196), Mazari was one of those taken from his home and tortured.

Five Taliban soldiers kicked open the door and in seconds had placed themselves in the path of every exit from the house. One of the soldiers grabbed me by my throat and rammed me against a wall, the muzzle of his Kalashnikov resting on my cheek…The Taliban soldiers threw me face down on the ground and flailed me with their whips…None of us in that room escaped with just the one beating. As days passed, we were taken again and again…Our numbers in that room grew fewer as the days passed. Men who could bear no more beatings confessed to what they had not done – fought against the Taliban – in order to hasten death…How many days had passed before my final beating, I do not know. I was dragged out and whipped and answered the commander’s demands with the same words I had started with. Then I was told to get to my feet…After ten steps, after 100, I did not look around, still expecting to be shot. I looked at nothing except my hands, at my fingertips worn raw from clutching at the earth (199-202).

Following his release from the Taliban, Mazari knew he was still not safe. He left his wife and daughter in Mazar-e-Sharif and travelled to his old village of Shar Shar. Here he received information from his family that he was to leave Afghanistan and seek refuge elsewhere. In this way, the vengeance sought by the Taliban forces him to flee for his life. Mazari’s early life was lived against the backdrop of conflict between the Russians and the mujahedin, his brothers needlessly killed as innocent bystanders to this, and his later time in Afghanistan horrific against the torturous regime of the Taliban.

Mazari is not the only one whose life is turned upside-down by conflict. He makes references to ‘people [in the detention centre] from five different countries’ (p24), including Iranians, Chechens and Kurds and briefly refers to deaths of others’ family members, ‘killed by Russian explosions in Chechnya, or Iraqi explosions in Kurdistan’ (p26). Throughout the world, people’s lives are impacted to dramatic degrees by the war and conflict that has gone and continues to go on around them. Mazari’s is only one of these stories.
There was and continues to be much conflict in Australia surrounding asylum seekers. Mazari came to Australia by boat, bypassing the ‘official’ ways of seeking asylum. However, there is no Australian consulate in Afghanistan whereby individuals can seek these ‘official' processes.

Mazari references men in his detention centre who had ‘sewn their lips together’ (p101), such was their desire to stay in Australia, and for the public to hear their plight. Conflict in their own home countries puts individuals at the mercy of other countries’ ‘hospitality’. Asylum seekers have to have their status as a refugee confirmed before being granted an Australian visa. A refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (defined by the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, to which Australia is a signatory).

More simply, a refugee is someone who has fled because of the threat of persecution and cannot return safely to their homes if the circumstances do not change. Mazari is vaguely critical of the process he and his fellow asylum seekers must endure before being recognised as refugees. He comments, ‘Australians, would it have been such a tragedy if you had accepted this man’s story? Would your country have been destroyed if you had shown a little more kindness? Surely not’ (p101-102). Though the conflict within Australia is not overtly commented on, much debate has ensued between the Liberal and Labor governments about Australia’s policies regarding refugees. Around the world, countries’ responses to accepting those fleeing conflict within their home country are varied.
Structure

The text alternates between Mazari’s experiences in Afghanistan, dating from 1977 until the time Mazari flees in 2000, and his time in Australia, ranging from 2001 to 2006. The odd numbered chapters take place in Australia and the even numbered ones in Afghanistan and on Mazari’s journey as he flees Afghanistan and journeys to Australia. Odd numbered chapters are chronological as Mazari relates the process of being in detention to Australia to his eventual release into the community to the arrival of his family. Even numbered chapters are not chronological, recounting stories from different times across the course of Mazari’s life. For instance, chapter 2 features the rocket explosion and death of Mazari’s brother Rosal Ali, later in the text Rosal Ali chastens Mazari for lying about his apprenticeship at the blacksmith. The final chapter of Mazari’s experience in Afghanistan and subsequent fleeing occurs just before the first chapter of the section that focuses on his Australian experiences.

The 23 chapters are prefaced by a map showing Mazari’s journey from Afghanistan to Australia. His story finishes with a postscript in which Mazari explains the current state of affairs in Afghanistan, where the Taliban has returned (p251). He also tells readers of his citizenship ceremony and gives details of a fund he has set up to provide for people in Afghanistan. This is followed by Acknowledgements and a Glossary section.
Encountering conflict

**Style**

*The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* is both autobiographical and biographical. The text is told from the first person perspective/experience of Najaf Mazari, but was written in conjunction with Robert Hillman. Hillman is a Victorian author, renowned for his fiction pieces. Hillman also co-authored *My Life as a Traitor*, published in 2007 which documents the story of young Iranian woman Zarah Ghahramani. Similar to Mazari’s story, she was taken and beaten and was later granted asylum in Australia.

Readers are informed of Mazari’s story through insight into his thought processes at different times and through the conversations he has. Through his relation of the events he endures and the history of his country and family, Mazari informs the reader of both his own and Afghanistan’s past and current contexts.

Even-numbered chapters are written using the past tense. Mazari weaves stories of Afghanistan’s history into these chapters. He gives details of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and their installing of Babrak Karmal as puppet leader, doing so with personal reflections on these facts. Mazari also gives details of Afghani culture, such as food, houses, ‘courting’ and the position of women in the society.

Odd-numbered chapters, exploring Mazari’s experiences in Australia, are primarily written in the present tense. They begin with his internment in Woomera detention centre, charting his time detained in the different camps there, followed by his ‘release’ and move to Dandenong, his work at a rug shop until he owns his own shop and finally, the arrival of his wife and daughter at Tullamarine Airport. Because the chapters alternate in this manner, the reader is aware that Mazari survives the torture of the Taliban which is detailed towards the end of the text. Yet they are also aware through the early chapters – given that he has been forced to seek refuge – that he encountered real persecution under the Taliban. A desire to understand the fullness of his experiences engages the reader to continue reading.

Mazari also gives perspectives on Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers, suggesting that the government should ‘Make us work, give us some pay. Build a factory at November. We could make things’ (p25). These chapters feature some traditional Afghani stories, such as that of the camels in chapter 9, giving some insight into the culture of Afghanistan.

Dialogue is used throughout the text. Presumably the conversations are fabricated to a degree since complete recall of many of the exchanges recorded would have been very difficult. The language used is simple and straightforward, appropriately conversational. Although most of the conversations would have been conducted in Dari, Mazari’s native tongue, they are recorded in English. Mazari’s interview with the case officer reviewing his situation (chapter 5) is conducted through an interpreter but the exchange is chronicled in English as well. His personal reflections and thoughts are included in the narrative.

Mazari jumps to the current time at the end of chapter 4. Though this chapter focuses on Mazari’s childhood and his time at school, he finishes with an observation of his daughter Maria in her classroom. While this goes some way to alluding to the differences in attitude to education in Afghanistan and Australia, it also gives the reader the satisfaction of knowing that Mazari’s story has a happy ending even though they have just begun reading.
Although it is a story of extreme hardship, given that members of his family are killed and that he is forced to leave his wife and baby daughter to flee the Taliban, Mazari’s story is ultimately a positive one. While he relays the story of other asylum seekers sewing their lips together (chapter 9), Mazari does not unduly criticise the Australian government for his detainment. He suggests possible changes to the treatment of asylum seekers, but he is not angry about his confinement in Woomera. Mazari is also gracious about the way Australians treated him, including the security guards and those in the wider community when he is ‘released’ from detention. His story is imbued with hope and gratitude to a God that has looked out for him.
Encountering conflict

Major and Minor Characters

Najaf Mazari

Najaf Mazari was born in 1970 and raised in Shar Shar until his family moved to the town of Mazar-e-Sharif in 1980. As a boy he looks after his family’s sheep, later taking a position as an apprentice blacksmith until he finds his ‘calling’ as a rugmaker, a trade he continues in his Melbourne home today.

Mazari is a respectful son and younger brother, showing clear regard for his father, then his brother Gorg Ali who took the role of head of the family on their father’s death, as well as deference to his mother who ultimately has final say in Mazari’s choice of wife. He is a moderate Muslim, as opposed to the more zealous Taliban whose harsh rule he opposes, describing his belief as a person who

was then, and I remain, a man of religion. I honour God. I know of no other way for a man to live his life. Those who honour other gods than mine – peace to them forever. Those who honour no God at all – peace to them, too. I would never raise a sword, never even raise a feather cushion against another man because of his religion, or because of his lack of religion. (p172)

He is resourceful and independent, making socks following the injuries to his leg received in the bombing of his home (chapter 1). He continues to view his situation in Australia in positive terms and seeks to keep himself busy by working in the cafeteria. On being granted a temporary protection visa, Mazari works as a rug repairer for a woman in Prahran, also taking on extra work. Later he has his own shop selling rugs.

Figure 2 - Najaf Mazari and his daughter Maria, http://www.afghantraditionalrugs.com.au/the_age.html
Gorg Ali

Gorg Ali is Mazari’s eldest brother. On the death of their father, Gorg Ali becomes head of the family. He is a gentle person, ‘a good man, wise and kind’ (p37). Following his death at the hands of a sniper when Mazari was twelve years old, ‘more responsibility settled on to [Mazari’s] shoulders’ (p117).

Abdul Ali

Mazari’s second eldest brother, Abdul Ali, heads the family following the death of their eldest brother. A butcher, he is ‘unsmiling and severe’ (p37). Abdul Ali ‘didn’t have the gentle manner of Gorg Ali’ (p91), giving Najaf a ‘mighty blow across the side of [his] head’ (p93) as punishment for Najaf not revealing to his family that he had left the blacksmiths for a rug factory. Mazari equates his sudden violence with the Taliban, saying that he resented deeply those two blows to [his] head. Was it not possible for [his] brother to simply ask [him] for an explanation without boxing [his] ears? Truly, that was something like the way of the Taliban – first, punish, don’t bother about explanations (p94).

Abdul Ali does not feature much more in the text after this.

Rosal Ali Mazari

Najaf’s younger brother, Rosal Ali, causes him some tension because of his unruly behaviour. Mazari reports that he ‘got fed up with him and shouted at him, just as Abdul Ali sometimes shouted at me. It was as if I were in training to become another Abdul Ali’ (p118). Rosal Ali’s actions result in Mazari ‘smash[ing] the window with my fist in [his] determination to get at him and the glass sliced deeply into [his] hand’ (p118).

