ENGLISH CONTEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“Encountering conflict”

Includes:
- A Separation
- Every Man in this Village is a Liar
- Life of Galileo
- The Lieutenant

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Understanding the context

Conflict is inevitably encountered by all humans in different ways. Consider the types of conflicts faced by individuals: personal conflict, interpersonal conflict and extra-personal conflict. The study of this Context requires an understanding of a range of conflicts including moral dilemmas, differences with immediate others and social unrest, such as war. However, it is imperative to also consider the various ways in which people ‘encounter’ conflict in their lives and how they deal with and resolve the battles and challenges they face as a result of particular conflicts.

It is necessary to define the phrase ‘encountering conflict’. ‘Conflict’ may be defined as a clash, disagreement or battle between two or more parties. It may be driven by the need to survive or by contrasting opinions, principles, ideologies or modes of survival. It may be constituted by psychological distress, contradictory political views or armed warfare. Also, it is valuable to consider the antonyms of ‘conflict’, such as peace, harmony, agreement and reconciliation.

To ‘encounter’ conflict may be an unexpected or chance meeting with an adversary in confrontation or combat. The people involved in conflict may be perpetrators or victims. Whether they cause or are consequently affected by conflict, individuals are largely influenced by their values and beliefs. Culture, religion, history and family actively manipulate the behaviour of individuals in both their contributions to conflict and their reactions to conflict.

Conflicts occur on many levels. In film and literature they are often characterised by a clash between good and evil. However, in real life the distinction between good and evil is not always clearly defined and a conflict may arise from a difference of opinion or a varied angle of perception. Individuals must understand and make choices between hate, arrogance, intolerance, superiority, greed and anger or compassion, tolerance, empathy, kindness, love, kindness, generosity and peace.
Personal Conflict

The inner conflicts of an individual may embody a personal dilemma of a moral nature. Inevitably the individual will have to make a choice in order to resolve and shed the emotional residue of the personal conflict or pursue an emotional battle. The decisions made by individuals may not only create a personal struggle but may change the direction of their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. Internal conflict arises from making personal choices and can lead to feelings of indecisiveness, confusion or anxiety. An individual may find themselves in an arena of inner conflict when they feel a need for others to recognise that something is important to them.

Personal beliefs and values contribute to shaping the identity of an individual, which influences personality, cognitive and physical behaviour. There is less potential for conflict when people share complementary value systems. In contrast, people who believe strongly in a value may welcome confrontation. Individual priorities and preferences may also lead people into conflict of a personal nature, such as a battle of conscience or a concern for displeasing others. At the ethical core of personal conflict is trust.

The dispositions and temperaments of individuals may influence their decisions and behaviour which will inevitably impact on those around them. Dispositional tendencies and established personality traits, such as being agreeable or harbouring high levels of personal negativity, will impact on the conflict management styles preferred by an individual. Those who have a personal negative view may easily become dominated in interactions or appear detached from dispute resolutions. Some may acquire greater confidence and a clearer sense of identity. Through personal conflicts, people learn more about themselves and others, thus they grow. Furthermore, personal reactions to trauma and change as a result of conflict may lead to greater personal strength and may alter the values that have been guiding factors.

When people pursue private and personal interests, the consequences may benefit the individual and their family. Conversely, the personal objectives of individuals may clash or one's personal goals and desires may affect the extent to which they accept or neglect their responsibilities. Personal interests may influence and interfere with judgements with beneficial or detrimental effects on the lives of individuals and their loved ones. An individual’s capacity to make objective judgments may be reduced when personal interests cloud obligations, reason and objectivity. People may act on their personal interests when changing their job or career for more income or for greater satisfaction and the consequences may provide some improvement to their lives. However, when people neglect or disregard their responsibilities and ethical duties in their pursuit of personal interests, a situation of conflict may arise.

The desire for power is an aspect of our inherent competitive human nature. Individuals may strive for power in any setting in which there are competing interests. Conflict may arise as individuals or groups try to gain advantage over one another. In order to survive, humans will make sacrifices and act in their own best interests. Human instinct dictates that one acts to preserve one’s own human life.
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One’s conflict management style is deemed to have a proportional impact on the extent to which they experience conflict in their personal environment. The strategies an individual utilises in managing conflict largely depend on emotional intelligence, stress management and capacity to accommodate compromise and stand firm. Individuals may encounter inner conflict in their relationships with family and friends, in their professional life or in their civic life. On a personal level, if an individual is open to additional possibilities, factors such as miscommunication, fear and assumption may be less pervasive and damaging. The resolutions of ongoing tensions may stimulate either cooperative or antagonistic behaviour.

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflicts may occur between family members, between neighbours or within groups in the community. Relationships may be weakened or strengthened by conflict. In resolving interpersonal conflict, both parties must collaborate to find an acceptable solution that is mutually satisfactory. Approaches that embody fairness and equal participation are most likely to last. Effective communication and empathy are essential.

Conflicts between loved ones, such as family and friends, parents and children and between marital spouses, may stem from an inner conflict. Personal issues may be projected into the relationship and exacerbate interpersonal relationships. One’s behaviour can contribute to interpersonal problems when an individual’s focus on their personal interests damages a personal or professional relationship. Opposing beliefs, opinions and values may also be sources of conflict within relationships.

Conflict occurs in healthy relationships, but can force a relationship to come to a painful end. External conflict can lead to feelings of anger, hurt, fear, jealousy, resentment and hostility. Honesty, respect and trust are core factors that contribute to the resolution of interpersonal conflicts. The end of relationships may cause further conflict, particularly if there has been a betrayal, a battle for pride or disappointed expectations.

Methods of resolving interpersonal conflicts will impact significantly on relationships. Individuals may chose to avoid a conflict if they perceive confrontation will cause them significant loss or change. People who find it difficult to assert themselves or control their emotions may be reluctant to acknowledge that a conflict exists. Individual differences and opposite character traits may also hinder the resolution of conflict within relationships. However, avoidance strategies will eventually cause further tension in interactions and denial can lead to even greater conflict in the future.

More competitive approaches involve the use or abuse of power to manipulate the conflict in their favour. This can exacerbate distrust between parties and hinder long-term conflict resolution. In a school or work setting, conflict in the form of bullying may arise as a result of a struggle for attention from peers, family members or colleagues. Alternatively, bullying may be the manifestation of a power struggle. The duration of the victimisation of an individual by a bully
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depends on the way in which the conflict is managed and resolved. Often, a third party can help to assuage the personal issues impacting on the negative relationship.