

The Search for Meaning | A1 Sample answer

Give two examples from contemporary culture that illustrate the human search for meaning. Examples may be taken from Music, art, film, literature or youth culture. (2014/2010/2007)

For as long as humans have lived, they have questioned the meaning of life. This characteristic alone has separated them from all other living things. We have the ability to question and reason. For some of us this ability may contribute to the meaning in our lives, for others it may be completely irrelevant. It's important to remember that the meaning of life and the way in which people find meaning is different in each specific case, yet all are still valid.

As Tom Gunning wrote "The meaning of life differs from person to person and moment to moment. It is up to each individual to define the meaning of their own life, in their own particular moment."

Music

People can search for meaning in many different ways. I will now discuss how the writer of the Marina and the Diamonds song "Numb" was searching for meaning. They expressed their search in the song itself. The beginning of the song shows how the writer felt trapped by the way of life they were living and that they are "stuck".

"One track mind like a goldfish, stuck inside my petri dish"

The writer is trying to broaden their horizons but they are holding themselves back. This is a common feature in the search for meaning; sometimes we are our own biggest obstacles. Sometimes we can be scared to try new things, so we stick to what we know. I know this to be true because I myself hold myself back sometimes as a result of fear.

The chorus of this song continues to explain another feeling which the writer has encountered in their search for meaning. It shows that they have battled with bad and tough times in life, along with experiencing some good ones. They understand that life

can't always be great. In the search for meaning we will all experience suffering, but it will get better.

"I get dark only to shine."

I agree with the theory that we need a little sadness in our lives to fully appreciate those moments of pure happiness.

"Oh it's a reasonable sacrifice"

The most moving aspect of the song is the final verse. It deals with the complicated matter of losing family and friends. They will come and go and we all have to learn how to cope with this.

"Forego family, forgo friends. How it started. It's how it ends"

What really had an impact on me personally is how this is a universal truth. As humans we naturally fear change-yet change is the only constant in our lives. When a friend or family member is gone suddenly for any kind of reason it is sad. When it's the end of their life then it sometimes seems like it is the end of our lives too, but it's not. It is the end of our time with them. It's the closing of a chapter-not a book.

I think that by writing this song the writer realised what the meaning of their life is. From hearing this song, I feel that the meaning is to confront your fear of change and to become a better person as a result. I hope that the writer not only conveyed this message in the song but also followed it through in their own life- that the music was not the only example of the search for meaning in their life.

Film

A film which illustrates the search for meaning is the popular Disney film "*Mulan*". It poses the question "what is justice?" Thrasymachus, a well-known Sophist from our course, said "Justice is simply the interest of the stronger.". Unfortunately this is often true and it is obvious that this is one of the points the movie is trying to make. In our search for meaning we should strive for real justice - not just power.

In the film, Mulan is living in a patriarchal society. Men make all of the decisions all of the time. The film is trying to portray that in order to fulfil our search for meaning we will have to overcome societal obstacles e.g. sexism. This is shown by the act of defiance from a young woman named Mulan. Her father is conscripted into the Chinese army but he is old and sick. Instead of asking his healthy daughter to take his place, they would've forced him to fight for China. He surely would've died, so rather than let her

father die, Mulan took his place.

From this action we learn that family has a very important meaning in life. Mulan's action is not only one of defiance, but also one of love and compassion. In searching for meaning one can't do it alone and family should be there to help you along the way. I know from personal experience that I would not be where I am today, without the help of my parents and siblings.

In the film, Mulan runs away to make her parents proud because she feels inadequate. Her feelings of inadequacy are expressed in the lines "*Look at me, I will never pass for a perfect bride-or a perfect daughter*". We all go through phases of self-doubt in our search for meaning, but I feel it is important to remember that our search is for us, and although other people are important, we should never put anyone before ourselves.

Once we have found our place in the world, we have found meaning. When we are searching for meaning, we must search deep within ourselves. Our ability to conquer obstacles, to come out the other side of suffering stronger and to love even in the hardest of times are all things which I would consider important in the search for meaning. What you find important may be different-it may even be a number e.g. 42