Rosal Ali’s death from a rocket is related in the first chapter of the text.

Hakima Mazari

Hakima and Maria, Mazari’s wife and daughter, escape to Pakistan following Mazari’s departure to Australia. They later join him in Australia. Hakima is the sister of Mazari’s friend Iajaz. Hakima and Mazari meet once before their marriage.
Robin Bourke

Robin is an Australian woman who helps Mazari, in particular with mastering the English language. She also, cooks for [him] and listens to [his] troubles. She is like a mother to [him]. [He] remembers times when [he] was in such despair in Afghanistan, and on [his] journey to Australia. If [he] had known that at the end of [his] journey, [he] would find such a friend as Robin, [he] would have thought all the pain and fear was worthwhile for such a reward (p215).

Robin provides emotional support for Mazari. He describes himself as ‘depend[ing on her] for true comfort’ (p226) as ‘she listens to [him] in times when happiness has made [him] crazy with joy, and in times when [he] grieve[s] for reunion with [his] wife and daughter’ (p226).

Colin Young

Colin is a Melbourne rug and antique dealer. They become friends following the establishment of Mazari’s own rug shop. Mazari describes Colin as ‘a very reliable friend’ (p241) and it is Colin who takes Mazari to pick up his wife and daughter from the airport.
Important Quotations and Passages

- Consider Emerson’s quote, referring to peace, that prefaces the text.

‘But the real and lasting victories are those of peace, and not of war’.

- Consider Mazari’s recognition in his dedication of those who still suffer and those who work for peace.

‘This book is dedicated to all those people of Afghanistan who have lost so much in wars – their houses, their limbs and their lives – and to all people working for peace throughout the world’.

- Consider the way that Mazari’s removal from his land impacts on his perception of his self-importance (or lack thereof) on page 5.

‘For a few minutes, I was not merely one of hundreds of down-at-heel nuisances from some hellhole in Central Asia, but a man with something to offer, a song to sing and maybe a tale to tell that might be worth listening to; a tale that might even be true’.

- Consider Mazari’s constant focus on the positive despite his horrendous situation on page 6.

‘For the first time in months, I can hope. And it’s good to feel hope come to life again in my heart. I think of the red flowers around the mosque at Mazar-e-Sharif. I think of how they bloom each year, no matter how many rockets explode over them’.

- Consider Mazari’s summation of the entry of the Russians into Afghanistan on page 7, and the other countries that aided the mujahedin.

‘In the 1980s, the Russians tried out bombs and exploding devices in Afghanistan that came fresh off the drawing board. We Afghans had the undesired honour of being among the first humans being on earth to be blown to pieces by this state-of-the-art Russian weaponry. The mujahedin, the sworn enemies of the Russians, also had very up-to-date mortars, bombs, mines and rockets, provided by the Americans and Saudis. The arsenal of the Taliban came from all over the world; whatever they could buy, they used’.

- Consider the ongoing nature of living constantly with conflict, as evidenced on page 11.

‘In Afghanistan at that time, feeling secure was never a long-term thing…’
Consider the way forces are concerned only about their own purpose and not about civilians on page 12.

‘How much happier I would be now if I had taken some time to reflect on the nature of this civil war that had raged for five years up and down Afghanistan. For truly, it was impossible to feel safe when battles could change course in a matter of hours. Neither the Russian-backed government forces nor the mujahedin cared much about innocent bystanders. In fact, the whole category of ‘innocent bystander’ didn’t exist in Afghanistan in the years of civil war. Both sides expected that it would be necessary to kill civilians, or at least that it would be too troublesome to avoid killing them. Neither side acted with any real conscience.’

Consider the losses Mazari’s family experienced after two rockets struck their house (page 16).

“Your brother Rosal Ali has been killed, God receive him”, [my uncle] said. “Hassan, too, has been killed, God receive his soul. Abdul Ali is badly wounded, but he will live. Your mother has suffered a terrible wound, but she too will survive, thank God. Latifeh and your sister-in-law have been spared, thank God for their safety. Alas, your home is destroyed.”

Consider the effect of conflict in driving people around the world from their homes on page 20.

‘Eighty people just like me searching for a new home in the world file past me … most had put together the few thousand dollars needed to pay the people smugglers by borrowing … Some will be repaying the money they borrowed for years to come, and if they die, their relatives will have to pay… I think of the odds for such a gamble. First, there is the journey by land, and that journey by itself can end in disaster, in capture or death. Then, November. Some of us will be permitted to stay, some will be sent away. It’s a very bad gamble, a foolish gamble if you think about it. But if you are one of the winners, it’s worth it.’

Consider that, around the world, wars impact on civilians, as illustrated on page 26.

‘Although we are not, all of us could easily be related to each other. We all have the same experiences, too. It was a mujahedin explosion that killed my younger brother but others here have had family members killed by Russian explosions in Chechnya, or Iraqi explosions in Kurdistan. We have all had to bury people we loved after battles that we did not start and did not want.’

Consider Mazari’s reflection on governments’ and groups’ impatience on page 32.

‘I think that all of our waiting and our need for patience is caused by people who would not be patient and would not wait. I mean the people who did not wait before they dropped bombs on us, and did not wait before they fired rockets, and did not wait for the United Nations to make peace in our lands. Whenever people are impatient and will not wait, you can be sure there will be a cost.'
Consider the overview of Afghanistan’s conflict-riddled history that Mazari gives on pages 33–36.

In the last days of that year, the Soviet Union leaders in Moscow decided to invade Afghanistan and install a man called Babrak Karmal to be the leader of our country. Karmal then ‘invited’ an enormous host of Soviet troops into Afghanistan to make sure he remained President… hardship has been a big part of the pattern of life in my violent homeland for not hundreds, but thousands of years…. Thousand of years ago, the Persians ruled Afghanistan… then the Macedonians of Alexander took the land from the Persians, followed by the Mongols and a whole host of tribal warriors from all over Central Asia… Afghanistan was not recognised as a country in its own right until 1919… Amongst the four main ethnic groups of the country you’ll find some of the most shrewd and fierce guerrilla fighters anywhere in the world… I have seen men, Afghans, who would be prepared if necessary to commit themselves and a hundred generations of their family to battle, from now until the end of the world.

Consider the consequences of conflict on civilians who are forced to do desperate acts (p101-102).

[A lady] tells me that a man I had spoken to a short time before has sewn his lips together… Blood is gushing from his mouth and down the front of his shirt… Security guards… arrive and try to seize the man and take him away. But his friends won’t let the guards take him, and soon people are wrestling and struggling and shouting loudly. Some of the poor man’s friends are dashing their heads against the wall… Many of these people have also been refused visas and are waiting in despair for deportation… The man’s heart has been torn into pieces, but because everyone has seen broken hearts before and there’s nothing unique about such pain, he has had to mutilate himself to show us all what it feels like… Australians, would it have been such a tragedy if you had accepted this man’s story? Would your country have been destroyed if you had shown a little more kindness? Surely not’.

Consider Mazari’s recognition of the suffering of the people of Afghanistan on page 105.

In Afghanistan today, it is possible to listen to a story of heartbreak in the morning, hear a more heartbreaking story in the afternoon and in the evening, hear the worst story of all. It is not that Afghans have chosen a path of suffering out of madness; no, other people have chosen that path for us’.

Consider the ignorance of the fighting parties of their impact on civilians on pages 111-112.

In fighting of the sort that was going on in Afghanistan at this time, neither side gave much thought to civilian casualties. The best a family could hope for if one of their number was killed in the clashes was an apology from whatever commander was responsible.

“Sorry, we didn’t mean to kill your son, it was a mistake, really the fault of the people we are fighting”. But even that was rare. Mostly, the soldiers and tanks simply moved on to the next battlefield unconcerned about the grief they’d left behind. On this day in the spring of 1982, the grief that was left behind was the grief of my family’.
• Consider the ongoing nature of the warring on page 115.

‘Now, it was true that we were used to the fighting, but in 1982 it was obvious to everyone that the bitterness of the conflict between the communist government and the mujahedin was going to tear the country into pieces. My land of Afghanistan is not a land of brief wars.

• Consider again the way fighting factions do not concern themselves with civilians or what is best for a country (page 150).

‘…the communists and the mujahedin did not seem to me like people who had a grand plan for the salvation of Afghanistan. No, they seemed to me interested in ruling, and that was it. It was a power struggle in which the people in the struggle had forgotten everything about Afghanistan except their desire to rule it…How could I, or how could anyone believe that these people were thinking of the good of the country?’

• Consider the way the opposing sides endeavour to get civilians to fight for them on pages 150-153.

‘Babrak Karmal was President when I returned to the rug factory. He wanted me to join his army and fight the mujahedin, even though I was barely into my teenage years. The mujahedin also wanted me to fight on their side. It was not just me that these two sides wanted, of course; they wanted every young Afghani male they could get their hands on. I had to spend half my life hiding from the recruitment officers of both sides. For neither side took any interest in the view of the young men and boys they were attempting to recruit…It was worthwhile making a big effort to avoid being recruited into either army, because once you were in, you were dead. They did not want us in order to make us pilots of jet planes. They wanted us to stand and fight and kill other boys until finally one of the other boys killed us’.

• Consider the way that living with conflict makes it normal (page 163).

‘War had always been the background to my life (and sometimes much more than background) and it surely helped to form the way I thought about things. In a way, war had become normal in Afghanistan; it was peace that was strange’.

• Consider the effect of conflict of civilian populations on page 173.

‘When the Russians came to my country in 1980, the war created millions of refugees. And the mujahedin civil war that followed when the Russians pulled out nine years later made millions more people homeless…they packed up what they owned – very little – and carried these few possessions eastwards into the border provinces of Pakistan’.

• Consider the violence of conflict, demonstrated in the Taliban’s behaviour towards Hazara people on pages 193 – 197.

