‘Encountering Conflict’

Context Study Year 12 2013

*The Quiet American*
The focus in this area of study is on reading and writing and their interconnection. Students will read these texts in order to identify, discuss and analyse ideas and/or arguments associated with the selected Context. Students will then draw on the ideas and/or arguments they have gained from the texts studied to construct their own texts.
Outcome 2

- On completion of this unit, student should be able to draw on ideas and/or arguments suggested by a chosen Context to create written texts for a specified audience and purpose; and to discuss and analyse in writing their decisions about form, purpose, language, audience and context.
Curriculum and Assessment
Section B requires students to complete an extended written response. In your writing, you must draw on ideas suggested by the Context Encountering Conflict.

Your writing must draw directly from at least one selected text that you have studied for this Context (The Quiet American) or Paradise Road for the exam) and be based on the ideas in the prompt.

Your response may be an expository, persuasive or imaginative piece of writing.
Expository Writing

- This style of writing is designed to explain, explore, analyse or to give information.
- Typical forms include an essay, feature article, non-fiction prose, lecture transcript and report.
This style of writing is designed to persuade, argue, rebut, encourage action or inspire.

Typical forms include an argumentative essay, letter to the editor/ opinion article or persuasive speech.
This style of writing is designed to entertain, divert, describe, reflect, encourage reflection and explore.

Typical forms include a narrative, poem, descriptive writing or journal entry.
This task requires a sophisticated response in language, form and purpose.

Examples of ‘unsophisticated responses’ include:

- Love letters
- Simplistic diary entries
- Tales of fractured schoolyard friendships
- Anything more suited to ‘Dr Phil’ or ‘Bold and the Beautiful’.
Produce one piece of writing in response to one of two prompts.

Your writing must have implicit or explicit reference to ‘Paradise Road’. You may also draw on other material.

Your response may be expository, persuasive or imaginative.

You must complete a written explanation which identifies your choices in regards to form, audience, purpose, context and language.
Your written explanation is only a requirement of the SAC. You are asked to explain your choices in regards to form, audience, purpose, context and language. In order to do this, you need to have thought of reasons for your choices.
Your work is assessed on the extent to which it blends together the ideas of the text, the prompt of the context and a sophistication in writing/ expression.
This means that a response that focuses on one area at the cost of the other two will not score highly.
REMEMBER:

*The Quiet American* itself is not the focus of our study, but a springboard for ideas about conflict
Graham Greene’s allegorical novel, *The Quiet American*, was first published in 1955. Greene’s extraordinary career included reporting as a war correspondent for *The Times* and *Le Figaro* in French Indochina from 1951 to 1954, and *The Quiet American* draws on this experience.
Historical overview of conflict in Vietnam

- [http://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/history/euro-hist/cold-war/v/vietnam-war](http://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/history/euro-hist/cold-war/v/vietnam-war)
- As you view, construct a timeline in your notes providing an overview of the Vietnam conflicts
Initially, the novel was widely censured for being anti-American as it foreshadowed the United States’ covert involvement in Vietnam long before this became public knowledge. Greene’s portrayal of a naive American protagonist promulgating the necessity of interventionist politics is just as disturbing today as it was when the novel was first released, though perhaps for different reasons. There are clear parallels between Alden Pyle’s clandestine agenda to establish a ‘Third Force’, independent of both the French and the Communists, and American foreign policy of more recent times. Indeed, Greene’s text may be read as a grim warning as to how particular responses to conflict can compromise national and personal integrity.
The Quiet American explores the ethics of Western involvement in other parts of the world. It asks whether we, the Western observers can in fact know what is best for other people and whether we should act for them or let them act for themselves. It asks when well-intentioned help becomes interference. This is shown both on personal levels, in Pyle’s desire to help Phuong, and on the national level. We also acknowledge the need to understand cultures on their own terms and in their own contexts.
The idea of ‘Encountering Conflict’ is both explicitly and implicitly explored in *The Quiet American*. Conflict occurs at a societal as well as a personal level. The setting is Vietnam in the early 1950s, before the defeat and subsequent withdrawal of the French. War, therefore, provides the backdrop to a clash between personal and political ideologies. There is a running debate throughout the text on the issue of foreign intervention – most comprehensively articulated when the two protagonists are trapped in the watchtower. The larger conflict between the French colonialists and Vietnamese nationalists is also mirrored in the romantic dispute between Thomas Fowler and Pyle. Both men are in love with the same Vietnamese woman and each bring their own self-interested agenda to the relationship. In this sense, Fowler and Pyle’s rival attempts to possess Phuong reflect the West’s attempts to possess and control Vietnam itself.

