

Clash of cultures coursework essay sample

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Culture is the term used to describe the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterises an institution, organisation or group. In the stories the idea of culture is thoroughly underlined and made clear to the reader. The reader is given two different types of culture that share opposite views and ideas, and when placed together it creates a clash of cultures. Culture clash is the term used to describe the misunderstandings, and disagreements between different cultures. Culture is learned, whereas the clash is the unlearning and relearning of new cultures. It is a common theme expressed throughout many of these stories, and each has their own way of putting forward the author's ideas on the clash of cultures and how difficult it is for two very different cultures to put aside their differences and see things in the same light.

“ The Young Couple” is a short story by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, who herself has a strong sense of Indian culture, having lived there herself for a period of time, which is heavily reflected in the story as she expresses the culture of a typical Indian family. The book is set in the early 1960s, which was a time when the two different cultures between an English girl and Indian family would have been extremely diverse, as the two have experienced different upbringings as well as a different set of values. These include the way they interact with people in their society, the way they speak as well as the things they expect from each other and also family values. The differences between the values of which both cultures share is emphasized a lot throughout the story.

For instance in India, families are expected to do most things with each other so that the pleasurable experience can be shared amongst them: “ Naraian's

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mother, sisters, sisters-in-law, always eager to go out shopping in a car, frequently urged her to join them. But she had enjoyed herself more on her own". The fact Cathy has different ideas and does not see along the same lines as her in-laws shows that the two different cultures have different values. It is also a good example of how two different cultures clash, and come across as a constant struggle, as Cathy, an English born woman who has moved to India, is forced to enter an alien world in which she cannot escape from.

"The Train from Rhodesia" is another short story, written by Nadine Gordimer, who was born in South Africa in 1923 to an English speaking family. She was a critic of the ways in which the white European minority controlled the black African majority and exploited the rich natural resources of the land they had colonised, and disliked the way the white European minority controlled the black African majority. A lot of the views that the author has about the exploitation of African are expressed strongly in the story, or instance the way in which the Europeans are made out to be exploiting the resources of places in Africa like Rhodesia (nowadays better known as Zimbabwe). The black Africans are extremely dependent on the white Europeans on the train, and they have to sell their goods to them in order to make a living.

"Dead Men's Path" is a short story by Chinua Achebe, who having being born in Nigeria and travelled widely around the world, is able to explore the effects of European customs and beliefs on traditional African society through his writing. This can be seen clearly in the story where the headmaster of a new school decides to block a path crossing through the <https://assignbuster.com/clash-of-cultures-coursework-essay-sample/>

compound. The consequences of doing this lead to the Africans violating the school, and this is caused mainly due to the headmaster's unwillingness to cooperate and not listening to the village priest who warns him about the costs of blocking the pathway. The culture clash is shown mainly through the headmaster's ignorance towards the newly found customs of the African villagers he experiences through blocking the path, and conflicting opinions between himself and the village priest emphasise the culture clash in the story.

"The Young Couple" begins when Cathy, a typical English woman, and her husband Naraian, a man brought up with a strong sense of Indian values, both move to India to live there with his family. Cathy's naivety at the beginning of the story is plain to see; seeing as she knows little about the culture she was about to make herself a part of and of which she despairs of towards the end of the story: The word "thrilled" is also a direct contrast to way she feels about the situation she is in towards the end of the story: On the other hand when it says how "she was thrilled at going back to India", it shows that she has been to India before (for her wedding), therefore she should know how the culture there would affect her negatively later on in the story.

She describes the family positively as she talks about the wedding that they organised for her in India: "They had organised a splendid wedding for them (...) nor had they raised any objections to the young couple living separately". This description of the family in India is a strong contrast to the way she feels towards them later on in the story, as the writer describes the way in which she feels "trapped in the middle of them". The feeling of being

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oppressed is highlighted a lot in the story, for example: " But here too she felt oppressed in the same way that she did in the house". The word "oppressed" is a strong word as conjures up the idea that she cannot escape from her current situation, and as the story progresses she is being forced closer and closer into doing the Indian family's bidding. This backs up the sense of feeling trapped, and this feeling increases as Naraian's family gains a stronger influence over what the couple do.

