

Self essay



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Human beings as individuals are very complicated. So many different aspects of life shape them and make them the person they are today. However, what exactly affects individuals in such a way that they can come out with a whole new identity? It is already well known that serving in a war and traumatic experiences can make a man or woman very unstable and depressed, whereas they may have been a very joyous person before. In everyday life you may see situations like this whether is be someone close to you, or a character on the television.

Some changes may be for the better and can greatly increase the person's quality of life and their outlook on the rest of the world. These instances are hard to come by, though the origin of their happiness may not be as exciting or epic as the experiences that cause someone to become spiteful, but they are still a major part of someone's past, and therefore, equally as important. Sometimes, these experiences are unknown to the reader, and can only be discovered through their words and actions. In addition to an unknown past, there are also instances where things are left unsaid, and actions are not taken.

A character is prevented from evolving when they make no effort to fulfill their life. In the instance where a personal experience leaves you as just a mere shadow of yourself, you may not have suddenly changed. Sometimes just a small, single event in your life may grow and become something so out of control, you are left with no way out. In Oscar Wilde's novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray,” a young man, after receiving a beautiful portrait of himself, makes a wish that he could remain youthful and attractive for the rest of his

days. Unfortunately, this simple request comes back to haunt him for the rest of his life.

As the main protagonist becomes very bitter and vain, due to some outside influence from a friend, we see that his actions affect not him, but his portrait. The painting becomes ugly and eventually begins to bear all of the burdens of old age that Dorian would have originally had to experience. “The portrait is the main symbol at work here. It's kind of a living allegory, a visible interpretation of Dorian's soul... the picture represents Dorian's inner self, which becomes uglier with each passing hour and with every crime he commits.” (“The Picture of Dorian Gray: Symbolism.... par. 5) If this item had not fallen into his possession, it can safely be assumed that Dorian would have grown to be a kindly old man. However, even without the dreadful wish that Gray made, there were other influences that caused him to change so drastically. In the beginning of the novel, Young Dorian was introduced to a man named Lord Henry by the artist who gave him the painting, and regrettably, the two became very close acquaintances. Lord Henry leads a very immoral and unsympathetic lifestyle, one which Gray begins to transition into.

Gray does not believe Henry is trying to change him, but is simply feeding him new ideas that awaken a side of him that had been laying dormant. (“The Picture of Dorian Gray o the Influence Themes.”) So this brings forth the question: Do the people that a person surrounds themselves with reflect who they truly are, or who they want to be? Was Lord Henry simply the catalyst in Dorian Gray's downfall? The simple choices you make in your every day life can greatly affect who you are, and who you will become. Although you may

not know it at the time, just the smallest decision can greatly affect your fate.

Next we come to the topic of a character's influence on those around them. A man or woman may already be a mature and stable individual that who is too stubborn to be swayed by those around them. In the play "The Glass Menagerie," the author Tennessee Williams explores the idea that when you try and force someone to be something that they're not they will surely fight back. In the play, the lives of a mother, Amanda, and her two adult children are on display for all to see. Amanda, Tom, and Laura are all abandoned by their father and forced to step up and work so that they may maintain their former lifestyle.

Unfortunately, since this new hard-working life is not a personal choice of any of the three, all rejected their responsibilities in one way or another. Amanda had a leisurely life up until she suddenly had to fend for herself and two children, and quite frankly did not adapt as well as she could have. In all ways possible, she denies her children's flaws and their wants, and pushes them to work and be productive members of society while ignoring all of their unique qualities that make them human. (Beattie 11).

Amanda's two children resemble outcasts from society: Laura is born with a disability that requires her to wear a brace on one leg, which she believes to be very noticeable. "[Laura]... has magnified this limp until it has affected her entire personality... her oversensitive nature make her think that everyone notices her limp; it becomes for her a huge stumbling block to normal living. " (The Glass Menagerie Character Analysis Laura... 2). She

chooses to hide from reality behind her menagerie of beautiful glass animals that are almost as delicate as her.

Her severe bashfulness prevents her from getting a proper job and having relationships with others beyond her own family. Now Tom believes himself to be a dreamer and an artist who is above the menial work that his factory job provides. He does not completely see the point in slaving away at this job when instead he could be traveling the world and live his own life, just as his father before him had. Instead of leaving her children to their own devices and taking it upon herself to be the main care taker of the family, Amanda pushes her children to their wits end.

She often pesters Tom about going out too frequently, reading certain novels, and about his drinking habits. Essentially, by trying to force Tom to not follow in his father's footsteps, she drives him to walk out on her and Laura. An argument could be made that even without Amanda's constant nagging, Tom would have left anyways because it was already in his nature to do so. However, if circumstances had been different, would he have followed the same path? The series of events that started with the abandonment of their father to the pressure put on him by his mother all caused him to long for a different life.

Not all life-changing experiences occur in an adventurous and extravagant way, but they tend to be just as meaningful. A man whose opinions of individuals that are different from himself and his wife have been distorted by the media and the close-mindedness of society. In the past, those with disabilities of any kind were treated as lesser beings and misunderstood.

Often, they would be placed in a mental institution or a home for the elderly because their family feared anything outside their comfort zone.

In the short story "Cathedral" by Raymond Carver, a man who narrates the story tells the reader about his first-hand experience with his wife's old boss, Robert, who happens to be blind. In the first few paragraphs he describes how he is both afraid and repulsed by the thought of such a man entering his house and the way he views the blind comes from a very distorted resource. His only knowledge of people like Robert comes from movies and television shows where the blind are only thrown in for comedic values. "Throughout he narrative, we get a sense of disdain for the man who has closed himself off to new experiences" (Enstrom 1). Eventually, when Robert does come to visit the narrator's wife, you see the man at least make an attempt to be welcoming to her old friend, but there is still doubt in his heart. As the night continues, he sees how Robert functions in every day life and does not struggle as greatly as one would expect. As they settle down in the living room to watch tv and smoke, a television programme about cathedrals comes on and when Robert asks the narrator to describe one to him, he finds that his words are failing him.

