

The clash within life is
beautiful essay
sample



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When I walk through the library at my university, I cannot help but wonder if all the books there have been read. Is it possible that every single volume housed within the library has had its pages perused? Then I begin to wonder what the utility of all this accumulated knowledge is to the university. I have come to the conclusion that, per se, it is useless. If a book is accommodated by the library and is never checked out, it serves no useful purpose whatever. At the risk of sounding redundant, it has absolutely no utility, other than to serve as fuel for a fire that might rip its way across campus. If some undergraduate student checks out a book, and skims through its pages in search of a couple of words to use in his or her paper, the utility increases none. If a graduate student, or even a professor checks out the book, reads the entire thing, and retains the knowledge within, the book's utility increases by a factor of zero. The endeavor of acquiring knowledge in and of itself is totally useless. Only when that knowledge is applied to achieve some end does it have value.

With this in mind, we shall see why Guido, in the film *Life is Beautiful*, is justified in his decision to hide the truth of the Holocaust situation from his son, Joshua, and to do so using comedy in the face of tragedy. To do this, we must first examine the controversy surrounding the film; we can then identify and give examples of the incongruous pentadic elements that cause the controversy. Finally, we will analyze the film's message and ending using these elements to determine whether the incongruity is justified. The Controversy

Life is Beautiful has received negative criticism on the basis that it is wrong to use comedy or comedic characters within such a tragic scene as the Holocaust. It is exactly this incongruity, however, that justifies the optimistic message and uplifting ending of the film. By juxtaposing sheer tragedy and lighthearted comedy, Life is Beautiful conveys its message that one's outlook on life is more important than knowledge of one's situation. We can discover why the film makes this suggestion by applying a pentadic analysis focusing on the incongruities between the scene and the act or the scene and the agent.

Identity of Elements The elements of the pentad that are at the heart of the controversy about the film are the scene and the act or agent. The film can be essentially cut in half, with the first half set in a city in Italy, and the second half set in a concentration camp. The scene of the first half of the film is not what creates the controversy, however. It is only when the story moves to the concentration camp that we see a clash between the scenic and comedic elements of the film. The act and the agent of the film are essentially the same.

The act is the use of comedy and the agent is the comedic character Guido. Guido maintains his comedic nature even when he and his son are taken to the camp. This discord is fuel for critics. However, we will see that it is necessary for the film to create this incongruity in order to achieve strength in its message. **Examples of Elements** To illustrate the incongruity itself, we should look at the game Guido plays with Joshua. When Joshua asks where they are going on the truck, Guido does not tell him they are headed to a concentration camp.

Instead, he tells his son they are going to a sort of vacation spot for his birthday. There, they will engage in a series of games to see who can accumulate points to reach 1000 first. The first team to reach the goal will win a real tank. Since Joshua plays with and adores his toy tank, this game sounds good to him. Every comedic act that occurs within the scene of the camp occurs as a result of Guido's desire to perpetuate this game. After the new arrivals find their bunks, a German officer enters to give instructions for operating within the camp.

He asks for an interpreter, and Guido volunteers so that he can lie about what the German is saying in an effort to hide the truth from Joshua. Guido acts as if the Germans are playing hopscotch and eating too many lollipops while the players are not allowed to eat any snacks. He says that the person with the least amount of points every day will have to wear a sign on his back that says " jackass. " Joshua believes everything he hears until some kids tell him the Jews are cooked in an oven and made into soap and buttons.

Guido laughs off this rumor, and chides Joshua for falling for such nonsense. He tells Joshua to ignore further rumors because the other players are simply trying to get ahead in the game. Later, Joshua sees there are no more Jewish children, as the Germans have murdered them all in the showers. Luckily, Joshua was hiding because he hates bathing. When he tells his father there are no more children, however, Guido takes Joshua outside where some German kids are playing hide-and-seek.

Guido tells Joshua they are all speaking a bunch of gibberish and that he is not to speak at all unless he wants to lose the game. This is in an effort to keep the Germans from realizing Joshua is Italian. The boy eats with the other children, and Guido is one of the waiters. When Joshua says thank you in Italian, the other waiter leaves to get help. When the waiter returns, Guido has gotten every child to speak Italian. The funny situation saves Joshua's life. Analysis of Message/Ending It is the idea of saving his son's life that inspires Guido to withhold the truth from Joshua.

In fact, it is more than simply saving his son's life; that is merely the beginning. Guido wants Joshua to live life with an optimistic attitude. Guido could have told his son they were prisoners and could be killed. Surely Joshua would have followed his father's orders to hide from the Germans, but Guido wanted more than that; he wanted his son to retain his positive, innocent outlook on life. Guido had to have known that Joshua would grow up and understand the Holocaust someday; his intention was not to hide knowledge from his son.

Rather, Guido was teaching his son a lesson he knew Joshua would someday realize: that our outlook on life is more important than knowledge of any particular part of it. As it is with the books in the library, it is with life in general. All the knowledge one could acquire about the Holocaust has no utility unless it serves a useful purpose. That purpose, to Guido, was to enhance one's outlook on life. The first half of the film illustrates Guido's viewpoint; it is light, comedic, and tells a story of love and of family.

This outlook is the important thing to Guido, and his message was that we should strive to preserve it. The tragic part of the film challenges Guido's message. This is where the incongruity exists: Guido attempts to pass this message on to Joshua in face of the most tragic event in world history. What better setting than tragedy for this message to have impact? The incongruity has to exist for Guido's message to attain its full meaning, and thus, the clash of scene and act is justified. This clash is also used to send a message to the audience through Joshua, who narrates the film.

The point of having an uplifting ending is to show that the message in the first half of the film prevails. Since Joshua is narrating, he could have ended the story on a sad note, citing the knowledge he obtained once he got older and learned of the Holocaust tragedy. Had he done that, Guido's message would have died, and the message that knowledge has value in and of itself would have triumphed. The fact that Joshua chooses an uplifting ending, however, shows his retention of Guido's message. The knowledge Joshua obtained about the Holocaust later only served to enhance that message.

If Guido had told Joshua the truth as a child, Joshua would have grown up resentful and would have a negative outlook on life as an adult. Because of Guido, Joshua was able to overcome the tragedy through optimism and comedy. This message can and should be heard by survivors of the real Holocaust. Too often, these people have allowed Hitler to indirectly win his war on the Jews by attacking their subconscious, and thus, their outlook on life. He has won by taking away their innocence and their ability to view life lightheartedly.

Joshua is testament to the notion that this does not have to be the case; we all have the ability to overcome tragedy by maintaining a positive outlook on life throughout it, and by retaining that outlook even when we gain knowledge of the atrocities that plague us. We should use our knowledge of tragedy as a means of enhancing our positive, non-tragic outlook on life, as we use knowledge in the library to enhance a claim we put forth in a paper, or to enhance our enjoyment of the world, for it is the enjoying of life that counts, and not the mere living of it.

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