Cathy's feelings of her life in India become steadily more disheartening as the family gain more control over what she is allowed to do:" She was very miserable; she shut her eyes but she couldn't shut out the sense of this large, well-fed family with Naraian and herself trapped in the middle of them". This comes shortly after Naraian is given a high-paid job as well as finding out that she is now pregnant with his child. The fact that she is "miserable" after being remunerated with such good news is bewildering, which for many people would be the cause for a celebration.

However, this may be down to the fact that she is bound to act peculiar with her hormones becoming unbalanced as a result of the pregnancy, this being shown when she breaks down in front of Naraian: " She tried to stop crying but she couldn't". This breakdown is a clear sign to the reader that she is slowly starting to crack under the pressure her husband's family is putting on her, as well as showing that she is not used to having her entire life being pervaded and controlled by other people. In India, large families made up of young couples are customary and they have the biggest say over what goes on to do with the family. Cathy, on the other hand, is unaware of this and feels that her privacy is being infringed upon, and cannot deal with this.

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Cathy's English culture is more independent and she is used to making her own decisions; not having a whole family making them for her.

Symbolism is used to represent the idea of Cathy being a higher class than the people that live below her at the start, when the description of the beginning of their new lives in India is made to sound almost perfect: " They had a glorious view from their flat: (...) they could look right down into courtyard after courtyard and see what everyone was doing". This sets the scene sanguinely, and the way the author describes the view as being able to " look down and see what everyone was doing" symbolises social class and the difference between Cathy and the Indian people below her. This may be that around the time the story was written (1960s) the English were considered more important than the Indians and the way she is situated at the top of the block of flats is proving that she has a higher authority than those below her: " Sometimes she looked down into the courtyards to see men shaving, servants lighting fires". The fact she is looking " down at the servants" represents her as being a higher class than the Indian people below her.

Symbolism is also seen in " The Train from Rhodesia" to show the differences in class between the two cultures. For instance this can be seen when the Europeans are inside the train while the Africans are below them, while at the same time they are reaching up into the windows to sell their goods to the people inside: " No, no, she urged, leaning down towards him, across the height of the train towards the man in the piece of old rug". The difference in height between where the two cultures stand at this point can be seen as representing the Europeans as being of a higher class and importance than

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the Africans below them, which can be related back to Cathy in “ The Young Couple” and the way in which she is seen to be looking down at the servants going about their normal duties.

Symbolism is also used in “ Dead Men’s Path” when describing the pathway running through the school: “ marigold flower-bed and the hedges”, “ faint signs of an almost disused path”. The flowers represent Western culture brought in by the new headmaster, while the path represents traditional African culture. Putting the two together brings about a culture clash that gives the reader the impression that the headmaster has grown these flowers normally found in the Western world for the purpose of intentionally trying to cover all traces of African culture that remained in the school.

Also when she continues to describe the “ glorious views from their flat”, Cathy describes: “ an eighteenth-century mausoleum, very large, very ornate, with a vast dome, which looked especially magnificent against the sunset”. This description adds to the impression of the couple’s perfect lifestyle at the beginning of the story, proving to be a strong contrast to what happens at the end where the couple are bickering frequently: “ Sometimes she looked at the birds wheeling round and round the dome of the mausoleum”. This can be linked to events that occur later on in the story, when Cathy becomes tired of the same thing happening each day, or maybe even symbolises the beginning of the death of their relationship, as a mausoleum is a burial place.

The idea of the birds flying can be related to the happiness felt by the couple at the beginning when they first moved in to their new flat. However the way

in which the birds are seen to be circling the mausoleum also gives the distinct impression that the couple are gyrating around inevitable unhappiness. Birds are also mentioned again later on in the story to describe the young couple when they begin to fight, while the sweeper lady tries to calm them: " It was the sweeper woman who tried to calm them by pursing her lips and cooing sweet words into the air, as if she were soothing two ruffled pet birds in a cage". This can be related back to the young couple at the beginning of the story when they were both free and full of love for each other; much like the birds at the beginning circling the mausoleum. However now that Naraian's family is controlling the couple's freedom and lifestyle, they can be seen as being in a sort of cage where their lack of freedom leads to the young couple fighting like " two ruffled birds in a cage".

