

Albert Camus *The Guest*: Existentialism and Absurdism

Curricular competencies

Students will think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts. Students will construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and the world.

Existentialism

This is the belief that a person exists and makes meaning for his or her own life. There is no god. There is no focus on the future. The person lives in the moment.

*The Guest* by Albert Camus

In *The Guest*, Daru struggles with his duty to take the prisoner to jail and ends up releasing the prisoner to travel on his own. Daru makes a decision that gives an opportunity for the prisoner to escape. Daru makes what he deems the morally “right” choice. Yet, the reader finds out at the end of the story that the enemy will punish Daru. After all the deliberation that Daru went through to do the right thing, his life is threatened: “You will pay for this...”

Albert Camus’ idea is this:

Why is Daru being conflicted about whether he should take the “easy” option and shoot the prisoner?

Why does Daru feel tension about whether he should take the prisoner to jail?

Daru finally decides that he did the right thing; yet, in the last two lines the reader learns that the prisoner’s brother wrote on the chalk board that Daru will “pay for” his crime of handing over the prisoner!

What is the point of Daru’s dilemma?

Absurdism

Absurdism is a way of thinking that comes from existentialism. Absurdism focuses on the mindset that a person tries to make meaning out of the meaninglessness of life. Social justice and social responsibility are perceived ideas of good. Absurdism reacts to this by condemning social roles, social injustice, and responsibility.

Ideas like “a person should save money for a rainy day”, are perceived as pointless by absurdists. An absurdist says, What’s the point of saving? Spend today! Death might come before the day is finished.

In contrast

A common belief is that good actions produce a benefit.

In the same vein of anti-absurdist thought, BC Ministry of Education believes in core and curricular competencies. These competencies are antithetical to absurdism. Here is an example of a BC Literacy competency statement:

*The student needs to construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and the world.*

Common beliefs and BC competencies encourage meaningful personal connections and allow people to seek joy and personal satisfaction. As a psychological aside, joy and satisfaction produce the equivalent brain chemistry which produces a good feeling!