*The Quiet American* is a deeply political novel, not just in terms of its prescient appraisal of the conflicted relationship between Vietnam and the United States, but also in its cautionary exploration of the individual’s response to conflict.
As Fowler is the narrator of *The Quiet American*, everything we read is seen through his eyes and coloured by his self perceptions. Throughout the novel he constantly claims to be “degage” (detached from events), however as the narrative progresses we are shown that his passionate nature through his actions in contrast to his words. Fowler expresses his outrage at the horrors of war, his hurt at the prospect of losing Phuong and ultimately his anger at Pyle’s careless intervention in the war. Fowler is a man of contradictions, and his internal conflicts are seen as he struggles to balance what he wants to believe, and what he truly feels.
Pyle, the quiet American, is an inexperienced young man, who comes to Vietnam stubborn with the rightness of his own actions and ideologies. Fowler describes him as “innocent” and “young and ignorant and silly”, and through his speech and actions we also see an arrogant and insensitive side to his personality. Pyle is largely influenced by the writings of York Harding, who discusses the need for intervention in Asian politics, and under this influence seeks out a “Third Force” that America should support in opposition to both the French and the Vietminh. Pyle is unable to set aside his own cultural frameworks when dealing with an unfamiliar situation, and this contributes to his downfall.
Phuong is a survivor, a woman who learns early in life that she must play a role in order to survive. She is realistic, adaptable and composed. Pyle sees Phuong as a gentle person in need of protection from the outside world, and fails to see her tough and calculating streak. Just as he cannot see this side of Phuong, he cannot see the toughness and complexity of Vietnam. As readers, we are never explicitly given anything from Phuong’s perspective, as she speaks little and, as Fowler observes, is capable of saying only what the listener wants to hear.
Graham Greene
1904-1991
Graham Greene was an English author with a voracious desire for adventure that took him through several politically unstable countries, with lack of regard to his own personal safety. This is reflected in his writing, as his travels enabled him to give detailed and realistic backdrops to stories such as *The Quiet American*.

Greene is believed to have put a lot of himself in the character of Thomas Fowler, who shares a similar distaste for the domestic life in London. Greene was said to have an “obsessive need to escape from the creeping boredom of everyday life”. As with Fowler, Greene expressed unhappiness in his marriage and guilt over adultery. Further to this, Greene suffered from bipolar disorder, and often felt a sense of personal despair and suffered suicidal thoughts. This is not dissimilar to the ways that Fowler thinks in *The Quiet American*, as he often wishes death on himself and claims that he “came east to be killed”.

Graham Greene’s interest in the Catholic faith is expressed throughout *The Quiet American*. While he was struggling with personal anxieties, he found some comfort in religion and converted to Catholicism in 1926. Fowler and Pyle discuss religion and faith while faced with death, and this is arguably an opportunity for Greene to present some of his own thoughts on the issue. “I envied those who could believe in a God and I distrusted them. I felt they were keeping their courage up with a fable of the changeless and the permanent. Death was far more certain than God, and with death there would be no longer the possibility of love dying.” – Fowler in *The Quiet American*. 
Pages 86 – 89

Ideological conflict – Fowler and Pyle argue about the implications of further intervention in Vietnam. The discussion revolves around the two opposing views – Colonialism and The Third Force (York Harding)
York Harding

Pyle lives his life and forms his opinions based on the books written by York Harding, who writes books on foreign policy, with no real experience in matters of Southeast Asia at all. Harding's theory is that neither Communism nor colonialism are the answer in foreign lands like Vietnam, but rather a "Third Force" — usually a combination of traditions — works best.

