

# The road by cormac mccarthy essay sample

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The Man, also known as the father in the book, travels throughout the novel with his young son. He feels like he is specifically on this world to protect his son, and he does anything to do so. Everything The Man does seems to be done out of consideration of the boy. Because of his devotion to the boy, The Man remains paranoid and cautious of others, especially of people he does not know. The Man's love for his son, gives him a sort of heroic quality, and brings out a tough, fierce side of him. -“ The man had already dropped to the ground and he swung with him and leveled the pistol and fired from a two-handed position balanced on both knees at a distance of six feet. The man fell back instantly and lay with blood bubbling from the hole in his forehead.” (102. 56). In the scene, we see The Man doesn't play around about his son. The Man sets a bad guy on fire with his flare gun and leaves a thief in the middle of the road without any clothes. This scene is important because we see the extreme The Man will go to to protect his beloved son. He will literally kill any person that puts his son in danger. The Boy-

The Boy is born into the post-apocalyptic world, so he knows nothing before the catastrophe. The Boy is constantly thinking of others, and while traveling the road with his father, The Boy continuously displays his faith in humanity and his humbling trust in others. Even despite, their near experiences with violence and death, The Boy is constantly pleading with his father to help others in need. - “ What if that little boy doesnt have anybody to take care of him? he said. What if he doesnt have a papa? There are people out there. They were just hiding. . . I'm afraid for that little boy. I know. But he'll be all right. We should go get him, Papa. We could get him and take him with us. We could take him and we could take the dog. The dog could catch

something to eat. We cant. And I'd give that little boy half of my food. Stop it. We cant. He was crying again. What about the little boy? he sobbed. What about the little boy?" (132. 2-132. 12). This scene shows the unselfish generosity in The Boy. In this instance, The Boy can see himself in the little kid, which is why he sobs over the little, presumably also sobbing over his own misery. He depends so much of his life on his father, so he can't imagine another little kid going through the situations that they go through in the apocalyptic world, without a guardian helping him. The Man in the Truck-

The Man in The Truck can also be sort of the antagonist of the novel. The Man in the Trucks exchanges words with The Man and his son about them joining his group. The Man though does not trust a word coming from this man and doesn't pay his plea any attention. The Man in the Truck suddenly grabs the boy and holds a knife to his throat, threatening to kill him. The father then pulls out a gun , and shoots The Man in the Truck in the head, killing him. -" This was the first human being other than the boy that he'd spoken to in more than a year. My brother at last. The reptilian calculations in those cold and shifting eyes. The gray and rotting teeth. Claggy with human flesh. Who has made of the world a lie every word." (118. 1). This scene with The Man in the Trucks is important because it makes us question the character of The Man. With the showdown with The Man in the Truck, we see a ruthless side of The Man that makes us wonder is The Man really any different from the " bad people" he comes in contact with, or does he really only act the way he does in consideration for his son. Setting:

The setting of The Road is set in the future, at some indeterminate time. The novel occurs after a nuclear holocaust has wiped out nearly all of the

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inhabitants of the earth, and most certainly most of civilization and all of its comforts. The landscape and the air are soaked in thick, gray ash.

Vegetation has been destroyed. There are no fish in the water. " By late afternoon it had begun to snow and they went on with the tarp over them and the wet snow hissing on the plastic." (244. 1). The two main characters in the novel, the father and his son, travel amidst a nuclear winter, where ash from the nuked matter constantly falls from the sky, making it gray and slushy. It rains and is cold all of the time, and there is hardly any plantlife or clean water left, and certainly no animals. Humans have become barbaric and cannibalistic as a means to survive, so the father and the son live in constant fear of running across these barbaric crowds of people, and wander from place to place, looking for food. The setting is a pretty depressing scenario overall.

The importance of the setting in the novel is that it sort of serves as an antagonist in the book. The setting seems like it is trying to kill The Man and his son continuously. Forest fires, cannibals, a nagging lung disease the father has, the long journey they have along with the unknowns at even their destination, all make for a setting that is inherently antagonistic and hostile. Were it not for that setting, they could find their way perhaps to something like safety, or have any chance at a more stable society, and they could find food and water more easily, but with the horrible setting, even the ocean is not a source for resources as The Man tells his son, " I'm sorry it [the ocean] is not blue, he said. That's okay, said the boy." (297. 1). The hostile environment has driven all of humanity near the edge, that the man and boy have to unfortunately face. Tone & POV:

“ Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.” (309. 1). -

Throughout the novel, McCarthy seems to mix a horrific tale of cannibals and thieves and the end of survival in a post-apocalyptic world, with a soft father-son love story. McCarthy includes many examples of the touching moments between a protective father and his thoughtful son, that shows the love a father can have for his son, no matter what dramatic disaster, which deviates with the irony in the book.

In the novel, a lot of the tone chronicles what has been lost in this new world since the disaster struck. This passage from the novel in the last paragraph of the book, puts the reader's mind in what life was like before the apocalypse and all the trouble. When McCarthy describes The Man's memories or something that's no longer around, he seems to slip very comfortably into a simultaneously sad, celebratory tone sort of elegiac. In the excerpt, even while McCarthy describes the beauty of the trout, he mourns its extinction. The passage even seems to make the reader sort of mourn, as this visualization of how life was before the apocalypse, brings a sadness to the reader, as they realize the events that had taken place throughout the course of the book, and see how much The Man and The Boy struggled, trying to survive.

