

Death mans path essay sample



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The title of this story " Dead Mans Path" foreshadows the series of events about to take place in the story. " Dead Mans Path" does not only refer to the ancestral pathway but also refers to Obi's choice of action. His " path" by not compromising has made him a " Dead Man". Dead in this context is not death, but is referring to his failure. His dream died. The title also foreshadows dark events that would occur in the story. Meaning this story has quite a sad ending to it, not at all a happy story. . 26. • In this story " Dead Mans Path", Chinua Achebe gives the protagonist Michael Obi, a 26 years old secondary school teacher, a great chance of fulfilling his dream. He was appointed by the Mission Authorities to be the headmaster of Ndume Central School in Nigeria. " Mission Authorities" (page 618) are Christian Missionaries who were also the authorities in Africa. They are foreigners who have been sent everywhere around the world to teach Christianity

" A Dead Man's Path" is a short story about a bright and ambitious headmaster named Obi who soon finds that his ignorance over the ancestry of his people can bring about the worst of fates. Tradition is the main theme of this story, as the purpose of the ancient path is discovered and the reactions from Obi and the villagers define the importance of tradition to everyone involved. As events progress, Obi ignores the culture that his own ancestors once followed, soon finding that the passion of a person's beliefs can overcome all obstacles- whether the headmaster wants that or not. It is because of these factors that " A Dead Man's Path" best illustrates the importance of respecting and remembering traditions that may seem odd and old-fashioned, but have lived long in the hearts of the people who follow them.

The story takes place in Africa, and Obi, the main character, had just received news that he would be running a school that had been in dire need of help within the region. Obi is a bright young individual, and both he and his wife act as representatives to a more modern way of viewing the world. Chinua Achebe further shows this fact very early in the story, on the third paragraph: “‘ We shall do our best,’ she (Obi’s wife) replied. ‘ We shall have such beautiful gardens and everything will be just modern and delightful.’” (Achebe 476). They are energetic and spirited, especially Obi, who is ambitious enough to want to see that his new school will be the best that he can make it. It is not long before the new headmaster wants to make sure that the outside of the school is painstakingly beautiful for the inspector who was to come and look over the grounds. It is at that time that Obi comes across a scraggly individual who violates the grounds of the school by walking along a worn path that the school is a part of. Obi discovered from a teacher of the school just what the path was used for.

It amazes me,” said Obi to one of his teachers who had been three years in the school, “ that you people allowed the villagers to make use of this footpath. It is simply incredible.” He shook his head.

“ The path,” the teacher said apologetically, “ appears to be very important to them. Although it is hardly used, it connects the village shrine with their place of burial.” (Achebe 477)

Obi would hear none of this nonsense, demanding that the path be blocked for fear of letting the inspector see random strangers who didn’t belong on school property in the first place. In spite of the teacher’s warnings of a

possible uprising, Obi blocked the trail with large logs and whatever else he could find so that no one could go through that path again. The villagers refused to let the headmaster keep them from the path, sending forth a priest to spark some sense into Obi. The priest voiced the importance of that path to not only the villagers who used it, but the dead as well who walked among it. "...Our dead relatives depart by it and our ancestors visit us by it. But most important, it is the path of children coming in to be born..."

(Achebe 477)

Obi only scoffed at the priest's words, explaining that "Dead men don't walk," disregarding his own ancestry for modern beliefs. The path was left blocked. Two days later however, a woman died within the village while trying to give birth to a child. The tribe took this as a literal sign that misfortune was coming to them because the path was closed. They became restless, for there was no way for the woman to rest in peace with the path blocked. Nor could her child have entered the world and walked the path to their mother. Seemingly overnight, the villagers tore down everything that covered the path, taking down the bushes, flowers, and even a few school buildings with them, and the next day the inspector saw nothing but a wreck, and a Headmaster who had thought only of himself and the modern methods he had stood for.

