

ENGLISH EXTENSION

Creative Writing Task – Compose a piece of writing that focuses on an individual’s quest or search for meaning during the Cold War period.

‘Texts written during the Cold War focus on the individual and his/her questioning of beliefs, values and what it means to be human in the atomic age. These texts reflect the anxieties that arose as a result of the dropping of the atomic bomb.’ Feature Article from *The Times*, May 22, 1953.

Since the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world has not been the same, with the images of devastation and destruction fixed firmly in the minds of an entire global population. For the first time in human history, a weapon has been created which is capable of bringing the fabled idea of Armageddon into reality. This has struck fear deep into the heart of society, and as a result individuals have begun to struggle to find meaning in their lives. This begs the question: how will this quest for meaning affect individuals on a personal level?

Some interesting conclusions can be made from this question. It is possible that individuals could cling on stronger than ever to the beliefs and values of the past in order to restore their sense of human identity through the certainties which they once created. It is also equally likely that individuals could begin to abandon their connections to the pre-war values and beliefs which had failed them during the war to find their own personal sense of identity. However, the majority of theorists have noted that there has been a substantial shift away from the beliefs of the past. What has made this possibility more popular than the other, which would seem to provide a more stable society through the values of the past? The answer lies with contextual factors which have shaped the post-bomb period.

While the dropping of the bombs signified the end of the war in the Pacific, it did not signify an end to the conflict. Fearful of the almost God-like power America had inherited through its possession of the bomb, other nations (most notably the communist Soviet Union) began to develop their own atomic arsenals in order to protect themselves from being attacked. This was the beginning of the Cold War arms race. While the main intention of engaging in such a ‘race’ is to provide a means of defence against being attacked by other nations, it has had the side effect of creating new and innovative weaponry with the capability of unleashing unprecedented destruction to the global population.

As such, the Cold War arms race, which had sparked from the burning embers of World War II, has only intensified global paranoia that Armageddon may become a realistic global reality. This has led many individuals to make the stark realisation that human existence cannot be guaranteed into the future, and that pre-war values and beliefs may actually be a restricting factor in allowing individuals to live life with the greatest possible amount of enjoyment. Those who have made this realisation have thus begun questioning the relevance of pre-war belief systems and the values they entail.

One of the most dramatic results of this shift away from pre-war certainties has occurred with the development of the beatnik generation. The beatniks no longer value the religious ideologies of the past, instead creating their own set of values based on the works of existential philosophers such as Sartre and Nietzsche. These values mainly focus around notions relating to the death of God and the need for the individual to choose their own ideas about what they wish to value. As such, the religious ideologies of the past are no longer of significance in shaping the values of individuals within society.

However, has this shift in values been beneficial to the individual’s quest for identity in the atomic age? Logic would suggest that any devolvement of the belief systems which have previously provided individuals with their sense of identity would have a demeaning effect on how the individual can now find their human identity. Logic, however, does not necessarily have to match up

with reality! Identity, which can no longer be gauged from the religious beliefs held by all, must be derived from the personal values held by each individual. As such, an individual's sense of identity in the atomic age is relative to their own personal values, not the values held by an entire population like in the pre-war era.

After acknowledging the contest of the period, it becomes evident as to why pre-war beliefs and values have lost their significance since the dropping of the bomb. No longer can individuals find identity with large scale belief systems – their notions of what it means to be human in the atomic age must be derived from their own set of personal values.