

George orwell's observations on human nature in shooting an elephant



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In this argumentative essay I will qualify Orwell's observations on human nature. According to Orwell, the author of *Shooting an Elephant*, he observes that tyrants destroy their own freedom and the masks people wear grow to fit them. The first of his observations holds true and is supported with evidence for his autobiography and two external sources. And when qualifying his second point it only holds true for the autobiography. The two outside sources deny his observation. At the end of the essay I will take a step back and explain how the story is relevant to our lives.

George Orwell's autobiographical essay, *Shooting an Elephant*, showcases the wrongs of imperialism. The helpless British Officer, Orwell, has become a victim of imperialism and the people he governs, who are the Burmese.

Orwell believes imperialism to be evil and wrong even though he is humiliated by the people of Burma. When an elephant breaks loose and kills a Burmese, Orwell hunts down the savage beast. However, upon finding it, he sees that it is calmly eating. He no longer wishes to kill the beast, but the spectating Burmese pressure him into pulling the trigger. When writing his story Orwell exposes human nature and the results of his decision. “

When the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys” (Orwell, 2009) and that “ he wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it” (Orwell, 2009). He believes that his actions are due to human nature and so he speaks as if his decision would be matched by others. In response to the paradoxical metaphor and his position, I will qualify Orwell's beliefs.

A tyrant's own freedom is at risk when their greed takes over. In the case of Orwell, he argues that he shot the elephant because of his greediness. “

They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was

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momentarily worth watching". Orwell was greedy for the people's respect and so he gave his freedom to become a tyrant. Later in the story he mentions that even though he is the leader, he is pushed around like a puppet. " I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd — seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind". Orwell's claim is argued when he realizes that he's lost his freedom to become the tyrant. Though Orwell's tyrannical rule is weak compared to other tyrants, the basis of greed is similar. Stalin's tyrannical desires were born out greed. He went and overthrew a progressive Russia. The freedoms and liberties that citizens of Russia once knew were now restricted by Stalin. However, Orwell's paradoxical metaphor still holds true and Stalin along with his family were imprisoned for his actions. Stalin is just one of many tyrants that qualify Orwell's belief. The most common would be Hitler. His greedy desire for a perfect race and absolute power brought his demise. He went and overthrew a structurally weak Germany and created immoral and corrupt policies along with concentration camps. In the end, like Stalin and Orwell, he lost his freedom when the world joined together to stop the Nazis. Despite Orwell's accurate claim, his view on a mask growing to fit people is flawed.

A mask covers the true intentions of the person. Orwell argues that the mask allowed for him to hid his true beliefs. " I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British". The real Orwell had a strong dislike for imperialism and actually felt pity for the Burmese. His mask though, was one that portrayed him as a loyal British officer. " A sahib has got to act like a

sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things". As a sahib or European he must behave like one. This is the turning point in his mindset. He no longer hesitates to choose between the people and the elephant, because he has chosen the people. His firmness and resoluteness in his decision is the effect of the mask growing to fit him. Stalin and Hitler however defy Orwell's observations on human nature. Like Orwell their masks hid their true intention, but they never changed into their mask. Their masks only hid their corrupt thoughts, which were revealed when they gained a position of power. Hitler's and Stalin's mask were created from deceit and false promises. Unlike Orwell, when they became in charge of the state they took off their mask. Hitler no longer hid behind his deceit and false promises, rather he went and massacred the innocent Jewish people and attempted to conquer surrounding areas, only to be stopped by nations united under the goal of stopping Nazi Germany. Similarly Stalin hid behind a mask that showed him as a loyal citizen. In the end he used the violence occurring in Russia at the time as a distraction. He went and gathered his Battle Squads to raid both government and local Arsenal's and troops. When brought into a political position his corrupt face was showing over his mask. And so he too murder Illinois of innocent citizens. Both Hitler and Stalin are example of two tyrants that deny Orwell's claim. For some people the mask takes over and for others the mask is only an item to hide behind.

Orwell's story brings to light a much larger topic of helplessness. In Orwell's decision of shooting the elephant, helplessness was the primary factor effecting his decision. For us, especially high school students, the feelings of helplessness we face is because of peer pressure. Our peers have a large

impact on what, why, and how we do things. The most common example of peer pressure is taking drugs. When you are at a friend house and put into a situation like that of Orwell's, it becomes difficult to deny your peers. Being aware of this we must all strive to take better decisions.