‘The Taliban returned to Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998, and when they came, they came like wolves in the ancient story…the Taliban were not fighting street to street, but were all firing at once on the Hazara they had rounded up. A massacre was taking place…Wherever I turned, I came upon dead Hazara. Blood ran down the gutters and filled the gaps between the street cobbles…the Taliban soldiers struck a match, locked the door on my uncle and his son, and waited while they burned to death’.
• Consider the way civilians lived with the expectation that further violence would occur, evidenced in Mazari’s friend’s secret cupboard (p195).

‘[Ashraf’s] house was two storeys tall and, as I knew, he had made a secret room on the second floor when the house was built...The trapdoor had been fashioned so skilfully that no one could see its outline once it was closed. It had been made for just such an emergency as this, for the Hazara are a people who have lived with persecution and threats of sudden death for hundreds of years. The room was no bigger than a cupboard, but it was made to aid survival, not for comfort’.

• Consider the way Mazari is personally treated by the Taliban as demonstrated on pages 199-202.

‘Five Taliban soldiers kicked open the door and in seconds had placed themselves in the path of every exit from the house. One of the soldiers grabbed me by my throat and rammed me against a wall, the muzzle of his Kalashnikov resting on my cheek...The commander pointed here and there in the crowd and the soldiers seized those he’d pointed to, dragged them outside and beat them with whips fashioned from steel cable. All of us within listened to the screams with our heads bowed. Some men vomited where they stood. Others let their urine flow without shame...The Taliban soldiers threw me face down on the ground and flailed me with their whips...None of us in that room escaped with just the one beating. As days passed, we were taken again and again...Our numbers in that room grew fewer as the days passed. Men who could bear no more beatings confessed to what they had not done – fought against the Taliban – in order to hasten death’.
Encountering conflict

TEXT 3: THE CRUCIBLE

Themes

Puritanism

Now Massachusetts, Salem was founded in 1626. Settlers to the new colonies of the USA, when it was named New England, fled religious persecution in England, but their pilgrimage for harmony harboured negative traits, such as bigotry and intolerance. Yet, their values strengthened community and family bonds and were based on practical and simple faith. Puritanism survived in the new colonies and strict laws and punishments escalated into the lunacy surrounding the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692. Salem was a theocratic society which treated religious and state laws as one court of law. As panic gripped the people of Salem, an increasing number of individuals were accused of practicing witchcraft, which was an orthodox belief, and brought to trial where many were punished to death by hanging after falsely confessing under pressure. By the end of 1692, revulsion caused the hysteria to pass and the court dissolved.

McCarthyism

In the 1950s, hysteria resulted in the persecution of individuals who were deemed to hold Communist beliefs. United States Republican Senator, Joseph Raymond McCarthy voiced his support for a ruthless campaign against Communists and treachery at an opportune time when national confidence was low, partly stemming from the use of nuclear weapons at the end of World War II by relatively new leaders of the British and American governments. In the 1950s, The Cold War, an intense standoff between the USA and the USSR, posed the threat of atomic weapons and created a social sense of terror. Americans fought and died in battles against Communism, but did not clearly emerge victorious in The Korean War. In this period marked by anti-Communist suspicion, ordinary Americans became targets of the Government’s campaign to destroy the character of any person deemed an activist or reformist. Teachers, government employees, and members of religious minorities and unions, were primarily targeted in the vicious ‘witch-hunt’. Arthur Miller’s creation of John Proctor is based on his own experience of trying to defend his reputation in the ‘smear’ campaign of McCarthyism. Unlike Proctor, Miller was legally acquitted by the court appeal after he was fined for contempt of court in his first trial.
Conflict within the community

The Crucible demonstrates the pervasive nature of fear and its capacity to cause and exacerbate conflict. The people of Salem live in fear of the unknown and cling to their puritan beliefs as a source of security. The devout nature of the community to Christianity places them precariously at the whim of the threat of Satan inhabiting the townspeople, specifically the women. Accusations of witchcraft develop into hysteria with even the most pious Rebecca Nurse being hanged for practising witchcraft. The religious authorities are positioned to restore peace and order through bringing agents of the Devil to justice. The hysteria, panic and fear that rapidly envelopes the village is the product of deep insecurities. The context of Miller’s play allegorically parallels the hysteria that resulted during the period of McCarthyism in the United States of America.

Members of the community of Salem value conformity for the purposes of harmonious existence. However, those in society least satisfied with their personal plight trigger a social conflict that creates changes in the community’s foundation and structure. The young, female servants manage to gain power over the highest authority of the state. The community’s Puritan Christian values, represented in essence by Rebecca Nurse, are fundamentally brought into question and used to justify the sentencing of any person in the community deemed a transgressor and dissenter. The values of individuals, embodied in the character of John Proctor, in truth, reason and freedom are seen to threaten autocratic and tyrannical social control. Thus good and ordinary people are confronted with conflict on a personal and social level. Neighbours, who once supported each other, turn on each other. Some, such as Abigail and Thomas Putman, are keenly motivated by their own personal interests. The hysterical social climate provided opportunity for members of the community to pursue repressed jealousy, grudges and desires for revenge. Such malicious motives further heightened the tragic consequences of the social conflict between individuals and the state. The insular nature of the society encouraged puritanical judgement of others and fuelled the victimisation of innocent people.

The reactions of panic and hysteria, a collective phenomenon, brought about the destruction of their unity as a community, which had been their greatest strength in the challenges of settling in a foreign land. The accusations and responses by certain individuals and authorities heightened the tragic conflict in the pursuit of justice and security. Those who refuse to falsely confess and retain their sanity and integrity become victims of the theocratic rule.

As a result of the conflict, the community gains greater social awareness and “the power of theocracy in Massachusetts was broken”. Miller’s allegorical style serves to emphasise the recurring nature of history. Despite the obvious lessons regarding corruption of power and social control, humans have repeatedly engaged in similar conflicts.
**Conflict within the individual**

The individuals in *The Crucible* are challenged in terms of strength and courage by the events that unfold in the village. As a consequence of the “crying-out”, many innocent townspeople were accused of fraternising with the Devil by a group of children and sentenced to jail and execution by the judges. The responses of individuals to manipulation and hysteria, as well as the expectations of moral behaviour, contribute to the extent of the tragedy in Salem. Abigail Williams and Thomas Putman are driven to fuel the conflict by their personal interests. As a consequence, the power of such individuals is destructive and indiscriminately hurtful.

Honourable people, such as Rebecca Nurse, John Proctor and Giles Corey, find themselves at the mercy of an uncompromising authority despite their innocence. They become victims of the larger social conflict as reality is subjectified by the accusers, judges and community majority. When individuals do not defend their rights in the face of injustice and corruption at a state level, hysteria is seen to consume the social fabric and the conflict ultimately enacts permanent change. Rebecca Nurse and John Proctor are martyrs for the legal and moral causes of truth and justice in a period of history marked by the lunacy that engulfed a society.

The battle to overcome fear becomes a battle within the private consciences of individuals. John Proctor is particularly suffering an inner conflict between his sense of honour and integrity and his guilt for committing adultery that itself threatens to contribute further to his tragic demise. Both John and Elizabeth finally choose to remain virtuous in spirit. However, John has been tormented and challenged by temptation on his journey through self-doubt. He considers surrendering his resistance as opportunities to escape his tragic fate arise. He is offered the possibility of withdrawing when it is revealed that Elizabeth is pregnant and when he is given a pen with which to sign a false confession. The extent of pain in coming to decisions is evident in both his interactions and behaviour described in the stage directions.

**Conflict in relationships**

The influence of relationships with spouses and neighbours significantly impacts on the outcomes of the tragedy for individuals. John is reminded of the consequences of his actions by friends such as Rebecca Nurse and Giles Corey, who bravely face death rather than succumbing to pressure to surrender their integrity. John, Elizabeth, Rebecca and Corey make difficult, yet noble, choices that demonstrate not only their personal strength, but also the strength of humanity to survive social atrocities.

Family relationships are challenged as husbands and wives are torn apart by the conflict. The young girls, who envy the social and cultural security enjoyed by the wives of the men of Salem, first accuse those they see as their oppressors. However, the text makes evident that individuals may act in ways that cause them long-term remorse. Their personal guilt for past mistakes may impact directly on the way they respond to public conflict.

The conflict between John and Elizabeth Proctor is forced into resolution by the external threat imposed on them by the witch trials. Both scrutinise their personal mistakes and contributions to the distance in their marriage and make peace with themselves and each other. In examining their personal flaws, clear parallels are drawn with the wider social conflict in which doubt and fear provides fuel for the conflict to grow.
Structure

The four acts of Arthur Miller’s play, *The Crucible*, are each set in a distinct and significant interior venue. The play begins in Parris’ home but the action moves to Proctor’s house as his character is revealed in Act Two. Act Three presents the Court Room of the Church and the play concludes in the prison compound in the fourth act. Scene changes within acts are omitted in order to concentrate the focus of the audience on the uninterrupted action within each scene.

Movement dominates dialogue in the openings of Act One and Two. The audience is invited to become familiar with the scene as the characters move without speaking. In *The Crucible*, conflict between the characters is depicted visually and physically, not solely verbally.

There are variations in pace throughout, however each act of the play concludes in tense and climactic scenes that reiterate the main conflicts within Salem, within John and Elizabeth Proctor’s marriage and within them personally. The rise and fall pattern within each act gives the play a certain rhythm.

Miller deems Act One “An Overture” in which he achieves some exposition of events which have contributed to the escalation of the core drama presented in his play. The tension unveiled immediately in the opening of the play is a theatrical device utilised to arouse curiosity. As characters enter in sequence, they each contribute to the complications and mood. Miller makes use of Act One to propound the conflict within the community prior to exploring the impacts and consequences for individual characters and their relationships. The growing hysteria and inherent fear evident in the community of Salem is momentarily contrasted with two ‘quiet’ scenes included for dramatic purpose. It is predominantly through conflicting individuals that Miller is able to depict the tension and stress that characterised the play’s context of Salem in this historical period.