The idea of using animals to relate back to the characters in the stories is also used in " The Train from Rhodesia", however the way in which this is used in the story seems to relate mainly to the exploitation of Africa through the mistreatment of the old native. The lion carving that is so heavily admired by the young woman can be used to symbolise Africa, due to the fact that it is often linked as being the representative animal of that continent as well as being mainly found there in the wild: " It was a lion, carved out of soft dry wood that looked like sponge cake; heraldic, black and white, with impressionistic detail burnt in (...) a real mane, majestic, telling you somehow that the artist had delight in the lion". The description used gives the reader the impression that this carving in particular has been intricately carved and stands out amongst the other carvings being sold by

the villagers. The fact that it is a lion can be used to relate back to Africa and its once proud, independent state.

However the story turns this proud, fearsome animal around into being sold for a miniscule price that leaves the African who crafted it worse off: " To give one-and-six for that. The heat of shame mounted through her legs and body". This tells the reader that the young man has taken advantage of the old native's desperation to sell the lion, which also symbolises the fact that the Europeans are exploiting Africa and have now turned it into a poverty stricken place: " The lion, fallen on its side in the corner". The way in which the lion is described as " fallen" seems to relate back to Africa and how once it used to be a proud, independent state like the lion, yet after the years of exploitation at the hands of other countries, it now appears defeated, which can be related to the stature of the lion at the end of the story. This is similar to " The Young Couple", where in both stories the animals are portrayed as being affected negatively by the effects of the culture clash that takes place within the two stories.

The author also writes: " They had a glorious view (...) a decadent eighteenth-century mausoleum..." This can be seen as ironic, mainly due to the fact that they have a lovely view of a place where people are buried when they die. This can also be seen in " The Train from Rhodesia" where the young woman looks out of the train window: " Out of the window, there was nothing; sand and bush; a thorn tree". The view depicted here links back to the mausoleum as it is also like a place where the African natives die, due to the fact they do not have enough food and water to survive.

The description of this view on the other hand contrasts to the magnificence of the mausoleum, and depicts a desolate setting where the villagers that die there do not have the luxury of being buried in a place as grand as a mausoleum, creating a culture clash outside of the stories to show that the Indians had more money to be buried in luxurious places. This theme can also be seen in “ Dead Men’s Path”, where death is emphasised by the path that crosses the school compound and is given spiritual qualities: “ Our dead relatives depart by it and our ancestors visit us by it”. While the two other stories depict views of where people are buried/die, this story happens to emphasise the theme of death by highlighting the spiritual importance of this path to the villagers who believe that the dead use the path to cross from one world to another. This is a part of the villager’s culture, and the way in which the path intrudes the school compound, which is full of flowers from the western world, creates a culture clash between the traditional African and Western cultures, which both have very different ideas about the path.

In “ The Young Couple”, Cathy and Naraian’s relationship can be related back to the weather and the sky in India: “ So early in the morning everything was still pastel coloured- the sky a pale washed blue, the trees a misty green- all the things which would become violent and hot”. The choice of language used in this quotation is oxymoronic due to the ways in which opposite words are used, such as: “ washed...misty” and “ violent...hot”. The lexis used here is an example of antithesis, which could represent the fact that the couple’s relationship will start off as being pleasant like the beginning of the days in India, however will turn violent and unstable, much

like how the relationship as a whole seems to be heading in towards the end of the story.

The reason that Cathy cannot go out and get a job is due to the fact that she does not have the correct qualifications to do so, and getting an inadequate job would have been forbidden in that period of time based on the fact that she is now part of a upper-class family due to her marriage to Naraian. Due to her new-found status, working in a job such as a cleaner would not meet the expectations of her Indian family, who would be ashamed if this were to happen. This point is clear to see when it says: “ In the meantime Cathy would have been glad to help and get a job herself. She had done quite a lot of things back in England.... but of course she realised that it was impossible to do anything like that here because of her, or rather the family’s background and social standing. The sort of jobs this background and social standing permitted her she was not qualified to do so.”

