

'the age of iron'
commentary by eda
karaman essay
sample



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The extract 'The Age of Iron' is a contemporary piece of writing that depicts the strong theme of conflict within generations. The writer takes on the persona of an old wise woman attempting to draw in a young boy to listen to the advice which she has to offer. His determinism and stubbornness portray how young children do not come to accept what they are being told, instead their strong-willed character lead them to chose the wrong paths. This extract clearly portrays this conflict within generations by the use of literary devices which aid in the understanding and appreciation of the issues and themes that surround the passage.

The setting of the extract takes place within the old woman's home. This is depicted in the line, 'I don't have bandages in the house.' The reader becomes aware that the young boy has fled to the woman's house from the hospital. The reader is also aware that there is a war going on, this becomes evident through several references made to the aspect of war, such as, death, blood, guns and bullets and is also depicted in the line, 'This is war.' The title of the prose is not significant in that it does not allow the reader to grasp an understanding of the issues and themes that surround the extract.

However, after reading the piece of writing the title is of some relevance.

The title of the extract is a metaphor used to allow the reader to draw a link between it and the passage itself. An iron-willed boy that is driven by the powerful force of battle, 'The instinct of battle too strong in him, driving him on,' depicts the connection between the title and extract. The clever use of a metaphor helps the reader to vividly draw this link. The structure of this extract comprises of paragraphs that vary in length according to their significance.

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The first paragraph is short as it sets out the events which are to follow. The reader is then immediately drawn into a dialogue between the two chief characters. The use of dialogue runs throughout the entire piece. This literary device allows the reader to grasp an insight into the true inner feelings and thoughts of each character, allowing the reader to further appreciate the extract. The writer has also used sharp short sentences to place emphasis on us, such as ' He was silent' and ' A favor'.

Repetition is also apparent within the extract, it can be seen in the line, ' Never, never, never,' this places emphasis onto the word and draws in the reader. The style of the extract is a persona in which the writer adopts. The writer takes on the persona of an old woman. The writer has employed a persona as it directly appeals and engages the reader facilitating personal views of the character. Through employing a persona the sentiment that this character holds is expressed along with her emotions and deep thoughts about the events that take place around her.

The tone of the extract is that of fretfulness and apprehension. References made to the element of war, battle and death all aid in developing the tone of the extract. The mentioning of Bheki's death in some sense generates a tone of understanding and sympathy, however this is overcome by the extensive references made to unpleasant elements of war that follow straight after. Also, as the old woman is attempting to ensnare and dishearten a young boy out of battle creates an atmosphere of tension and anxiety.

The fact that the boy refuses to take this advice from the older woman and instead go out to battle leaves the reader in a state of agony and melancholy. The wise old woman is one of the chief characters in this extract. The name of the woman is not revealed in the piece however, the reader is able to grasp an insight into her character through the effective use of dialogue. Throughout the extract the reader is aware that the woman is continuously giving advice to the young boy who has the will of iron, a strong determination and a powerful force within him to fight in battle.

Her age is portrayed in the way she speaks to the young boy accusing him of being immature and inexperienced, ' You are still children. You are throwing your lives before you know what life can be. ' The giving of advice not only depicts that this woman is protective but also allows the reader to appreciate her wise comments. The writer uses a powerful simile, which further reveals the woman's sense of protection over the young boy, ' As a hen that loses its chicks will take in a duckling, oblivious of the yellow fur, the flat beak, and teach it to take sand baths, peck at worms.

The simile is effective in demonstrating how a parent will take care of its child, just like how a hen cares for its chicks. She questions herself as to why she cares so much for this young boy, this becomes evident in the line, ' Who is he to me that I should nag him? ' However, her motherly instincts take over and just as the simile portrays how a hen would show affection to a duckling even though it was not her own an old woman would show warmth and care to a boy despite the fact he is not hers. The young teenage boy is the other significant character in the extract.

The reader becomes aware that he is a strong-minded and an iron-willed character that has the powerful driving force of battle within him. Unlike the old woman, the reader is able to get an impression of the young boy's age, this is depicted in the line 'What are you- fifteen years old?' 'Fifteen is too young to die.' The fact that the young teenager does not seem to appreciate the advice given to him by the old woman portrays his determination to fight in battle and his ignorance of what could really happen to him.

His ignorance also becomes an indication of his inexperience and immaturity of real life situations and aspects. In the extract, the old woman states, 'A waste of breath to preach prudence to this boy,' demonstrating that his persistence is too strong and the instinct of battle is driving him to block out anything that may stand in his way. His ignorance of death and the dangers involved in battle do not seem to in anyway restrain him from his powerful driving force to fight.

The old woman continuously reinforces the dangers of battle 'The men you are playing against don't say to each other, 'That one is just a child, let us shoot a child's bullet at him, a play bullet,' even though the old woman on several occasions attempts to discourage the young boy his strong sense of determination and his eagerness to fight come in the way of him taking the advice of the old woman. The young boy seemed unmindful to the death of his friend Bheki who had been killed.

He asked the old woman, 'Where is Bheki?' the old woman trying to discourage the young boy from fighting in battle began to effectively describe his death graphically. She replied to him by saying, 'He is in a box

in a hole with earth heaped on top of him. He is never going to leave that hole. Never, never, never. ' Her graphical description of death and her use of language and repetition were done in order to persuade him to forget about fighting and what may happen to him if he was to take part in the battle. The boy's ignorance to death and the old woman's consistent giving of advice all add to theme of conflict within generations.

Overall, the extract taken from the novel ' The Age of Iron,' written by J. M. Coetzee, is an intriguing piece of writing in which the conflict of generations is clearly depicted. Through the use of dialogue the reader is provided an insight into the events that surround a young boy's life during the time of war. Cleverly written with the employment of successful literary techniques this extract is able to grasp the reader's attention as it appears easily comprehensible and appealing to the reader's senses.