Miller introduces further complications in a different type of tension revealed in the Proctor household in Act Two. The subtext of the conversations reveals more than what is actually verbalised. Miller assists the audience’s understanding of this conflict through his revelation in Act One of the previous relationship between Proctor and Abigail. Mary Warren’s interruption to the Proctors’ troubled conversation brings forth the climactic scene in which Proctor’s scorn at Mary’s apparent influence in the adult court is made evident both verbally and physically. The escalating hysteria in the community is also shown to be invading personal lives of community members. Hale’s visit to the Proctor household reinforces Miller’s theatrical direction to his audience from the general conflict to the plight of specific individuals now embroiled in the hysteria. Hale’s growing disdain with the nature of the witch-hunt is underscored by the timely entrance of Giles Corey and Francis Nurse announcing the arrest of Rebecca Nurse. The crisis intensifies further in Act Two when Cheever and Herrick enter to arrest Elizabeth amid John’s anger.

The hysteria climaxes in Act Three as Judge Hathorne and Judge Danforth are introduced and their characters are revealed. Abigail’s powerful influence over the girls is startlingly evident in court as they all become hysterical and imagine they are victims of a freezing wind. Positions of power are clearly reversed in this act. The consequences of the preceding conflicts strike blatantly in the court session. John Proctor courageously questions the judges’ assessment of their childish behaviour.
Resolutions to the personal and public conflicts that plague the characters are presented in Act Four. Changes in characters, such as Reverend Parris, are evident. John Proctor is caught between the words of Parris, Hathorne and Danforth urging him to sign his integrity away on his false confession and the words of Rebecca Nurse and his wife, Elizabeth. John is positioned in the centre of a battle of moral forces and must make a choice between good and evil. The play ends with Elizabeth’s powerful words: “He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him.”
**Style**

Miller intended *The Crucible* as an allegory for historical eras in which individuals were personally persecuted as a result of social hysteria reactive to ideological beliefs. Though the play is a historical narrative of the witch-hunts in the seventeenth century in Salem, it is based on Miller’s experiences during the McCarthy trials of the 1950s in America. Thus, Miller presents two parallel historical conflicts in *The Crucible*.

Miller’s stage directions contribute to his presentation of characters as they develop. They are designed to ensure the character’s thoughts are revealed to the audience.

Miller creates tension in his play through the sharpness of arguments between characters as well as through the inclusion of silence at times. Conflict is most clearly established through the conversations and escalating arguments that depict the relationships and underscore the thematic relevance of the events.

The characters speak in a natural style appropriate to the cultural and temporal setting. The dialogue is true to the dialect of the people of the late seventeenth century. The pioneer and uneducated status of the characters in *The Crucible* is reflected in the words Miller has chosen for them. They are plain people whose speech is often ungrammatical and vernacular.

Miller incorporates a Biblical tone in the speech of his characters, which clearly is intended to resonate with the fundamentalist or Puritanical religious values which guide much of the drama of the play.

The simplicity of the words of the characters is intended to be naturally accepted by the audience. Nonetheless, Miller achieves significant emotional impact. Ordinary vocabulary is used in a compact style, reminiscent of poetic verse at times, particularly in some of the speeches of John and Elizabeth Proctor. Relevant emotions, such as frustration and bitterness, are compressed into brief phrases and words.

Symbolism, metaphor and imagery are employed by Miller throughout *The Crucible*. The title itself contains the most prominent metaphor: a crucible. A crucible is melting-pot designed to withstand intense heat such as that required to heat metal. The concept of a crucible also carries connotation of witchcraft through similarity to a witch’s cauldron, thus it suitably serves Miller’s purpose well. It creates an image of a mixture of elements burning together intensely and is thus a metaphor for the intense and destructive conflict in seventeenth century Salem and the McCarthy era.

Sunlight is juxtaposed with the blackness of night symbolising truth and evil respectively. Also, connotations of light and fire as a source of purification are evident throughout the play and such symbols are also present in the Bible. Thus, although Miller depicts oppression and persecution, he also suggests that it is through such ‘conflict’ that principles and integrity can be renewed, restored and even purified to facilitate greater humanitarianism in the aftermath.
Some of Miller’s minor characters who do not change and grow are included with symbolic purpose to represent notions intrinsic to conflict. Giles Corey is used by Miller as a dramatic device to provide some rest for the audience from the tense confrontations.
Major and Minor Characters

John and Elizabeth Proctor

John and Elizabeth Proctor both suffer and learn as a result of experiencing conflict on personal, interpersonal and extra-personal levels.

Miller’s voice resonates most clearly through the morality of the protagonist, John Proctor, for whom the audience is encouraged to feel sympathy and admiration. He is outspoken, intolerant of foolishness and not easily intimidated, yet he is persecuted and pays the ultimate price for his honour and integrity. Proctor is both a victim of his own guilt and external threats.

Miller characterises his protagonist initially through the reactions and responses of Mary Warren, Mercy Lewis and Abigail Williams. In his interaction with Mary Warren, John’s physical strength and power is revealed. In comparison, his vastly different relationship with Abigail (even though she is the same age as Mary Warren) is evident in his softer mode of communicating with her.

In conversations with Putnam and Parris, Proctor’s disdain is evident. His regular non-attendance at sermons administered by Reverend Parris and his non-observance of the Sabbath by tending his farm enflame criticism that he is not a devout Christian. Ironically, he is unable to recall the Commandment forbidding adultery. This suspicion and his critical attitude towards the abuse of social status and power fuel the accusations against him.

Proctor’s inner torment is made increasingly evident as the play progresses into Act Three and the stature of his character grows. The stress that is escalating in the community of Salem is paralleled with the growing inner turmoil in Proctor. Proctor’s moral dilemma is the focus of Act Four. The social conflict is encapsulated in the choice Proctor must make between retaining his integrity but accepting death and forfeiting his honour to escape death. His honesty assists him to reign victorious in his struggle to clear his conscience.

Proctor carries the burden of guilt for his adulterous cardinal sin which affects his behaviour in response to the conflict engulfing the village. The marital conflict between John and Elizabeth Proctor challenges them personally in the midst of a social hysteria that also directly impacts on their lives.

As Proctor’s character develops, his relationship with his wife is also affected. In their final interactions, their words are brief but much meaning is sub textual. Through their physical and mental suffering, Elizabeth and John have come to perceive with some clarity the situation and pressure surrounding them.

Despite the poignant words of his wife, Elizabeth, and respected friend, Rebecca Nurse, Proctor is most affected by the pressure placed upon him by Danforth and Parris to physically sign his confession. Proctor’s integrity emerges victorious as he realises he cannot sacrifice “his name” and he faces his death with “his goodness”.

Elizabeth’s pride and religious reputation is injured by her husband’s act of adultery and she is unable to forgive him completely for his adulterous act with Abigail. She comes to acknowledge her personal limitations and flawed attitude.
Abigail Williams

Abigail and the girls involved in the “crying-out” are servants who rebel against the religious authority and social structure. An orphan, Abigail was raised by Reverend Parris and grew up without a mother. At seventeen years of age her frustration churns. Her behaviour is rebellious and spiteful and has significant ramifications on the entire community. She enjoys the celebrity status, as does Mary Warren, who fears Abigail. Abigail verbally introduces the idea of witchcraft, initially because of her fear of condemnation, thus in an attempt to deflect attention from the fact of the girls dancing in the forest.

Abigail’s motivations for making accusations of witchcraft are also influenced by the suppressive lifestyle of a servant girl. She seeks greater happiness and satisfaction and covets Goody Proctor’s role as John’s wife. Abigail is jealous of Elizabeth, who acknowledges that “she (Abigail) thinks to take my place”. She seizes the chance to get revenge and maliciously hurts everyone in letting her opportunism dominate her choices. She takes advantage of her position of power and shrewdly and skilfully manipulates others to satisfy her own interests. She uses Tituba as a scapegoat and does not hesitate to implicate Elizabeth Proctor and even accuses John Proctor to ensure her own survival.

Reverend John Hale

Hale’s speech at the end of Act Two is a culmination of the preceding drama, thus he is used as a theatrical tool, both for the audience and symbolically as an alternative perspective on the events unfolding in Salem. Hale embodies the debate upon which the play is structured. Though Hale seeks facts, his developing thoughts allude to the menacing nature of the witch-hunt. Hale instrumentally reveals the respected reputation of Rebecca Nurse, which sets up his difficult predicament. He is faced with an inner crisis which affects his public behaviour. He takes responsibility for his contribution to the hysteria and attempts to save John Proctor from the noose, resorting to moral compromise.

Rebecca Nurse

Rebecca Nurse functions in the play as a symbol of innocent, unwavering goodness who is nonetheless persecuted. Her influence on other characters and on the audience’s perception of the power struggle is significant. She essentially embodies positive Christian values. Reverend Hale acknowledges her renowned reputation as a virtuous Christian, yet she is found guilty and hanged.

Deputy-Governor Danforth and Judge Hathorne

Hathorne and Danforth represent the larger panel of judges who presided over the actual Salem witch trials. Symbolically, they represent the abuse of power by authorities and the tyrannical type of power a theocracy can yield. As judges presiding over the Salem witch trials, they command control as both the moral and legal authorities of the state. They afforded no middle ground in their examinations and verdicts and little opportunity to the accused, such as Rebecca Nurse and John Proctor, to negotiate their innocence in court. Individuals who publicly voiced their scepticism were held in contempt of court. Hathorne and Danforth demonstrate the merciless outcomes of conflict between the individual and authorities of the state.
Important Quotations and Passages

- Consider what Miller’s notes reveal about the social context of the conflict on page 15.

“They believed, in short, that they held in their steady hands the candle that would light the world. We have inherited this belief, and it has helped and hurt us. It helped them with the discipline it gave them. They were a dedicated folk, by and large, and they had to be to survive the life they had chosen or been born into in this country.”

- Consider the initial exchange between John Proctor and Abigail that reveals their conflict on page 28.

