

Dead men's conflict essay

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Dead Men's Conflict In "Dead Men's Path" Chinua Achebe uses a path that passes through a school to represent the turmoil often generated when traditional belief systems are challenged by new progressive ways of thinking. Achebe uses Michael Obi, the headmaster, to portray the misguided attempts often made to modernize people that have a deep seeded belief in the superstition of their ancestors. Achebe demonstrates that when the new do not respect the traditional beliefs that define a community conflict will eventually arise. The author uses the first dialogue between the headmaster and his wife to show the blind arrogance some have towards the customs and traditions of religious people. He told his wife "We shall make a good job of it, shan't we" and his wife replied "We shall do are best" which showed they have good intentions. But, in the same conversation he describes the other teachers as "old and superannuated" and "would better serve as simple traders" (Achebe 463). The headmaster places his views far above the traditions of the community.

He believes he can fix the "backwards" school and the people will be grateful (463). Nancy believes she will plant flowers and bring beauty to the grounds while her husband teaches the villagers his "modern methods" (Achebe 463). They believe everyone should live in a modern way and do not consider that many people wish to live as their ancestors did.

The headmaster observes a villager cross school grounds through some of the flowers his wife planted. He told a teacher "it amazes me that you people allowed the villagers make use of this footpath" (464). He immediately condemns the villager as disrespectful without consideration. The teacher informed him that "the path appears to be very important to

them” and “ it connects the village shrine with their place of burial” (464). He is naive and doesn't understand the connection between the school and the beliefs of the villagers. The path was blocked so the villagers wouldn't cross through the school grounds.

The headmaster thought they would simply go around the school even after one of the teachers told him about the uprising cause by a previous attempt to close the path. The headmaster stated “ That was some time ago. But it will not be used now. He thought because he was the one that closed the path and his modern ways were correct the villagers wouldn't object (464).

The local priest, motivated by the villager's frustration, inquired about the path closure. He explained the religious significance to the headmaster and conveyed that the path or the beliefs were there before him and would be around long after he was gone. The headmaster said the school isn't a “ highway” and “ the schools purposed was to eradicate such beliefs” (464). He was unwilling to acknowledge beliefs that didn't fit his vision of a proper modern education and refused to accept the strength of tradition.

A few days after the headmaster refused to open the path a villager died during child birth. The villagers believed it was punishment for the closed path and sought retribution. The headmaster awoke to utterly devastated school grounds. The villagers didn't stop as the school grounds, flower and hedges were ruined and a building was torn down. A school inspector showed up the same day and reported the headmasters “ misguided zeal caused a tribal-war situation” (464). The headmaster is portrayed as a failure in the eyes of his superiors.

His refusal to compromise his belief and accommodate those of others has been his own undoing.