

Existentialism and the absurdity in the stranger



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Throughout the novel *The Stranger*, Camus beliefs of existentialism and the absurdity of life are portrayed through the protagonist Meursault's.

Existentialism is the belief that existence precedes essence and that there is no true purpose to human life. Existentialism is seen throughout Meursault when he shows no emotion to the death of his mother, when he describes events in purely physical context, and the way that Meursault views life as meaningless, but does not seek any purpose for his life. Throughout the novel Camus portrays Meursault as detached, emotional, and absurd - a true existentialist.

Throughout the novel, Meursault has no emotional reasoning or attachment for any of his actions. Meursault only considers and records the physical aspects of each event which further shows his true existentialist viewpoint.

The book opens with Meursault stating " Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know" (1) which introduces Meursault as a character by showing his cold or detached outlook on life. While attending the burial for his mother he only seems to regard his physical surrounding , pointing out that his caretaker is dressed in black with pin-striped trousers (13) and that the coffin is sitting on walnut-stained planks. When Meursault's mother dies he does not regard or show any attention to his emotions and handles the ordeal completely detached, as if it was not his own mother that died.

Another example of Meursault being unable to portray/experience conventional emotions is the way he describes physical setting while being tried for murder. During Meursault's murder trial, he notes that the magistrate has a deep set of blue eyes rather than worry or guilt he feels while sitting in the courtroom. Meursault portrays his trial as an everyday

event, further evidenced by his describing of his lawyers tie as odd looking with broad black and white stripes. Camus portrays Meursault as seeming unable to discuss or feel emotions due to his purely objective outlook on life, which parallels an absurdist outlook on life.

Throughout all significant events in this book Meursault does not regard or think about emotion. This shows his true existentialist views in that he does not care about anything at all. Meursault holds the viewpoint that what happens happens and there is nothing he, or anyone, can do about it.

Evidence of this is when Meursault goes back to work after his break for the funeral and his boss questions his mother's age. Meursault says his mother was about sixty to assure he was not incorrect in approximating her age (25). The fact that Meursault did not know nor take the time to find out his mother's age aligns with existentialism in that he has no regard or emotion towards anyone or anything, even his close family. Meursault also never questions how his mother died, or puts any time or deep thought into it, he merely accepts that she died and moved on with his life. Meursault is seemingly unable to feel or show emotions to any characters he encounters throughout the book. This outlook on life causes problems with people that care about Meursault as they are unable to understand his emotional detachment. This is especially evident with Marie, Meursault's girlfriend. Meursault went on a date with Marie the day after his mother died, and they watched a funny movie which shows how little his mother's death meant to Meursault (more existentialism beliefs shown by Meursault). Marie falls in love with Meursault and proposes to him which he agrees to due to the fact that it does not matter to him and is all the same. When Marie asks Meursault if he loves her

he replies that he probably didn't love her and the love in question didn't mean anything (41). Meursault's relationship with Meursault shows how little he cares about like, an important thing such as love and companionship means nothing to him.

Existentialism entails that life is worthless and nothing matters in the grand scheme of things. Meursault portrays this when dealing with the matter of his own death. At the end of the writing Meursault comes to terms with the fact that he will spend the rest of his life in jail and eventually die. Meursault accepts his fate without any second thought or regret for his actions. He looks at his death sentence in radical terms that are very different from the average outlook. He is aware that death will eventually come and comes to terms with this, he does not try to fight it but rather gains a sense of comfort, which is evidenced by his refusals to see the chaplain. Meursault claimed he didn't have anything to say to him (108). By him making no effort to see a chaplain reflects Meursault's views on religion and life in general, in that there is no afterlife and life ends when he dies. This is another example of Meursault's existentialist views angering those around him, as the chaplain is furious that Meursault does not seek divine help. Meursault views death as inevitable and does not value life much, which is evidenced by him thinking everybody knows that life isn't worth living (114). Throughout the novel Meursault shows that he views life as worthless and that nothing matters. Meursault did not care that his death would be expedited because he did not care about anything at all, a true existentialist outlook on life.