

The Lot- Michael Leunig

Key Knowledge and Skills

An understanding of the text and the way authors create meaning (characters, settings, events, ideas, issues and themes); The ways in which meaning is affected by the contexts (audiences and purposes) in which a text is created and read; The features of different types of texts (written, multimodal) and how they convey the author's voice and style (structures, conventions, language); The conventions of spelling, punctuation and syntax of Standard Australian English.

Show not Tell: Use powerful images, anecdotes, colloquialisms, repetition, exaggeration, metaphors, irony, cynicism, intertextual references and idioms/clichés in creative writing.

Ten Facts about Michael Leunig

1. A species of extinct flowering plant is named after Leunig.
 2. He failed High School twice.
 3. He was conscripted for the Vietnam War, but didn't go because he is a conscientious objector.
 4. Leunig's parents were low-class workers (butchers).
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Key Themes of “Thou Shalt be Attractive”: Being Unique and Being Happy

What does it mean to be unique (in 150 words): Being unique sometimes means going against certain social norms that restrain our personal identity: “Not just a cell in the social body”. Although fitting in makes us more socially integrated, to some extent it deprives us of our own identities, we must make a tradeoff to find an ideal balance point between social integration and preservation of our “self” (think Tetris). We must think for ourselves on what it means to be unique and one must not succumb to social engineering: “Don't you wish you were free? In your own way, not in everybody else's way”. Although we, as individuals, are unique in scientific sense (genetically), it's a sad fact that we're often unnaturally conditioned by social norms and/or authoritarianism to voluntarily give up our identities in pursuit to be considered “valid”. In this case, our humanity would also be deprived as we're transformed into drones of the system. **Other people's ideas:** Possessing abilities and skills that are atypical, which could lead to exclusion. Being yourself and different to others. Following your passion. Standing out from the crowd.

“The person who swims against the tide is worthy of admiration”: The tide represent societal pressures/expectations artificially imposed upon us, and the person intending to conquer the tide, breaking free of the societal restraints, should be commended because he is demonstrating courage by putting his own wellbeing and sense of belonging at risk. Should he fail and gets overpowered, or if he changes his mind during his struggle (taking the easy way out), society would reject him and he would be rendered an outcast, just like how the tide would drag him off and perhaps drown him. Therefore, the situation is in for a penny, in for a pound. **Other ideas:** Never giving up. Being different. Taking control and ownership of our identities.

Key Words Definitions: Conformity: Attempt to belong to a bigger social body. Mass Mindedness: Thinking about how the majority of people would react in the same situation. Consumerism: Obsession with buying material goods. Superficiality: Overly obsessed with appearance and lacking in intellectual wisdom. Happiness: A state of wellbeing where everything is balanced and working.

What is the message of “Thou Shalt be Attractive”: We must be enlightened so that we may immunise ourselves from the overly materialistic world we live in now. Consumerism, superficiality and herd mentality were explored and rejected by Leunig to be detrimental to our personal development, and that we should start loving ourselves instead of being overly obsessed with celebrities. We should also cast away masks of body image we use to disguise ourselves because we're not deceiving others, but we're deceiving ourselves. Leunig exposes the reason behind why we embrace the “tyrant”'s rule as being fear of societal rejection. As a final warning, Leunig stated how this state of self-deprecation in favour of conformity may cause real tyrants in politics to rise up and “subdue” us like “slaves”.

What does it mean to be happy: Being happy means being content of oneself, not wishing for more than you can afford. Happiness, like uniqueness, should be defined by oneself and oneself only, because we don't live our lives for someone else/the government: “everyone's happy nowadays”. It should be pursued, as long as the pursuit doesn't hurt anyone in the immediate vicinity of the pursuer (crime). Hence, happiness is considered by many to be their ultimate life goals.