This statement shows a strong culture clash in terms of what jobs people are allowed to do based on what social class you belong to. So instead Cathy has to make do with just sitting around in her flat, waiting for Naraian to come home. In England during the 1960s your family’s social standing did not have as large an impact on what jobs you were allowed to take up compared to that in India. This is shown by the way in which Cathy has no choice but to remain jobless yet in England she had the chance to do numerous jobs: “ She had done quite a lot of things in England, she had been a receptionist to a Harley Street specialist, a sales assistant in an airlines office, once for a brief while a waitress in a coffee bar”. From this the reader gathers an insight into

the way in which a particular status is upheld for an upper-class family living as part of Indian culture.

The reasons why Cathy cannot get a job may appear bewildering to the reader, as it is clear to see she is willing to do so and has enough experience to get a basic job at that, and they may see this as being quite a trivial reason as to why she cannot get one. This contrasts to “Dead Men’s Path”, where Michael Obi is able to get a job as a headmaster of a Nigerian secondary school: “He was appointed headmaster of Ndume Central School in January 1949” and “He had sound secondary school education which designated him a ‘pivotal teacher’ in the official records”. Despite having experience as a headmaster, he is still able to create conflict with the neighbouring African villagers, much like how Cathy does with her Indian in-laws. This gives the impression that clashes between cultures can still occur in spite of somebody’s job position or how educated they are, which happens in the case of Cathy and Michael, who are extremely diverse in terms of their jobs, yet are both able to create tension between another culture.

The influences of Indian culture seem to have a negative affect on the amount of freedom Cathy has, and as Cathy is forced further into a new life where her freedom is being diminished, the young couple are becoming more detached from each other as Naraian’s family forces its culture onto Cathy. In England where Cathy grew up she got to experience no limits to her freedom, however as she starts to live her new life in India, her freedom is hindered based on the expectations of her new family’s culture. This can be seen after Naraian’s mother criticises her for going outside into the bazaars alone: “Our girls don’t go into these bazaars alone. It is not proper
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for us.” This statement made by Naraian’s mother makes clear the expectations of her culture, as well as emphasising the comparisons between English and Indian culture, and is instead offered lifts by numerous members of the family: “ Naraian’s mother, sisters, sisters-in-law, always eager to go out shopping in a car, frequently urged her to join them. But she had enjoyed herself more on her own”.

This may show an anti-social side to Cathy that she is not giving the family a chance for them to acknowledge her and take her out with them, however this adds to the clash of cultures as Cathy is more used to going out and doing things on her own, and therefore shows that she is used to being independent in her own culture: “ She would welcomed a word from him to tell his family about the independence customarily enjoyed as a right by English girls”. This gives the reader an insight into the amount of freedom that Cathy is used to having back in England, and she looks to Naraian (who is the only Indian there who understands this freedom) for reassurance from his family who seem to not understand this.

The Indian family, on the other hand, cannot understand the reason behind this; seeing as they have all been brought up with strong family values which consist of doing things together and going out together, and overall sharing the enjoyment they get out of doing something with each other. This can be related back to “ The Train from Rhodesia”, where the young man cannot understand the reason as to why his wife condemns him for buying her the lion carving: “ He was shocked by the dismay of her face”. In the same way the Indian family cannot see the situation from Cathy’s point of view, the young man cannot see what he has done wrong in the eyes of his wife. The <https://assignbuster.com/clash-of-cultures-coursework-essay-sample/>

only difference between the two is that although Cathy and the Indian family are from different cultures and are bound to see things from different views, the young man and his wife are both from the same culture and are married to each other, giving the reader the impression that they should be able to relate to each other more than anyone else. However the fact that the young man cannot see what he has done creates conflict within the European culture as well as within their relationship.

