

Thematic synthesis essay sample

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Thematic Synthesis of “ The School Days of an Indian Girl” & “ Size 6: The Western Woman’s Harem” In both essays “ The School Days of an Indian Girl” by Zitkala-Sa and “ Size 6: The Western Woman’s Harem” by Fatema Mernissi the theme is based around alienation and the definition of normal, which is tested when these ladies step outside of their homelands. In Zitkala-Sa’s essay she tells the story of a young Indian girl who, in transit to be educated by missionaries is left feeling alienated and embarrassed through the sights, and things she endures on her way to the missionary and once she arrives. In Mernissi’s essay she tells another story, but one about a Muslim woman who receives a rude awakening when she decides to go look for a skirt at a local store in the city of New York. Both essays share a common ground of alienation and through first person point of view the author’s are able to engage the reader and share those feelings of indifference through mere words.

In Zitkala-Sa’s essay she begins with expressing the excitement she and her fellow bronzed transistors felt as they left their homes to begin school with the missionaries, “ We had been very impatient to start on our journey to the Red Apple Country...We had anticipated much pleasure from a ride on the iron horse...” (103). Sadly, the mood was suddenly stiffened as the young girl began to notice as she calls them, “ palefaces” staring upon her and the others. Everyone from men, women, and children were staring at her, and as a result this brought a feeling of embarrassment upon her. To make matters worse, no one cared that they were making these children feel this way, “ Their mothers, instead of reproving such rude curiosity, looked closely at me, and attracted their children’s further notice to my blanket” (103). The author

then goes on to tell how she finds comfort looking out the window at the passing objects which reminded her of home.

But once again this feeling of relief was disturbed again and continuously once she arrived to the missionary. She was exposed to things she never witnessed before, “ As I was wondering in which direction to escape from all this confusion, two warm hands grasped me firmly, and in the same moment I was tossed high in midair...My mother had never made a plaything of her wee daughter” (104). The missionary then forced the young girls to wear tight clothing and shingled hair, which is not favorable where the young girl is from, “ I looked hard at the Indian girls, who seemed not to care that they were even more immodestly dressed than I, in their tightly fitting clothes” (104-105).

She was not familiar with the school setting and the directional taste it favored; so this left her feeling even more alienated. To top things off and make her more so like the other missionary girls she was forced to do things that was considered a disgrace back home, “ I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit.... And now my long hair was shingled like a coward’s!” (105). The closing of the essay expresses all the indignities she has endured which has ultimately left her with only one thing to do, cry out to her mom.

Furthermore, Mernissi’s essay covered what it is that is considered normal and how everyone doesn’t fit. It began when a woman/the author could not find a skirt that fit her. Making a statement about the fact that she could not

find a skirt in her size the saleslady said to her that she is too big (106). This sparks up a conversation that leaves the woman feeling less beautiful and less self-worthy. Mernissi then replies with, “ I am too big compared to what?” (106) and the saleslady responds with, “ Compared to a size six” (106). Insisting that size four and six are the norm and that she can find her size clothing in a specialty department store. Mernissi is baffled by the saleslady remarks, “ That was the first time I had ever heard such nonsense about my size...The flattering comments I received from men in Morocco regarding my particularly generous hips had for decades led me to believe that the entire planet shared their convictions” (106).

Mernissi was determined to find out who placed these standards and why did they exist and to her surprise this “ norm” is everywhere you go in America. So it is a constant weight of the western women to look a certain way, and she just did not agree with this. She then begins to express to the saleslady how in Morocco there are no sizes, you gather material and have a seamstress make whatever you want. The saleslady then goes on to say, “ You mean you don’t watch your weight?...Many women working in highly-paid fashion-related jobs could lose their positions if they didn’t keep a strict diet” (107). Those words cut Mernissi deeply and it began to sink in that in the western society, to be beautiful is to look fourteen years old (107). She also ties the western man to Immanuel Kant’s 19th century theory which states, “ To be beautiful, women have to appear childish and brainless... When a woman looks mature and self-assertive, or allows her hips to expand, she is condemned as ugly” (107). She leaves the store feeling very ugly and useless but with a new light on the western society.

Both authors used first person point of view to tell these stories. Repetitive statements beginning with or including “ I” are throughout both essays. They are recounts of actual experiences that these two women bared through; focusing only on one character which is the author which does not change focus throughout the story. “ I had arrived in the wonderful land of rosy skies, but I was not happy, as I thought I should be...My long travel and bewildering sights had exhausted me” (104), is a great example from Zitkala-Sa’s essay that shows how the story is told from the author’s recollection. The opening sentence in Mernissi’s essay gave hence to the first person point of view, “ It was during my unsuccessful attempt to buy a cotton skirt in an American department store that I was told my hips were too large to fit into a size six...That day I stumbled onto one of the keys to enigma of passive beauty in Western harem fantasies” (106). The fact that these are personal recollections also places them together to share many of the same qualities.

Both of these essays are based around the feeling of alienation after being told and forced to do things that are normally abnormal for them in their culture but in their new standing, it is considered the norm. Both essays discuss how the pressures of a new society can bear down onto one person. Through first person point of view the readers are able to take a walk in these authors’ shoes and experience the indignities they overcame.

Works Cited

Mernissi, Fatema. “ Size 6: The Western Women’s Harem.” English Composition 2: Writing about Your World: Global Sociocultural Awareness. Jacksonville: Florida State College at Jacksonville, 2011. Digital. Zitkala-Sa. “ <https://assignbuster.com/thematic-synthesis-essay-sample/>

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