In regards to story elements used throughout the piece, it's easy to see that the narrator, though he does not actually take part in the story, sides with the villagers and their predicament from the tone he used in describing the pompous headmaster and his stern refusal to comply with the priest's request. Chinua Achebe writes, "Mr. Obi listened with a satisfied smile on his

face. ' The whole purpose of our school,' he said finally, ' is to eradicate just such beliefs as that. Dead men do not require footpaths. The whole idea is just fantastic. Our duty is to teach your children to laugh at such ideas.'"(478). There were two main characters throughout the story that we read the most about: Obi, who can be considered as either a protagonist or antagonist given the side you join when reading the story - And the village priest who can be considered a parallel character to the headmaster's intentions. The key concept of the entire story however, was the path itself: A road to and from the grave for the dearly departed. That was the entire focus of the story and tied the characters together as they formed opinions and, in the village's case, rebelled against Obi's authority.

The specific issue raised within this story regarded the customs of the villagers themselves and just how important it meant to them. It brings up controversy over destroying and ignoring anything that was and still is considered important to the traditions of the people, no matter how old those traditions are. No one has the right or the ability to deny their heritage, or to accept modern beliefs and systems to replace those that had existed for thousands of years. No matter how unreasonable superstitions may seem- to those that believe it, they are as real as the science and technology that our era relies on. Obi was wrong in his way of thinking, that he could simply push the villagers away from a path that was the equivalent to having a funeral in the here and now. There are several traditions when it comes to death, for it is one of the most mysterious events to ever happen to a person.

When a person dies, they go on to a world that no living person has ever seen before. Because of that lack of knowing just what happens to those who have passed, people use their imaginations for what occurs, so that pure faith can support those still living. The Mexican people have a holiday dedicated to having picnics in the churchyard and eating candied skulls as they celebrate and remember their loved ones. Called Dia de los Muertos, Mexicans spend three days having fun and enjoying themselves as they cherish those who have died with happiness and cheer. Here in the United States, it's a ceremony to bring fresh flowers to the grave of those who passed every birthday or sometimes every time you pass that graveyard. The core of a person's belief system belongs to believing in things that cannot and can never be proven. Death traditions are akin to this.

On that day of days, when all that Obi had striven for had ended up a wreck because of the people he had refused to listen to, Obi, or at least the reader, might learn and understand that modern technology can prove anything. It can prove that we cannot literally fly. It can prove how the earth was made and how we evolved. Yet not everyone believes science or technology. As in the story, the villagers were so superstitious about the blocking of the path, that they attacked the school and everything that blocked the path: " The beautiful hedges were torn up not just near the path but right round the school...flowers trampled...one of the school buildings torn down..." (Achebe 478). Science has theories, not facts, and though we live in the 20th century, no one can know about what will happen to them when they pass. We have religion to base our customs on, for it makes the person able to rely on something when all they see is a depthless hole.

What happens when we die? Many cultures can answer that differently. The Hindus believe that there is a hierarchy of sorts, and that people are constantly reincarnated until they reach true Heaven. Certain Native American tribes believed that their ancestors were the stars themselves, a new one to be added to that dark blanket of sky whenever someone passed away. We have no knowledge of the unknown but the beliefs that our ancestors held before us, which is why traditions, customs, all of those 'old' beliefs can and will be important.

According to Achebe's "Dead Man's Path", modern society should never destroy the basis of a person's beliefs. That is what Obi had done, with his smart response to the village priest, "...Our duty is to teach your children to laugh at such ideas" (Achebe 478). It would be like saying to a Christian that there is no god, that praying is nonsense and the bible is just a story someone decided to create on an exceptionally boring day.

The importance of a person's culture goes beyond just a person, connecting a society of believers to work towards a common purpose and a common goal. A German philosopher named Friedrich Nietzsche stated that he wanted his readers to open up and accept nature as it is in all its manifold appearances. In order to be able to interpret nature it is mandatory to imagine. (Wikipedia paragraph 14). In Achebe's story, it was to free the path so that those who died could rest and peace and the tradition of those villagers continue on, longer than Obi will ever live. Remembering and cherishing tradition is a key point of "Dead Man's Path", in which tradition and the beliefs of a group of people would always conquer against those who wish to thwart them.