Naraian defends his family when Cathy asks him why he did not stick up for her while the family were casting accusations about her whereabouts in the bazaars. Naraian's reply is: " It's not Oxford Street, you know. You can't just saunter down the road as you please". This statement from Naraian emphasises the culture clash by giving a direct comparison between a well-known place in England to the streets of India. It is plain to see that the amount of freedom for people in India, especially women, is hindered by family morals and generally the expectations of Indian society. The fact that Naraian does not back his wife up also leads the reader into getting the impression that their relationship is starting to become more heavily strained.

The clash of cultures in " The Young Couple" are also emphasised in the way in which Naraian and Cathy are not as close as they used to be, represented in the way they display public affections for each other: " She ...liked kissing and holding hands...in England he had enjoyed that too". This gives the reader an insight into the beginning of the end for their relationship.

However this can be explained by the fact that the culture in India frowns upon the displays of such public affection, whereas in England it is a

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common sight for couples to be seen kissing and being intimate with each other.

This is also a strong example of how the cultures clash in the story, as Cathy is unaware of what is expected of her while in India, whereas Naraian, having lived in India already, knows that displays of public affections are prohibited: " Alone at home, however, he was as affectionate with her as he had always been". This backs up the fact that although public displays of affection are not allowed in Indian culture, that does not mean to say that couples are not allowed to do it in the comfort of their own home. However the breakdown of their marriage slowly develops as the story progresses: " Cathy and Naraian began to bicker. (...) He stumbled over pieces of discarded underwear, and where once he would have tenderly picked them up and pressed them to his lips, now he kicked them aside impatiently". This emphasises the growing detachment between the young couple, and even points how lovingly Naraian used to treat her compared to the irritated way he treats her afterwards.

The subject of relationships is also used in " The Train from Rhodesia" to emphasise the point in the story that all human relationships, including within the white ruling, are contaminated by apartheid's brutalising attitudes: " Through the glass the beer drinkers looked out, as if they could not see beyond it". The glass acts as a barrier between the two races keeping them both apart, which can be related back to apartheid. The fact that they cannot " see beyond it" suggests they choose to not to notice the native's suffering that is taking place outside of the train. The relationship between the young woman and her new husband also proves to suffer under <https://assignbuster.com/clash-of-cultures-coursework-essay-sample/>

the influences of apartheid. The way in which she refers to him as “ the young man outside” is impersonal, and gives the reader the impression she is resentful and resigned to her marriage. The fact she mentions the “ discovery of a void” almost appears as if she married him to escape singleness, but in this early stage of the marriage she realises something is missing: “ She was feeling like this again.

She had thought it was something to do with singleness, with being alone and belonging to oneself”. This is a direct contrast to the way Cathy and Naraian feel about each other at the start of the story: “ When there were only the two of them together, they were always completely happy”. This also shows that the couple appear to be genuinely in love with each other at the beginning, unlike the couple in “ The Train from Rhodesia”, where the reader is given the impression that the woman feels somewhat indifferent towards her own husband. They are also on a “ train to nowhere”- the implication being that just as their marriage has no future, neither has apartheid, meaning there will be no “ next generation” where races of every kind will at last unite and live with equal wealth and social standing. However the difference between both of the diminishing relationships in the two stories is that Cathy and Naraian’s relationship grows steadily worse as the story progresses, whereas the couple on the train seem to only really fall apart when the young woman expresses her disgust for her husband’s actions.

The reason behind the breakdown of the relationship in “ The Young Couple” appears to be due to Cathy’s unwillingness to co-operate with Naraian’s family who are becoming “ oppressing” for her, yet are not used to the

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values she has been brought up with in her culture. The reader gets the sense of feeling that this can be said of Naraian, who is becoming increasingly annoyed of his wife's antics, and so this turns into a series of endless bickers. The only time in which he starts to become friendlier to Cathy is after the time in which everybody finds out she is pregnant: " If he found clothes strewn about the place, he picked them up and folded them, moving very softly so as not to disturb her".