ABIGAIL: Gah! I’d almost forgotten how strong you are, John Proctor!
PROCTOR: [looking at ABIGAIL now, the faintest suggestion of a knowing smile on his face]: What’s this mischief here?
ABIGAIL: [with a nervous laugh]: Oh, she’s only gone silly somehow.
PROCTOR: The road past my house is a pilgrimage to Salem all morning. The town’s mumbling witchcraft.
ABIGAIL: Oh, posh! [Winningly she comes a little closer, with a confidential wicked air] We were dancin’ in the woods last night, and my uncle leaped in on us. She took fright, is all.
PROCTOR: [his smile widening]: Ah, you’re wicked yet, aren’t y’!
[A trill of expectant laughter escapes her, and she dares come closer, feverishly looking into his eyes.]
ABIGAIL: Give me a word, John. A soft word. [Her concentrated desire destroys his smile.]
PROCTOR: No, no, Abby. That’s done with.
ABIGAIL [tauntingly]: You come five mile to see a silly girl fly? I know you better.
PROCTOR [setting her firmly out of his path]: I come to see what mischief your uncle’s brewin’ now. [With final emphasis] Put it out of mind, Abby.

- Consider what Miller reveals about John Proctor in the exchange with Putnam and Parris on page 35.

PARRIS [now he’s out with it]: There is a party in this church. I am not blind; there is a faction and a party.
PROCTOR: Against you?
PUTNAM: Against him and all authority!
PROCTOR: Why, then I must find it and join it.
- Consider the exchange between John Proctor and his wife, Elizabeth, on page 55.

PROCTOR: Spare me! You forget nothin’ and forgive nothin’. Learn charity, woman. I have gone tiptoe in this house all seven month since she is gone. I have not moved from there to there without I think to please you, and still an everlasting funeral marches round your heart. I cannot speak but I am doubted, every moment judged for lies, as though I come into a court when I come into this house!

ELIZABETH: John, you are not open with me. You saw her with a crowd, you said. Now you –

PROCTOR: I’ll plead my honesty no more, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: [now she would justify herself]: John, I am only -

PROCTOR: No more! I should have roared you down when you first told me your suspicion. But I wilted, and, like a Christian, I confessed. Confessed! Some dream I had must have mistaken you for God that day. But you’re not, you’re not, and let you remember it! Let you look sometimes for the goodness in me, and judge me not.

ELIZABETH: I do not judge you. The magistrate sits in your heart that judges you. I never thought you but a good man, John – [with a smile] – only somewhat bewildered.

- Consider John Proctor’s view of the conflict in the village on page 72.

PROCTOR: If she is innocent! Why do you never wonder if Parris be innocent, or Abigail? Is the accuser always holy now? Were they born this morning as clean as God’s fingers? I’ll tell you what’s walking Salem – vengeance is walking Salem. We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law! This warrant’s vengeance! I’ll not give my wife to vengeance!

- Consider the behaviour of the accusers and judges in court on pages 102 and 103.

[MARY WARREN, utterly confounded, and becoming overwhelmed by ABIGAIL’s – and the girls’ – utter conviction, starts to whimper, hands half raised, powerless, and all the girls begin whimpering exactly as she does.]

DANFORTH: A little while ago you were afflicted. Now it seems you afflict others; where did you find this power?

MARY WARREN [staring at ABIGAIL]: I – have no power.

GIRLS: I have no power.

PROCTOR: They’re gulling you, Mister!

DANFORTH: Why did you turn about this past two weeks? You have seen the Devil, have you not?

HALE [indicating ABIGAIL and the girls]: You cannot believe them!

- Consider Hale’s view of the conflict in the village on page 114.

HALE: Excellency, there are orphans wandering from house to house; abandoned cattle bellow on the highroads, the stink of rotting crops hangs everywhere, and no man knows when the harlots’ cry will end his life – and you wonder yet if rebellion’s spoke? Better you should marvel how they do not burn your province!
• Consider Hale’s advice to Elizabeth on page 115.

HALE: [continuing to ELIZABETH]: Let you not mistake your duty as I mistook my own. I came into this village like a bridegroom to his beloved, bearing gifts of high religion; the very crowns of holy law I brought, and what I touched with my bright confidence, it died; and where I turned the eye of my great faith, blood flowed up. Beware, Goody Proctor – cleave to no faith when faith brings blood. It is mistaken law that leads you to sacrifice. Life, woman, life is God’s most precious gift; no principle, however glorious, may justify the taking of it. I beg you, woman, prevail upon your husband to confess. Let him give his lie. Quail not before God’s judgement in this, for it may well be God damns a liar less than he that throws his life away for pride. Will you plead with him? I cannot think he will listen to another.

• Consider Proctor’s integrity and courage on page 124.

DANFORTH: Then explain to me, Mr Proctor, why you will not let -

PROCTOR [with a cry of his soul]: Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!
TEXT 4: THE QUIET AMERICAN

The Quiet American is a novel that strikes a chord with Australian readers via its setting in Vietnam, a short time before Australia became involved in yet another of the armed struggles that predominated in South East Asia for much of the twentieth century. Many students may have older relatives who were personally involved in the latter stages of this conflict. The text is also of interest to students of history and politics due to references to the dying stages of French colonialism in the region and the emergence of the United States in a role that has been described by some as being neo-colonialist.

The novel was first published in 1955 and in some ways it can be seen as being prophetic, foretelling the potential dangers for the United States and their allies when getting involved in the Vietnamese conflict, which started as a war of independence and then became a civil war. Despite the early warning signs that this was not a wise move history shows that the Americans went ahead with their plans. It was only after massive loss of life and widespread destruction that would take decades to recover from that the United States was eventually forced to try and withdraw into ‘peace with honour’. Only then were the Vietnamese able to create their own political system in a reunified country. Given the current situation in Iraq, many commentators have likened what happened in Vietnam a few decades earlier to the current situation there. A moot point to consider might be: how many of history’s lessons have been learned?

Themes

Conflict caused by War

In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, the map of the world showed that most of Africa, Asia and South America were colonies of the major European powers of the time. These included Great Britain, Belgium, Italy, France, Spain, Holland, Portugal and Germany. Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos were part of the French empire. France ruled this area, known as Indochina, for many years, and Vietnam itself was considered to have three major regions: Cochin in the south, Annam in the central and Tonkin in the north. European countries colonised these parts of the world so that they could exploit the natural resources of the colonies and find a source of cheap raw materials for their own industries. French control of the colonies was maintained through military might, and the local people had little say in the way that the country was ruled or how its resources were put to use.

Throughout its history there have been numerous wars and shifts in political power and dominance in what is now known as Vietnam. As neighbours with other countries that are now known as China, Cambodia and Laos, there have been many conflicts between the varying ethnic groups and the empires that existed in this region have waxed and waned. At different stages in its history the northern part of Vietnam was under Chinese rule while at other times parts of the south were under the control of the Khmer empire and the boundaries that exist between the modern day countries are only recent developments, reflecting current international frontiers. For many of the ethnic groups that exist in the remoter regions of Vietnam, the current borders mean little, as the people are influenced more by tribal rather than political borderlines. When the modern day Vietnamese speak of the armed conflicts in the twentieth century, they talk of the ‘war of independence’ against the French, while what people in the
west call ‘the Vietnam War’ is known as ‘the American War’. At the time that the text is set the ‘war of independence’ is reaching its final stages, but the country is about to be embroiled in a new conflict that would last until 1975.

The Vietnamese struggle for independence from the French forms the backdrop for the text and there are constant reminders of the death, destruction and dislocation that are so much a part of warfare throughout the story. There are set battlegrounds in the north where the opposing armies are quite regular and traditional in nature, with groups standing toe to toe and fighting, whereas in the south and other parts of the country, there are more a series of skirmishes and guerilla actions. In this war, the French rule the day. They are armed with artillery, planes and helicopters that give them a military supremacy that the Viet Minh cannot match. At night it is a different story. The military hardware that is so effective by day cannot be utilised and this makes it possible for guerilla groups to come out of the darkness, attack targets, and then melt back into the night. They have the added advantage of knowing the landscape intimately and they are not encumbered by heavy equipment and can therefore move swiftly and silently, making detection and pursuit very difficult.

The Vietnamese people have to try to live their lives as best they can while the struggle goes on around them. If they live in the countryside, they may have some safety away from the areas where the armies are fighting. However, they are not totally immune, as the destruction of the sampan shows: “Down we went again, away from the gnarled and fissured forest towards the river, flattening out over the neglected rice fields, aimed like a bullet at one small sampan on the yellow steam. The cannon gave a single burst of tracer and the sampan blew apart in a shower of sparks.” In the major cities such as Saigon where there is a greater concentration of French people, the war is brought closer to them with incidents such as the bicycle bombs. Frequent mention is also made of the mesh placed on buildings to protect the citizens from grenade attacks. People like Pyle have a privileged position because they can sit back and look at the situation from a detached political and philosophical point of view, having no connections to the people whose lives are being affected by the war. They have the luxury of thinking of the civilians as pawns or objects that can be used at will to further political agendas. It’s all very well to talk about domino effects and third forces in the abstract, but when it comes to the harsher realities it’s not so easy. Witness Pyle’s response after the bombing: “Pyle said, ‘It’s awful.’ He looked at the wet on his shoes and said in a sick voice, ‘What’s that?’ ‘Blood,’ I said. ‘Haven’t you seen it before?’ … He was seeing a real war for the first time: he had punted down into Phat Diem in a kind of schoolboy dream, and anyway in his eyes soldiers didn’t count.” However, he’s back to his old form again at the later meeting with Fowler when he dismisses the deaths of the civilians by saying “They were only war casualties … It was a pity, but you can’t always hit your target. Anyway they died in the right cause.”

_The Quiet American_ also shows the arbitrary nature of war, where random deaths are a fact of life, and people’s lives can be ended or changed forever if they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, like the unfortunate people in the sampan and those in the square. As Fowler accurately comments “A two hundred pound bomb does not discriminate.”
Encountering conflict

Conflict caused by Politics

In the melting pot of post World War Two Indochina, political ideologies compete. The French colonial influence is on the wane. France has ruled the region for a considerable period of time driven by its own political and economic interests, which have dictated strategy and policy, but their days of power are numbered. The key question is: which ideology will take over after the French leave?

The Viet Minh see themselves as the natural choice. Led by the very popular Ho Chi Minh, they have the support of many of the peasant population, whose lives have been dominated by the wealthy bourgeoisie for centuries, condemning them to meagre, subsistence existences. With the French gone, there is a chance to restructure society so that the wealth of the country is more evenly distributed. They are not the only Vietnamese contender for power, as there are many other splinter groups, each with their own political agendas, and some have private armies to back them up.