He comes to a realization that in his own way, he has been blind to the world around him, solely relying on his eyes to describe the world around him. (Enstrom 2). Although he is no poet, he should at least be able to simply state what a cathedral looks like. In its own way, this is the narrator's own disability. To properly show Robert what a cathedral looks like, he guides his hand with a pen and paper and draws a rough sketch of the building. As they are drawing, the narrator closes his eyes so that he can have the same

experience as the blind man. When they are finished, he finds that he does not wish to open his eyes again.

He feels the room around him like never before, and without actually seeing it, he finds that he is relishing in this new-found awareness. In T. S. Eliot's poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," an old man gives a monologue about his innermost thoughts and fears. While giving a very confident speech about his life, this man is full of doubt and fear when it comes to the opposite sex. He sees women as being some form of mystical creatures who are so beyond his reach that he will never be able to successfully interact with them. Besides his "social and sexual anxieties," (The Love Song...

Themes, 2) Prufrock seems to have an easygoing, but lonely, life. He never really indulges his audience to why he has so much difficulty when it comes to the opposite sex, but one can only assume that his past relationships have shaped him into a sad old man. Prufrock could have always had very high expectations when it came to relationships and went after the women who were out of his league by both looks and social standing. Possibly, if he had set his standard lower, he could have successfully started a relationship, but this information still remains unknown. Low self esteem also seems to be a major cause of his alienation.

He seems to think of himself as no more than a bottom feeder of the ocean, unworthy of love from another human being. (Loy 104). Prufrock's past has not set him up for success as one may have hoped, but his poor attitude towards himself also prevents him from experiencing happiness. Accompanying the subject of things left unsaid, Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall" tackles the subject of intentional isolation. Two neighbors

come together every year to rebuild a stone wall that separates their properties.

When the narrator questions his neighbor as to why they uphold this tradition, he simply replies, “ Good fences make good neighbors. Instead of getting to know each other, they rebuild this wall every year without even questioning the fact that the wall seems to resist it's original purpose. Stones fall out of the wall as the year goes on, even ones that should remain intact as if nature wants the two properties to be joined. (Robert Frost: Poems.... 5). Building this wall would be understandable if the two had their own livestock that they wanted to keep enclosed or even if they hated each other, but neither of these scenarios apply to them and the annual building of the wall almost seems like an ironic bonding experience. Mending Wall, 234).

Each year their lives remain the same because neither of the two neighbors are willing to put the effort into breaking this odd tradition and becoming close acquaintances. They could even become close friends and live happier, more open lives if they just took down the wall. Life does not always directly provide you with experiences that will change who you are, more times than not you must find the opportunity by yourself, and put the effort into becoming a new person. Finally, the story of man who suffered from an unknown illness that severely affected his perception of reality.

Unlike the fictional characters that have been previously mentioned, Vincent Van Gogh was a real man that lived a very depressing life. Van Gogh is a very well-know artist today and is known by his famous painting “ Starry Night. ” While many are familiar with his works, not many know of his struggle. To his fans, he is the epitome of an “ iconic tortured artist” (Vincent

Van Gogh par. 2) and despite his struggles, he strove to capture the world as only he saw it. Like many other artist, painting allowed him to open up and express himself but Van Gogh took his passion to a whole new level.

Throughout his ten year career as an artist, he only sold one of his paintings. His passion for art is revealed by the fact that he never continued to work for money and truly loved what he did. It is believed that Van Gogh suffered from bipolar disorder and was often had delusions. When analyzing his first works of art, especially his self portraits, it is easy to see that his style was much more contained and fit into a more common category. However, after a few years he almost abandons the blending technique altogether and created beautiful pieces that were almost completely abstract.

During periods of time when Van Gogh's mental illness became very prominent, his colour usage became darker and more sullen, almost mirroring his depressed attitude. (Suzuki, Toshiko par. 7) When his works are traced back to certain dates and then analyzed, it is very clear to the viewer as to what mood Van Gogh was in or how his surrounds may have been affecting him. For example, his works that were painted while he was staying in at the Saint-Remy asylum appeared to be " writhing and restless" (" Vincent Van Gogh" Encyclopedia... p. 427) while his works from the Arles countryside give off a joyous atmosphere.

In Van Gogh's early works, the painting conformed to social standards as closely as they could, but after a few years his style became drastically different. His transition from realism to impressionism (Harding, Elizabeth par. 4) was almost parallel to the state of his declining mental health. He really captures the meaning of putting yourself into your work because he

completely disregarded a style that would have made him a very rich man in favour of expressing himself. Sometimes all it takes is just a small push in the right, or even the wrong direction to change somebody.

Your personal experiences, the people around you, society, and even your financial stability all make you the person you are today. At a young age, you are very impressionable and most likely have not figured out exactly who you are and who you want to be. If you happen to be fortunate enough, a good companion will come into your life and steer you in the right direction and make your life truly worth living.

Regrettably, we do not live in a perfect world that is free from bad influences. Your everyday life will always be plagued with obstacles, whether they be drugs and alcohol or formidable opponents, you must simply carry on. However, even the most unadulterated of characters fall into trouble sometimes. From their misfortune, they can either rise up and become a stronger person, or they can fall into a cycle of misfortune and hatred.