This statement is a direct contrast to the way in which Naraian was described before: " He kicked aside the clothes impatiently, at the same time shouting at her to point out her neglect". The author creates these two very contrasting statements to highlight the dramatic change of heart Naraian has had since finding out that his wife is pregnant, and this gives the reader the impression that maybe he is only acting this way because of this reason. However his newfound friendliness could also be a result of Cathy's compliance with the expectation to have children, which is what married woman were expected to do in Indian culture, hence the reason for Naraian's family being so large. In a way, the pregnancy creates a bridge that links the arguing couple back towards each other.

The state of poverty shown in " The Train from Rhodesia" which the African natives live in is emphasised when the author describes the state of the environment that the villagers live in: " The stationmaster's barefoot children wandered over. From the grey mud huts with the untidy heads that stood within a decorated mud wall, chickens, and dogs with their skin stretched like parchment over their bones". The word " parchment" suggests an old piece of paper that is very fragile and also susceptible to tearing, and the <https://assignbuster.com/clash-of-cultures-coursework-essay-sample/>

way this is used to describe the children's skin as being " pulled over their bones" gives the reader the idea that the children are very fragile and soon their skin will be pulled too tightly and will tear.

The fact they are also barefoot adds to the sense of overwhelming poverty expressed in the story that the villagers have to live with, as they do not even have enough money to buy shoe. This is ironic in terms of the fact that while the villagers cannot afford to eat properly, the young woman on the train cannot afford the lion carving that she wants to buy. The clash between the cultures here is that they both cannot afford different things: " But the wooden buck, the hippos, the elephants, the baskets that already bulked out of their brown paper under the seat and the luggage rack!" The fact that the young woman already has a bag full of wooden carvings with her on the train emphasises the difference in terms of wealth that the two cultures shown in the story have. This shows that the importance in terms of the needs and wants of the two different cultures are at opposite ends of the scale.

The culture clash between the two cultures in terms of poverty and wealth is expressed even further when the train pulls in. The author writes: " A girl collected a handful of the hard kind, than no one liked, out of the chocolate box, and was throwing them to the dogs". The fact that she is just simply throwing the chocolates away gives a negative impression of the Europeans on the train, as it shows that they are just prepared to simply waste food that they do not like, yet only a few yards away there are countless people suffering from starvation. The inconsiderate action of this girl is intended to sum up the attitudes and people who are on the train, and gives the reader the impression that the passengers are altogether ignorant of the suffering

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taking place outside. The clash between the two cultures in terms of wealth is represented here as it shows that the Europeans are able to dispose of foods at will without so much as a second glance. The fact that the girl chooses to throw the unwanted chocolates to the dogs also shows that they are considered of being a much higher importance than the villagers.

Throughout the story personification is used frequently to compare the train to that of a living thing: " The driver stood talking against the steaming complaint of the resting beast", " Creaking, jerking, jostling, gasping, the train filled the train station". The way in which the train is compared to being like a " beast" gives the reader the impression that a wild and brutal animal is heading towards the village, and that as a living thing the passengers inside are like organs who operate the functions of the train. It can also be seen as an omen heading towards the village, ready to prey on the weak villagers and take them for granted. Personification is used to give the train its own voice: " The train called out, along the sky; but there was no answer; and the cry hung on: I'm coming... I'm coming..." This can be seen as the train calling out to Africa, yet the way in which there is no reply may show that the train is not wanted, and will bring bad tidings to the villagers and their country. On the other hand, the fact there is " no answer" may also suggest Africa has no voice in the affairs that take place there, allowing the Europeans to come and go as they please.

Despite the fact that the African natives are extremely poor, they are portrayed in a much better light than the Europeans, who to the reader come across as being selfish and ignorant. The ending of the story is shown to be the European people's ultimate act of degradation towards the African

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natives: “ Here, one-and-six baas! (...) A man fumbled wildly down his pocket, brought up the shilling and sixpence and threw them out; the old native, gasping, his skinny toes splaying the sand, flung the lion”. The old native is degraded even further when he is made to run for the train and for the money thrown out of the window by the young man. The culture clash here is that the old native has no choice but to accept what little money is offered, whereas the European’s money is expendable. The fact that the author has chosen to portray the Europeans in such a derogative way gives the reader the moral impression that wealth cannot buy you kindness and selflessness.