Key Themes of “Assimilation Blues”: Conformity

What is the key message of “Assimilation Blues”: Although it is necessary to conform to one's new environments to some extent in order to not be rejected as an outcast, full assimilation is not possible and is a “miserable waste of time”. Rather than assimilating to society, Leunig suggests immigrants to take a step back and embrace their own identities as well as nature, implying non-conformity as an integral part of human nature (rebellion started with Adam and Eve). Assimilation may include to masculinity and politics/war too, and “well-assimilated” people might support morally dubious acts such as murdering innocent people “in their beautiful homeland”. Leunig describes the main obstacle to discovering the true self as the “embarrassment and shame of being yourself”, and that we must overcome this fear in order to find and identify with our “peculiar self”.

Other ideas: Serenity and peacefulness in nature. Questioning Australian culture- not able to be defined by a clear set of values.

Benefits of nature: Nature offers people the opportunity to escape from the bustling and overcrowded modern lifestyle. Leunig calls on his readers to quit embracing an ambiguously defined mainstream Australian culture and to start embracing the wonderful natural environment Australia offers. He explores the fact that people are inherently connected to nature, and nature should still be our sanctuary, how nature can offer us a place to belong regardless of our social identities. In addition, nature is able to counter the bad effects of war.

Main Messages from Michael Leunig

Leunig's Messages: What is real and authentic can easily swamped by what is artificial. Human beings can often be violent and cruel: we need to acknowledge this often denied reality. We gain a sense of self-respect from being our true selves (the person who swims against the tide is worthy of admiration). Reject fear and embrace diversity (uniqueness, irregularity, authenticity).

What is real and authentic can be swamped by what is artificial:

Conforming can bring disastrous results for the individual and society: While bowing down to the tyrant that is the media is not necessarily a bad thing, conforming too much with societal expectations can lead to apathy and apathy allow tyrants in the real world to rise up and subdue us. Apathy disengages us from the wider world, and watchful eyes are a requirement for a truly free

and democratic society. As we stop paying attention to our world, we get distracted easily by smokes and mirrors intent on brainwashing us. We should conform just enough to socially integrate, but we shouldn't conform for the sake of conforming, for that's how authoritarianism take root. Individuality is a key part of humanity, a healthy balance needs to be made. Being unique is the only quality that separates humans from servile creatures like ants and bees.

We become what we believe other people expect or want us in order to avoid rejection: The main cause for mass-mindedness in the media field was mental conditioning exerted upon the masses. We voluntarily decide to do away with our real selves (the anima) and adopt a false act (the persona) for everyone else to see.

Key Themes of “In the Company of Strangers”: Australian Identity

We need greater acceptance, love and understanding-war is always wrong: War is ultimately caused by misunderstandings between two parties with conflicting interests. It fundamentally resulted from the selfish, patronising and condescending belief that one's own nation/interest is superior to others, manifesting itself in extreme patriotism (jingoism), which is usually a warning sign of war (eg Hitler instigating Germans to revoke the Treaty of Versailles). Unfortunately, the global community doesn't learn from its past plagued by violence. To conquer the conflict, we as a multicultural society must accept and embrace people of different cultural backgrounds, and spend more time understanding others. If we don't, racial tensions/conflict may be the enemy within, fragmenting the country and sowing the seeds of violence.

How is the Australian identity connected to strangers: The majority of Australia's population is strangers, because we are all immigrants, and it was not us, but the Indigenous Australians who “used to gather in this very park...their Dreaming country”. To discover our real national identity, we must learn to embrace other cultures as they form an integral part of us too. In a multicultural nation such as Australia, there is no point in finding The Other and separating society into “us and them”, for this actually separate ourselves from our true national identities. This may cause civil war, and it is a well known trend that civil wars are much more brutal than wars against a common foreign enemy (think of USA, China and Yugoslavia). Due to the fact that we, as migrants, are all strangers, paradoxically we have more in common than we think we do, trying to cope with/survive in a foreign land. Strangers are mirrors, we see ourselves better when interacting with strangers. In a nutshell: discovering something new, embracing diversity, disdain of the ordinary (stereotypical Australian culture), self-discovery through strangers, appreciating different perspectives.