

Task 3--literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ursula Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1995) portrays a utopian confronted by a moral dilemma, and reflects our personal experiences in dealing with morally challenging situations. This essay depicts the economic, political, social, as well as psychological, emotional, and moral aspects of the people of Omelas. A personal experience that mirrors the issues faced by the people of Omelas is then discussed. The author describes the people of Omelas by their lack of a definable set of economic, political, racial, and cultural policies and structure. There is no "king... slavery... stock exchange, the advertisement, the secret police, and the bomb" (Le Guin, 1995, p. 968). The economic, social, and political freedom of the people stems from the absence of any ruling class or institutional structure (e. g. church, school, courts) that governs the daily affairs of the city. Economically speaking, the people of Omelas live in a prosperous city which can afford "subway trains, washing machines, and all kinds of marvelous devices" but can function just as perfectly well without technological devices (Le Guin, 1995, p. 968). Beneath this seemingly perfect city lies a moral dilemma that continuously haunts the people of Omelas. The people of Omelas, in addition, are characterized by their psychological, emotional, and moral composition. Its people are free from guilt and all forms of political and economic constraint. All of them, however, acknowledge that their happiness is entirely dependent on the suffering of a single child locked up in a broom closet. They feel disgust and anger upon initially learning about the child but soon accept the "terrible justice of reality" (Le Guin, 1995, p. 971). Once in a while, though, some of them leave Omelas to live with their own personal guilt rather than continue living in that morally ambiguous city. I find a semblance between the moral issues faced by the people of Omelas and a

personal experience from school a few semesters ago. As a final requirement for a certain subject, the teacher divided the class into groups of four and tasked each to accomplish a group research project. For my group, each member had a full participation from the research planning, data gathering, and up to data analysis. Each member was then tasked to accomplish a specific portion in writing the research objectives, methods, analysis, etc. One of our members, however, failed to submit her part because of an urgent matter she had to attend to. She told us she'd perfectly understand if we removed her from the group, which meant she wouldn't get any credit for the group project. We were confronted with a choice to either take her out of the group or keep the group intact. We decided to choose the latter. If our group were living in the city of Omelas, we would be following the footsteps of the people who walked away from it. The success of our group project depended on each member's participation, effort, and output. The perfection of Omelas, meanwhile, depended on the suffering child. One of our group members failed to complete her task but nevertheless devoted her time and energy to the project. We could have removed her from the group and take full credit for the project, like the people who stay in Omelas who are guilt-free and always happy. But something was whispering in our conscience - an echo of the wretched child uttering, " Please let me out. I will be good" (Le Guin, 1995, p. 970). We decided to keep that group member and potentially jeopardize the outcome of our project, like the people of Omelas who put their happiness on the line by walking away from the city. References Le Guin, U. (1995). The ones who walk away from Omelas. In R. V. Cassill (Ed.), *The Norton anthology of short fiction* (5th ed., pp. 967-972). New York: W. W. Norton.