In “ Dead Men’s Path” Michael Obi’s belief that the path has no spiritual value and is a nuisance to him and his school is emphasised in the story: “ The whole purpose of our school, he said finally, is to eradicate just such beliefs as that. Dead men do not require footpaths”. The point he makes is a direct contrast to that of the village priest, who stresses the spiritual importance that the pathway has to the village: “ The whole life of the village depends on 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”. The beliefs expressed here are at complete opposite ends of the scale, and this shows a culture clash between the two people and their views about what should be done with the pathway running through the school.

The way in which Michael speaks with the village priest makes him come across as being arrogant and having not much respect for his elders: “ We cannot allow people to make a highway of our school compound”. The way in which he refers to the pathway as being a “ highway” may appear insulting

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on behalf of the village priest, who holds the pathway in such high regard, and even goes as far as to say that “ the whole life of the village depends on it”. Michael’s lack of respect for his elders is mentioned earlier in the story in the statement: “ He was outspoken in his condemnation of the narrow views of these older and often less-educated ones”. However it is due to this that his school is violated after refusing to re-open the pathway to the villagers who hold it in such high regard.

References to Western culture are mentioned frequently throughout the story, which includes explicit use of references by Michael’s wife, Nancy, who uses words such as “ modern” and “ delightful”. “ A penny for your thoughts” is also a quotation she uses after imitating the women’s magazine she is reading. Michael has a “ passion for modern methods”, which gives the reader the impression he does not agree with the traditional African culture in the area and this can be related to the way in which he does not stand for the pathway crossing through the school compound, as it does not follow his modern methods. Michael is also described as having a “ sound secondary education, which designated him a ‘ pivotal teacher’ in the official records”. “ Official records” shows Western bureaucracy- the use of too many rules and forms by officials, especially in government departments, which in this case would have been education. The point of having these references to Western culture is to emphasise the culture clash that the couple bring to Nigeria when faced with traditional African culture. The reader is able to associate references to Western culture such as Michael’s passion for “ modern methods” and the “ dream-gardens” in the school

compound with youth, whereas references to African culture such as the “almost disused path” and the old village priest can be related to old age.

The clash between Western and African culture is shown a lot throughout the story, for instance this can be seen when Michael is speaking to a fellow teacher at his school about the pathway: “It amazes me that you people allowed the villagers to make use of this footpath. It is simply incredible”. The bewilderment Michael expresses emphasises his views on the segregation of his school from the village by Western standards. Conflicting opinions and the pathway being fenced off leads to the village priest asking Michael to cooperate, however from what Michael has experienced as a teacher in the past, segregation from the village is the best option.

Michael Obi uses sarcastic language in the story when expressing his outrage about the villagers using the pathway crossing through the school compound: “The villagers might, for all I know, use the schoolroom for a pagan ritual during the inspection”. The use of satire is used frequently by Michael, suggesting his grudge against the villager’s use of the path is not personal, but he is just doing what he thinks will give him a good report with the Government Education Officer: “What will the Government Education Officer think when he comes to inspect the school next week?”.

This shows that Michael is small-minded and is prepared to put other’s needs (the villagers using the footpath) behind his so that he can gain a positive report from the officer visiting his school. Michael also appears very patronising when speaking with the village priest, adding to the author’s use of satire in the story: “I don’t suppose the ancestors will find the little detour

too burdensome". The tone in his speech appears mocking and adds to the tension between the two views and beliefs; he is insinuating that the village priest's ideas about the pathway having a spiritual importance are just nonsense. His sardonic attitude is emphasised when it says: " Mr Obi listened with a satisfied smile on his face". This makes him appear arrogant and smug, and makes the reader want to side with the village priest more because of his peaceful and reasonable composure.