The American presence is another complicating factor. They, like most others, can see that France is on the way out. The U.S. wants to exert its influence so that whichever group gains power will be sympathetic to them. At this stage the United States is not prepared to become directly involved, so it resorts to covert means to achieve its political ends through agents of the OSS, the forerunner of the CIA. In this way it can try to shape what is happening in the country without dirtying its hands, and America can also deny any involvement or interference with the government. The bottom line is to ensure that communism does not take over the country, as this form of government is anathema to them, and it is not considered to be suitable for Vietnam or indeed the world. The development of the idea of a ‘third force’ is a fallback position for the U.S. and the way that the bombing took place shows that this idea is fraught with risk, not only for Americans, but for the Vietnamese people as well. By supplying the third force with arms and military assistance it would make Vietnam feel obligated to the Americans, and dependent on them for future aid, until they had established and entrenched themselves in power. This would have put the United States in a very strong position to build and maintain their influence.

In the tumultuous state that exists in Vietnam, several very different groups have their own ideas about what direction Vietnam’s social and political future should take and they will go to whatever lengths are necessary to impose these views. The peace settlement after the French withdrew was supposed to lead to elections that would decide a new government for the country. However, this did not happen and the country was divided into two separate countries near the seventeenth parallel of latitude, with North Vietnam being led by a communist government and South Vietnam led by a democratic government. As it became more obvious that the French would be defeated, the United States entered the conflict, as it wanted to stop the spread of world communism. The Americans had a belief in the ‘Domino Theory’ which held that if one country ‘fell’ to communism that this would then lead the neighbouring country to ‘fall’, and so on, until communism had spread throughout the world. Vietnam was where the Americans decided that they would take a stand, and they poured in billions of dollars of ‘military assistance’. This transformed into direct military involvement in the form of combat troops and aircraft to bomb enemy targets.

Hence, Vietnam became a battleground for competing ideologies. At the time of the novel, China had been a communist country for five years and was very happy to assist its southern neighbours in ridding themselves of their ‘colonial oppressors’. Later, the Chinese went on to fight against the Americans, whom they accused of being ‘imperialists’, trying to build a new empire and to spread their influence into
the region. China saw little difference between the French and the Americans whom they regarded as serving their own interests at the expense of the Vietnamese people: the citizens of Vietnam were not allowed to be independent and to decide their own destiny.

**Conflict caused by Love**

The love triangle between Fowler, Phoung and Pyle adds spice to the novel and it can be read on a simple, interpersonal relationship level as well as on a more symbolic level as the characters strongly represent their respective countries.

On the one hand Fowler’s feelings for Phuong can be seen as a mixture of simple lust and the desire to possess an object of considerable beauty, and there is a considerable measure of selfishness in the way that he treats her. At other times, there are signs that his feelings are deeper and nobler and that he does have her interests at heart. As she dances with Pyle he has a vivid flash of what had attracted him to her in the first place: “Suddenly watching her feet, so light and precise and mistress of his shuffle, I was in love again. I could hardly believe that in an hour, two hours, she would be coming back to me in that dingy room with the communal closet and the old women squatting on the landing.”

Fowler recognised that he did not have a lot to offer to Phuong in terms of a long term relationship and that it would only be a matter of time before she left him. Again at the restaurant, he has a chance to step outside himself and to see how others view him: “Suddenly I saw myself as he saw me, a man of middle age, with eyes a little bloodshot, beginning to put on weight, ungraceful in love, less noisy than Granger perhaps but more cynical, less innocent …” It is clear that Miss Hei holds him in little regard and Phuong’s relationship with him is an impediment to a more suitable partnership with someone who can offer her a higher degree of material comfort and provide her with children.

Because of the rivalry between them, it is not possible to rule out jealousy as being a contributing factor in the way that Fowler set Pyle up to die. Fowler resents Pyle, taking Phuong from him, and here was a chance not only to avenge this, but also perhaps to get Phuong back for himself. He sees that he is approaching his final years and if he loses Phuong he will be condemned to live out his last years as an old and lonely man: “Always I was afraid of losing happiness.”

Pyle on the other hand has a very different view of Phuong whom he places on a higher level, exalting her beauty. He has middle class American aspirations of being her protector and benefactor. Pyle is capable of giving her a wealthier and more secure life away from the war and the poverty of Vietnam. He judges that “She can’t be [happy] – not in her situation. She needs children” and he sees himself as being the one who can give her what she needs. His unconsciously arrogant assumption that he can take Phuong away from his rival, if he is given the opportunity, grates on Fowler and adds to the idea that revenge played a part in Pyle’s death.

Pyle does not try to know her in the same way that Fowler had done at first. Fowler has had the opportunity to develop a better understanding of Phuong through a long period of observation, but still asks himself “and did you understand her either?” Pyle consciously tries to mould her into a person who will be suitable in his world, and it is clear that it is she who will have to change.
Fowler summarises the differences between the loves that he and Pyle have for Phuong: “A dollar love, of course, would include marriage and Junior, even though later it might include Reno or the Virgin Islands or wherever they go nowadays for their divorces. A dollar love had good intentions, a clear conscience, and to hell with everybody. But my love had no intentions: it knew the future. All one could do was try to make the future less hard, to break the future gently when it came …”

Phuong is adaptable and compliant in the relationships that she has with the two men. Fowler relates how “She told me that she missed me, which of course was what I wanted to hear: she always told me what I wanted to hear.” With Fowler, she is able to take delight in simple things such as her pretty scarves, her magazines and her films; he is amused and diverted when she enthuses about these in such an innocent and child-like way. By contrast, when she is with Pyle, things are more serious and she even changes her appearance to please him: “I saw that she was doing her hair differently, allowing it to fall black and straight over her shoulders. I remembered that Pyle had criticised the elaborate hairdressing which she thought became the daughter of a mandarin.” Readers are never quite sure about the extent to which Phuong can be said to have love for either man. Her feelings have to be inferred from her actions, and these are filtered through the eyes of Fowler, who, when it comes to Phuong, has admitted that he is not the most reliable and accurate of judges.

The marriage of Thomas and Helen Fowler shows a different view of love. This is love that has gone bad and has done considerable damage to those involved. In her letter, Helen alludes to the hurt that she has suffered, and also the harm that Thomas did to Anne, whom he had left her for. It is difficult to tell whether Helen still sincerely harbours the affection for Fowler that she mentions, or whether she intends to be ironic and to pay back some of the hurt she has endured. The transitory nature of Fowler’s love is the target of another of her barbs in the letter: “You say that it will be the end of life to lose this girl. Once you used exactly that phrase to me – I could show you the letter, I have it still – and I suppose you wrote in the same way to Anne.”

*The Quiet American* raises the question as to what extent there is, or can be, love in marriage. While there was love at the start of the marriage of Thomas and Helen, readers wonder what might have taken place had Pyle taken Phuong back to America, juxtaposed with what might have happened had Fowler married Phuong.

**Conflict caused by Breach of Trust and Betrayal**

When trust is given between people there is an expectation that it will be returned. In the text, both trust and betrayal feature heavily, and sometimes trust is repaid with betrayal. In the relationship between Fowler and Pyle, Pyle tried to act honourably in his quest to win Phuong from Fowler, and he trusts that this will be reciprocated. Hence, when he sees evidence of Fowler’s “European duplicity” about the phoney assurance that his wife “has more or less agreed to divorce me”, he is incensed, hurt and betrayed: “Couldn’t you have won without lying?”

On a broader level, Fowler was sceptical about what Pyle was really up to in Vietnam, but he trusted Pyle to be working for the welfare of the Vietnamese people. When it became clear that Pyle had played a very large part in the bombing in the crowded square, which was little more than state-sponsored terrorism, Fowler felt betrayed and he repaid this by committing the ultimate betrayal, setting Pyle up for death at the hands of the Viet Minh. Still, on the subject of the bombing, Pyle had placed trust in General The and
he tries to find excuses so that he doesn’t have to believe that he has been betrayed: “The wouldn’t have done this. I’m sure he wouldn’t. Somebody deceived him. The Communists …” Fowler also places some trust in the information provided by Mister Heng but he doesn’t act solely on this and waits for Pyle to implicate himself even deeper in the culpability for the bombing.

The text shows how self interest rather than altruism is more often the potent motivating force in human relationships. Linked to the theme of trust is the nature of truth. It is clear how frequently appearances can be highly deceptive as, on the surface, Pyle seems to be a sincere, innocent, honourable and amiable person, yet he is one of the key engineers of the horrendous bombing, and his actions are made even more shocking when he does not show the slightest remorse for the deaths of the innocent victims. The text also shows that decisions taken on the basis of limited information or understanding often end up in disaster.

When it comes to matters of trust between people, Fowler says it all when he observes, “Oh yes, people always, everywhere, loved their enemies. It was their friends they preserved for pain and vacuity.”
Encountering conflict

Structure

While this text can be broadly classified as a novel, it has a number of other generic threads running through it. It has elements of a moral and philosophical debate about the nature of war and truth. It can also be seen to have romantic and historical threads intertwined.

This novel is worthy of study in its exploration of the complex clash between cultures and political ideologies, interspersed with fraught and labyrinthine interpersonal relationships. The murder investigation adds to the potent mixture. The setting of the novel in an exotic, tropical hothouse widens students’ geographical, historical and cultural knowledge, providing an appropriate background for the steamy and powerful forces that are at work in the lives of the Vietnamese people and the foreign interlopers, as well as in the global politics of the era.

The flow of the novel is, to some extent, bound to a ‘whodunit’ structure. It is a post-modern novel. Readers know from the outset that Pyle is dead, and the focus is on the successive filling in of the background information to his death and to identify who was responsible. The linking of the three central characters – Fowler, Pyle and Phuong, forms a rich tapestry of interwoven storylines that answer the questions about the murder. Along the way we are shown a range of possible motives and also how Pyle almost invites his own death for the clumsy way in which he mismanaged his role in Vietnam.