Important diction is evident too in this passage. The word "Once" is a huge importance in not only the passage, but in the work as a whole. McCarthy describes a scene of a beautiful trout swimming upstream in great detail. Every detail he portrays alludes to the world as it "once" was. He portrays a beautiful soft world much like the beautiful soft world the way it once was prior to the catastrophe. A world that was tender in comparison to the harsh world as it is post apocalyptic. The last sentence hints that man had come into this world, and left it desolate and destroyed, leaving the last living destructors to describe it with what it "once" was.

The point of view of the passage is third-person. In third person point of view, the characters aren't actually speaking, but the narrator lets the readers know how the characters feel. It is important here because by the end of the novel, The Man has died, and The Boy has left under the wing of another family, so there is no other character to get their point across. The point of view, serves to show us the unfortunate fate of the characters because since they are gone, there is no one left to tell their story of the pre-apocalyptic world, except for the narrator. Theme:

Violence: McCarthy portrays a post-apocalyptic landscape where the scarcity of resources has driven the few survivors to murder, thievery, and even cannibalism. The more sympathetic characters attempt to sustain their morals, avoiding brutality as much as possible. The acts of horrors in the novels, such as seeing infants being roasted to eat, bring out the savage acts humans can forgo without the presence of morals.

- In *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, the novel shows that the absence of law and order simply allows the worst parts of human nature free reign. Love: For all the violence that takes place in *The Road*, we still manage to get a sort of love story between father and son. In the novel, love survives in the midst of a chaotic, barbaric world as a father goes through whatever he can to protect his son in a post-apocalyptic world, filled with cannibals and thieves. What makes love so important in the novel is that given the isolation of the characters and the setting they are dealt with, it makes their love more rare and precious.

- In *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, the novel shows that in the presence of trials and tribulations, violence and brutality, and isolation and desertion, love can act as a wall that seems to block the mind and body from the corruption of the outside world. Mortality: Death is constant in *The Road*, so the constant threat of death from starvation, exposure, illness, or murder makes the everyday stuff in the novel much richer than it otherwise would be. Simple actions like eating, finding clean water, or exchanging a few kind words with another human being suddenly seem quite extraordinary.

Isolation: From the beginning of the novel to the end, isolation overcomes The Man and his son. It is like the world has abandoned them. The alienation is more evident to The Man who has experienced life in the pre-apocalyptic world, which makes the isolation more desolate. The isolation is foreshadowed though by the relationship between the father and his son.

Good vs. Evil: Surprisingly in the novel, there are actually "good guys" and "bad guys," which is crazy given the horrific world catastrophe that has overcome in the novel. The two protagonist are pretty much the "good

guys” and the cannibals are the so-called “ bad guys.” It seems that the only things that separates them apart is the eating of other people, but given their unfortunate circumstances, any small act of good seems to be somewhat heroic. Thesis Statements:

#### 1. “ 1990” Prompt

In *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, the author depicts a strong love relationship between a father and son, trapped in a post-apocalyptic world, fighting to survive. Throughout the novel, the experience and maturity of The Man and the innocence and kindness of The Boy conflict with each other, as The Man remains cautious and paranoid against people he does not know in order to protect his son, and The Boy remains reluctant to help any person he sees in need, whether he knows them or not. The difference in views of The Man and his child depicts the optimism in young children, too young to know better, and the pessimism in adults, who have been through much more in their lives, proving that wisdom and experience conquers immaturity and naivety in all circumstances.

#### 2. “ 2002” Prompt

In *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, the protagonist of the novel, The Man, can be greatly considered as morally ambiguous. In the novel, a father is caught in a post-apocalyptic world and must do anything he can to protect and keep his young son alive. Throughout the novel he shows signs of an evil side as he refuses to help starving and weeping children and even shoots a man in the head, killing him, but the reader can never consider The Man evil because all of his actions come with good cause, to keep his only son safe. The Man also remains ambiguous as he tries to always keep faith, through the unfortunate circumstances they are faced with. Though most, if not all of the people have

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lost all sense of morals due to the apocalypse, The Man tries to keep a sense of morality that he refers to as “ carrying the light” to his son, that seems to motivate them to fight harder each day, regardless if either actually believe they are really carrying “ the light” proving that any sense of motivation can keep any person pushing past a rock of tribulations. 3. “ 2008” Prompt

In *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, a young son seems to play an important role as a foil to his father as they are caught in a post-apocalyptic world. The boy is a foil for his father because the boy highlights the lost sense of innocence that his father once had and continues to dream about. The father was born before the nuclear disaster, so he remembers fishing with his family and playing on green grass. He remembers a time when people were civilized. The boy, on the other hand, was born after the disaster and only knows of the wasteland that the world has become. The father is always fearful of others and stays well away from strangers whom they encounter on the road, while the boy is curious about people and does not fully understand the unfortunate situation that most people find themselves in while on the road. *The Road* shows that a wretched situation can cause guilt and sin to appear with the acquaintance of evil.