The gardens grown in the school compound can also be related back to the clash between the African and Western cultures: " Beautiful hibiscus and allamanda hedges in brilliant red and yellow marked out carefully tended school compound from the rank neighbourhood bushes". The author creates a culture clash from describing the types of plants and shrubbery belonging to the two cultures, and the way in which both are described give the reader very different impressions about both cultures represented in the story. The way in which the gardens within the school compound are described brings to mind bright colours and youth: " brilliant red and yellow". However this clashes with the " rank neighbourhood", used to describe the land where the villagers live. This term is in stark contrast to what is used to describe the school gardens, and brings to mind the feelings of dullness, lack of hygiene and old age. The sense of contrasting colours and feelings conjured between these two descriptions creates a boundary that separates the school and the village; this can be related back to the feelings Michael has towards the villagers and that they should remain segregated from the school.

To the reader, the choice of ending in " The Young Couple" may appear unfinished and lacking the conclusion that most stories have at the end, as <https://assignbuster.com/clash-of-cultures-coursework-essay-sample/>

there is no distinctive resolution to the problems expressed by Cathy throughout the story: " This kiss was delicious (...) she had a vision of the room that was being got ready for them: the same heavy, shiny furniture as the rest of the house, a carpet, ample satin bedspreads matching the curtains". However the reason it is so effective is that it suggests Cathy and Naraian are falling further into doing his family's bidding from the way all of the furniture is being arranged to match the rest of the house, which emphasises the fact that not even they have the freedom to do such a simple and personal task themselves. The ending also appears quite ironic in the way in which the couple are sharing a passionate moment in the midst of this transition period taking place, which although Cathy is very opposed to, she cannot stop it from taking place.

An epiphany is met by the young woman at the end of " The Train from Rhodesia", where she realises that her husband has just committed a despicable act of selfishness towards the old: " If you wanted the thing, she said, her voice rising and breaking with the shrill impotence of anger, why didn't you buy it in the first place? (...) Why did you wait for him to run after the train with it, and give him one-and-six?" The anger expressed by the young woman is in stark contrast to the way in which the young man stands dumbfounded; bewildered as to the reason his wife is acting like this. While he thinks nothing of the villager's suffering, the young woman's sudden epiphany shares some sympathy and compassion with them. Despite the Europeans being represented as being selfish and ignorant, the way in which the woman acts at this point gives the reader the impression she is coming away from her stereotype: " To give one-and-six for that. The heat of shame

mounted through her legs and body and sounded in her ears like the sound of sand pouring. Pouring, pouring". This tells the reader that the author does not believe all of the Europeans around that time were greedy and selfish, shown through the way in which the young woman feels ashamed of herself and her husband. The use of repetition in the statement, "pouring, pouring" emphasises the amount of shame that she feels at that moment, and the verb gives the impression that this shame is steadily increasing until it spills out of her.

The ending of "Dead Men's Path" results in Michael facing the consequences for his actions after closing the path: "The beautiful hedges were torn up not just near the path but right round the school, the flowers trampled to death". This emphasises the cost Michael faces for not cooperating with the African villagers who made it clear to him that they wanted the path to remain open for them to use. However Michael Obi's willingness to please the Government Supervisor has a reverse effect; it leaves him with a bad report and his reputation in tatters: "That day the white Supervisor came to inspect the school and wrote a nasty report on the state of the school (...) arising in part from the misguided zeal of the new headmaster". This shows that the culture clash has brought about bad tidings for both cultures: "Two days later a young woman in the village died in childbed". The reader is led to believe that this is a result of the path being shut, after the village priest says: "It is the path of children coming into be born". The reader therefore gets the impression that he is responsible for her death, and so is deserving of the vandalism that takes place at his school. This sends out the message

that what goes around comes around, and that overall it is better for two cultures to try and cooperate instead of fighting.

All of the stories have a negative ending as a result of the culture clash taking place within the three stories. The endings for “ The Young Couple” and “ The Train from Rhodesia” are similar as they both involve the breakdown of relationships. “ The Train from Rhodesia” sends out an affective message to the reader, informing them of the consequences of exploitation and the lifestyles of those less fortunate in the world. The young woman’s epiphany at the end also sends out a positive message, that if one person can change their views on the suffering that takes place in the world, so can many more people.

I conclude by saying that from looking at the three stories countless ideas based around the theme of culture clash can be drawn from the texts, whether it be shown in the language, through symbolism and literary techniques such as repetition.