The text does not flow as a conventional linear narrative, but rather jumps forwards and backwards in time, tantalising the reader with tidbits from the present and the past. By the end, the more important plot lines reach varying degrees of resolution and the people involved in the murder have been identified. While it seems that Fowler and Phuong have a future together, readers must wonder if the relationship can survive, given the damage that his dishonesty caused, combined with the hostility of her sister and Fowler’s own poor track record at being able to sustain relationships with women.

Style

The novel is a first person narrative seen through the eyes of Thomas Fowler and he provides readers with his own perspective on the events and people. It is important to look at the values that are explored in his descriptions. His extensive experience in troubled situations both as a reporter and in his troubled personal life, colour the way that he recounts what he sees – he has been rejected before and one of his ‘defence strategies’ is to try to remain detached and uninvolved. He is also given to searching within himself to provide meaning and context for what is happening around him.

It is also worth noting that the relationships between the three main characters also operate on a symbolic level. Fowler can be seen to symbolise the ‘old world’, a colonial remnant. He and his kind have been in similar situations in the past and to some degree they have learned from the mistakes made. Pyle represents the role of the United States in exporting a ‘new world order’ and trying to spread his country’s political ideology and influence to prevent the spread of world communism. Phuong symbolises Asia generally, and Indochina in particular and, like her country, is open to offers from others, playing one off against the other to seek the best advantage. It is no accident that her name can be translated as ‘Phoenix’, the legendary creature from mythology that rises from the ashes.
Major Characters

Thomas Fowler

Thomas Fowler is a world-weary journalist who has seen it all. He is depicted as being a cynical journeyman who takes pains to be a “reporter” rather than a “correspondent” and makes much of his detachment from what is happening around him. Having had wide experience of others in times of war and peace, women he’s dallied with, and people in general, he approaches his relationships in a fairly self-centred way. Fowler frequently doesn’t fully think through the consequences of his actions or how they may affect others, as seen in the indecorous scene at Pyle’s office at the American Legation. His experiences in both his personal and professional life have led him to develop a world view that sees his fellow men as untrustworthy and capable of very foolish acts. Fowler’s comfortable sinecure is threatened when his office wants to recall him, and a situation develops in which he might lose Phoung to Pyle. When he first met Phoung, Fowler recalls “that first tormenting year when I had tried so passionately to understand her, when I had begged her to tell me what she thought”, but he then starts to take her for granted and concludes: “One never knows another human being.” Through the series of crises that happen to him, Fowler starts to recognise the depth of his feelings for Phoung and what it would mean not to have a future that included her. His outrage at what Pyle did with the explosives shakes him from his detachment and he is persuaded by Mister Heng that: “Sooner or later … one has to take sides. If one is to remain human.” Fowler is self-deprecating and lacks self-esteem, and in some ways is quite reckless in the way that he tackles his job, deliberately placing himself in dangerous situations.

Alden Pyle

Alden Pyle is in many ways the opposite of Fowler. He is young, compared to Fowler’s rapidly approaching middle age. He is enthusiastic about his work, whereas Fowler sees his work as a convenience that allows him a lifestyle that he has come to enjoy. Pyle is passionate about what he believes to be just causes and is keen to get involved, while Fowler is happy to sit back and to watch. Where Fowler, with his broad experience, sees the subtleties and complexities of politics and human relationships, Pyle sees the world in very black and white terms and seems incapable of dealing with the intricacies of political life in an alien land. He seems to be naïve and transparent, and yet he has the ‘trade craft’ to keep his ‘cover’ intact until quite late in the chain of events. Pyle is doomed to failure in trying to apply a simplistic solution to a very complex problem in Vietnam. His blundering approach to his work sees him involved in matters that he is ill equipped to deal with and, as a result, many people’s lives are destroyed while he adds to the problems rather than raising possible solutions.

Pyle develops a love for Phoung, but never really understands her in the same way that Fowler does, which leads readers to question whether he loves Phoung as a person or as the ideal she represents. He wants to change her so that she will be acceptable in his world, and Phoung is a willing participant in this process. There can be little doubt of Pyle’s sincerity, even though his ideas and actions are misguided. He is honourable to a fault in his personal relationships, as can be seen in his discussions with Fowler about his love for Phoung. The old saying ‘all’s fair in love and war’ is only partly true of Pyle. His role in the war is ruthless and unscrupulous, but in matters of the heart he is very ‘gentlemanly’ and chivalrous. He represents the role of the United States in exporting a ‘new world order’ and trying to spread his country’s political ideology and influence to prevent the spread of world communism.
Phuong

Phuong is the object of both Fowler and Pyle’s affections, and both find her highly desirable. She exudes an aura of mystery that Fowler in particular wants to lose himself in, while Pyle sees her almost like an ‘exotic flower’ that he wants to take home and show off to his friends and family. The ways in which she is unfathomable to both men adds to her allure and they are equally ardent in their quest to have a permanent relationship with her. Abetted by her sister, she tries to turn the attraction both men have towards her to her advantage, which places her in a position of power, as she can pick or choose between them. When Fowler’s wife refuses to give him a divorce Phoung switches her affections to Pyle and, when he dies, she returns to Fowler. Readers never know with certainty how she feels about the men as she is not likely to come out into the open about it, given her cultural background. Readers have to infer Phoung’s feelings from her actions and words.

Minor Characters

Vigot

Vigot is an old style policeman who has reasonable grounds to suspect that Fowler knows more than he is revealing about the circumstances of Pyle’s death. He painstakingly tracks down clues and any leads that he can obtain about the murder, such as the presence of cement between the dog’s toes. There is a strong sense that Vigot is merely ‘going through the motions’ and he states the reason that he is still pursuing the investigation is because “The American Minister keeps bothering us.” Vigot realises that his own country’s involvement in Vietnam is coming to a close and he has become tired of the subterfuge and ever-shifting alliances that stymie his investigations, leading him to observe, “We don’t have the same trouble, thank God, when a Frenchman is killed.” Unfortunately for him, Vigot feels that Fowler is complicit in Pyle’s death, but without proof he has to let matters lie, and he tells him “I don’t suppose I’ll trouble you again.” He does exercise good judgement in knowing when to give up on a hopeless case.

There is another side to Vigot too. Fowler recalls meeting him at some parties and he “had noticed him because he appeared incongruously in love with his wife, who ignored him, a flashy and false blonde.” Readers having this insight might see him as a somewhat pathetic figure, as his personal life seems to be in tune with his professional life – in neither sphere is he particularly effectual.

Granger

Bill Granger’s infrequent appearances are brief but full of paradoxes. At times he has a slapdash approach to his work, relying on information fed by the military authorities for his stories, while at other times he can be forceful and even aggressive in pursuit of a story. We see evidence of this in his interrogation of the French officers at the press conference. He is, however, a ‘soft target’, and there is a contrast between his technique, and Fowler’s more thorough investigative methods, that put him where the action is.

Granger manages to elicit some sympathy from readers when he bares his soul to Fowler about how the bad news concerning his son’s illness is having a negative effect on him. He also shows that he is aware of how others see and feel about him, revealing a sensitivity and capacity for introspection. On the other hand, Granger’s hedonistic lifestyle and the way that he deals with the local people make him a very
unsympathetic character. For many readers he represents all the brashness and naked self-interest that is unappealing about Americans abroad. He becomes the quintessential ‘Ugly American’.

**Mister Heng**

Mister Heng makes a number of important appearances in the text. At the Quai Mytho, it is he who makes Fowler realise that there are different layers to the conflicts. Heng indicates that Fowler needs to be aware of, and educated about, the issues. Heng is an astute judge of character and in Fowler he sees a person who may be useful in furthering his cause. He does not go overboard in providing detailed information about the OSS bicycle bomb conspiracy, but drops enough clues to whet Fowler’s appetite, allowing him to fill in the missing pieces for himself. After the bombs have gone off, Heng reappears to make sure that Fowler has reached the right conclusions about who is behind it all. Their final meeting is after the major bomb blast, and Heng makes sure that he builds on the outrage that Fowler feels about the way that innocent people have been killed to make a political point. He is intent on getting Fowler to jump down from the safety of sitting on the fence and take a stand for what is right.

Heng tries to make Fowler understand what is being done to his country and his people through the interfering actions of foreign powers. While this might be well intentioned from the point of view of the foreigners, from a Vietnamese point of view the actions being taken are unforgivable. Readers are left with a number of questions about Heng. He seems to have a very good information base and knows a great deal about the machinations of the various groups involved in the conflict, but if he knew what was going to happen with the diolacton, why did he do nothing to prevent it? Was it because there were aspects to the bombing that suited his political ends? Or was it because having knowledge was one thing, but having the power to act on the knowledge was beyond the capabilities of his group?

**Helen Fowler**

While she is not directly seen in the text, Helen Fowler has an important presence, as she is controlling Thomas’s life from their home in England. The high handed manner of her initial refusal of a divorce shows her to be a wounded person, who is enjoying a rare moment of power over her husband, who in the past had caused her much grief. She ‘takes the moral high ground’ by her refusal, pointing to many valid reasons why she should not acquiesce, but the underlying subtext shows the hurt that she tries to camouflage with reason and morality. The later agreement is expressed much more simply and directly by her, as would be expected in a telegram, but it leaves readers to ponder her motives.

**Dominguez**

Fowler’s assistant is portrayed as a competent and efficient person who manages to be effective even when suffering from illness. When he is introduced, it is in glowing and affectionate terms: “… his pride was deeply hidden, and reduced to the smallest proportion possible … for any human being … All that you encountered in daily contact with him was gentleness, humility and an absolute love of truth.” His contribution to Fowler’s success in putting together important stories should not be underestimated. Dominguez has quite a servile approach to his relationship with Fowler and even though Fowler admitted, “Now that he was ill I realised how much I owed him” he still can be quite brusque with his employee, as when Dominguez turns up after the fateful meeting with Pyle.
Captain Trouin

The pilot takes Fowler on a dive-bombing raid in contravention of the regulations and shows Fowler a side to the war that he had not observed before. Trouin is a capable pilot who is full of contradictions: within a short space of time he has strafed a sampan and “didn’t even wait to see our victims struggling to survive” and then he tells Fowler “‘We will make a little detour. The sunset is wonderful on the calcaire. You must not miss it,’ he added kindly, like a host who is showing the beauty of his estate.”

Trouin continues to play the host, with a visit to the opium den, and when Fowler questions him about the necessity of shooting up the sampan he replies that “we have orders to shoot up anything in sight” and then tries to minimise the impact of these words by emphasising the risks that they faced from ground fire. He states how much he hates napalm bombing and how he would risk court martial by refusing to do this. Trouin is generally cynical about war, those who send people to war and those who profit by it. He justifies his actions in the country by concluding that “… we are professionals: we have to go on fighting till the politicians tell us to stop.”
Important Quotations and Passages


- Vigot interviewing Fowler after Pyle’s death.

“You sound like a friend of his,” Vigot said, looking past me at Phuong...
“I am a friend,” I said. (Page 17)

“The trouble was,” I said, “he got mixed up.”
“To speak plainly,” Vigot said, “I am not altogether sorry. He was doing a lot of harm.”
“God save us always,” I said, “from the innocent and the good.” (Page 20)

- Pyle cabling his London office with the news story of Pyle’s death.

“It wouldn’t have done to cable the details of his true career, that before he died he had been responsible for at least fifty deaths, for it would have damaged Anglo-American relations, the Minister would have been upset.” (Page 21)

- Puong’s reaction to the news of Pyle’s death.

She put the needle down and sat back on her heels, looking at me. There was no scene, no tears, just thought – the long private thought of somebody who has to alter a whole course of life.
...“Am I the only one who really cared for Pyle?” (Page 22)

- When Fowler first meets Pyle and tries to explain the situation in Vietnam.

“York,” Pyle said, “wrote that what the East needed was a Third Force.” Perhaps I should have seen that fanatic gleam, the quick response to a phrase, the magic sound of figures: Fifth Column, Third Force, Seventh Day. I might have saved all of us a lot of trouble, even Pyle, if I had realised the direction of that indefatigable young brain. (Page 25)

- Fowler defending his actions to himself and to Vigot.

“You can rule me out,” I said. “I’m not involved. Not involved,” I repeated. It had been an article of my creed. The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder, I would not be involved. My fellow journalists called themselves correspondents; I preferred the title of reporter. I wrote what I saw. I took no action. Even an opinion is a kind of action. (Page 28)

- Fowler’s philosophising regarding religion and death.

Death was the only absolute value in my life. Lose life and one would lose nothing again forever. I envied those who could believe in a God and I distrusted them. I felt they were keeping their courage up with a fable of the changeless and the permanent. Death was far more certain than God, and with death there would be no longer the daily possibility of love dying. (Page 44)
• Pyle discusses his feelings and intentions for marrying Phuong with her boyfriend, Fowler.

“She’ll just have to choose between us, Thomas. That’s fair enough.” But was it fair? I felt for the first time the premonitory chill of loneliness. It was all fantastic, and yet... He might be a poor lover, but I was the poor man. He had in his hand the infinite riches of respectability. (Page 58)

• Fowler reflecting on Pyle stealing Phuong’s love from him, as well as other things.

I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused. (Page 60)

• Dominguez reporting on Pyle’s stated political/military solution for Vietnam.

“Then someone asked him some stock question about the chances of the Government here ever beating the Vietminh and he said a Third Force could do it. There was always a Third Force to be found free from Communism and the taint of colonialism – national democracy he called it; you only had to find a leader and keep him safe from the old colonial powers.” (Page 124)

• Fowler’s flippant sarcasm taken literally by Pyle.

“Oh, go away.” I said. “Go to your Third Force and York Harding and the Role of Democracy. Go away and play with plastics.”

Later I had to admit that he had carried out my instructions to the letter. (Page 134)

• Captain Trouin speaking about shooting up anything in sight.

“I’m not fighting a colonial war. Do you think I’d do these things for the planters of Terre Rouge? I’d rather be court-martialled. We are fighting all of your wars, but you leave us the guilt.” (Page 151)

“It’s not a matter of reason or justice. We all get involved in a moment of emotion and then we cannot get out. War and Love – they have always been compared.” (Page 152)

• Pyle’s reaction to the reality of war.

Pyle said, “It’s awful.” He looked at the wet on his shoes and said in a sick voice, “What’s that?”

“Blood,” I said. “Haven’t you ever seen it before?”

He said, “I must get them cleaned before I meet the Minister.”

I don’t think he knew what he was saying. He was seeing a real war for the first time: he had punted down into Phat Diem in a kind of schoolboy dream, and anyway in his eyes soldiers didn’t count.

I forced him, with my hand on his shoulder, to look around. I said, “This is the hour when the place is always full of women and children – it’s the shopping hour. Why choose that of all hours?”

He said weakly, “There was to have been a parade.”

... He was impregnably armoured by his good intentions and his ignorance. (Page 162-163)

• Mr Heng thanking Fowler for arranging an opportunity to kill Pyle.

“Sooner or later,” Heng said..., “one has to take sides. If one is to remain human.” (Page 174)
Sample essay prompts/stimulus material

Write an extended piece for a specified purpose and audience, exploring ideas and using detail from at least one set text. Your response may be an expository, persuasive or imaginative piece of writing. Your response must be based on the ideas in the prompt.

- “In suffering we are all equal.” – Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop

- ‘The ways in which individuals respond to conflict are determined by their personal experiences and expectations.’

- ‘The consequences of conflict are as significant as its causes.’

- ‘Conflict triggers social progress.’

- “The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.” – Albert Einstein

- ‘Violence does not resolve conflict; it only creates more conflict.’

- ‘Fear is a strong catalyst for conflict.’

- ‘Conflicts challenge individuals to discover their strengths and personal flaws.’

- ‘Compromise is often needed to resolve conflict.’

- ‘The effects of conflict on individuals and their relationships are not always destructive.’
Supplementary texts and References

Print texts

Searching for the Secret River – Kate Grenville
The Fight - Martin Flanagan and Tom Uren
The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop – E.E.Dunlop
Omagh Voices of Loss - Graham Spencer
The Kite Runner – Khaled Housseini
Animal Farm – George Orwell
I’m Not Scared – Niccolo Ammaniti
Border Crossing – Pat Barker

Websites

Amnesty International - http://www.amnesty.org
Kate Grenville’s website - http://www.users.bigpond.com/kgrenville
Omagh Support and Self Help Group – http://www.omaghbomb.co.uk
Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) – http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk

Films

The Crucible (1996) – Nicholas Hytner (director)
The Beach (2000) – Danny Boyle (director)
Lord of the Flies (1990) – Harry Hook (director)
Bloody Sunday (2002) – Paul Greengrass (director)
In the Name of the Father (1993) – Jim Sheridan (director)

Songs/Lyrics

Bicentennial Man – Paul Kelly
Sunday Bloody Sunday, Peace on Earth – U2
Paper Sun – Def Leppard
Broken Things – Julie Miller

Poetry

An Omagh Remembrance – John Friel
Homecoming – Bruce Dawe
Encountering conflict

Print Media Texts (daily tabloids and broadsheets)

The Age, The Australian, Herald-Sun
- reports, editorials, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, photographs, political cartoons

Television programs (news and current affairs programs)

ABC, SBS, Channel 7, 9, 10 News Broadcasts
Four Corners, A Current Affair, Today Tonight

Who Bombed Omagh? Four Corners, March 26, 2001

Situation Comedies

Seinfeld
Neighbours
The Simpsons

Picture Books

Rose Blanche – Roberto Innocenti
War Game - Michael Forman
Anne Frank - Josephine Pool and Angela Barrett
The House of Narcissus - Margaret Wild and Wayne Harris
The Arrival – Shaun Tan

Reviews

Day of Death, The Observer, Sunday May 9, 2004 - Peter Stanford
Bush Ballad, The Observer, Sunday January 22, 2006 – Geraldine Bedell
The Line: A Man’s Experience of the Burma Railway; A Son’s Quest to Understand, The Age, December 17, 2005 – Tony Thompson
Final examination advice

- Use the understanding of the Context that you have developed throughout the year through your study of set texts and supplementary texts.

- Develop your own collection of materials relevant to the Context.

- Gather a range of perspectives on the Context.

- Ensure that all your textual considerations are within the framework of the Context.

- Find potential elements of the set texts that may be used in your writing.

- Always consider the three most important aspects of writing: audience, purpose and form.

- Even though a Statement of Intention is not required or assessed in the final examination, consider framing the assessor’s thoughts with brief notes on your intended audience, purpose and form.

- The three essential writing questions must predominate your thinking:
  - Purpose: What do I want to communicate and why?
  - Audience: For whom is this to be written?
  - Form: In what style/form/genre would it be best to approach this?

- Recognise your personal strengths in writing. Consider the mode of writing that suits you best.

- Ensure you use language appropriate to the purpose and audience.

- It is not advisable to write in poetic form in response to the prompt in the final examination.

- Respond thoughtfully and relevantly to the specific prompt provided for the Context. It is impossible to pre-plan a response to an unseen question.

- Crossing out in the examination is not interpreted as a weakness. In fact, it shows your thinking processes and is seen as a strength. Not even the best writers get it right the first time.

- Good writing demonstrates the capacity to generate your own ideas.
Glossary (Metalanguage)

characterisation
protagonist
antagonist

narration
omniscient narrator
third person narration
first person narration

genre
style
form

narrative structure
plot pattern
exposition
complication
climax
crisis point
turning point
resolution
catalyst
prologue
epilogue
flashback
chronological

director
dialogue
monologue
soliloquy
transcript
camera shots
close-up
framing
costume
soundtrack
lighting
set
setting

juxtaposition
imagery
paradox
irony
sarcasm
tone
register
allegory
fable
symbol
motif
theme

figurative language
simile
metaphor
personification
onomataepia
emotive language
inclusive language

reflection
recount
narrative
prose
speech
essay
documentary

poetic quality

editorial
letter to the editor
opinion piece
feature article
report
political cartoon
eulogy
obituary

editing
dramatic tension

novel
short story
non-fiction
biography
autobiography
expository
persuasive
imaginative