Fowler comments:
"[Harding is] a superior sort of journalist – they call them diplomatic correspondents. He gets hold of an idea and then alters every situation to fit the idea. Pyle came out here full of York Harding’s idea. Harding had been here once for a week on his way from Bangkok to Tokyo. Pyle made the mistake of putting his idea into practice. Harding wrote about a Third Force."
The brutality and casualties of war
This scene is a turning point for Fowler as he becomes haunted by the images of the carnage he has witnessed and he acknowledges that inaction can also have lasting consequences.
Moral dilemma

- Pages 164 – 166

Sooner or later, one has to take sides
Pages 167 – 173
Conflict does not bring easy decisions or resolutions.
Pages 122-125

Pyle and Fowler’s ‘struggle’ over Phuong can be compared to the ‘struggle’ over Vietnam.
- **Engage** – is the French term for involvement or commitment, particularly in a political sense. It was used in the 1940s and 1950s to refer to writers and intellectuals who took a political stance through their writing.
- **Degage** – detached or non-committed.
No man is neutral

http://lgdata.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/docs/2181/456423/In_Our_Time_No_Man_Is_a_Neutral.pdf
We need to use *The Quiet American* as a springboard to explore other examples and ideas around ‘encountering conflict’
Conflict
Causes of Conflict
(The Christian View and Hobbes)

Reactions to TQA Graham Greene and Reviews of the text

Cultural Arrogance/Colonialism

Changing nature of conflict
Samuel Huntington – The Clash of Civilisations

American involvement in war/cultural imperialism

The Quiet American

The impact of imperialism

The ethics of reporting conflict
(Photographers -Ronald Haeberle, Kevin Carter)

Responding to Conflict – seeing the bigger picture – Dr Abuelaish

The impact of war on civilians

The Bystander (Kitty Genovese)

The philosophy of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century moved away from the recognition of a divine authority to an exclusively naturalistic account of man.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), recognised as a leading western philosopher, in his work ‘Leviathan’ depicted men as egoistic calculators whose overriding concern was the pursuit of private advantage.
Hobbes depicted men as being motivated by “a perpetual and restless desire of power after power”.

Hobbes goes on to identify another disposition of human nature which, along with the desire for gain, is the most important source of conflict: pride.

Pride is makes men ambitious and perpetually inclined to compete with each other.
Hobbes’ explanation of conflict is simply put: human beings are social but conflict-prone. Given that the desire for power is inherent in human beings, naturalists (like Hobbes) would argue that conflict is inevitable.
Players in Conflict

- **Aggressor**
  - Much has been written about the psychology of the aggressor and what allows an individual to behave in ways that are against both their upbringing and social conventions.

- **Victim**
  - Apart from physical and mental aggression, Victims often feel powerless and this sense of helplessness compounds their feelings of vulnerability and victimisation.
Bystander

- The question remains if one can genuinely be a bystander to conflict and indeed what the toll of attempting to be a bystander might be.
- “Evil thrives when good men do nothing.”

Can one be a bystander to conflict?
In 1964 Kitty Genovese was stabbed to death near her apartment in New York City, while neighbors ignore her cries for help during three separate attacks lasting 35 minutes. According to police, no fewer than 38 people heard at least one of the attacks. Nobody came to her aid, and only one bothered calling the police — and only after the third attack had killed her. This appalling display of collective indifference sparked numerous psychological studies into what would become known as the **bystander effect**

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdpdUbW8vbw
One of the more famous studies, carried out by social psychologists John Darley and Bibb Latane, concluded that the larger the number of witnesses at the scene of an emergency or crime, the lower the probability that an individual will act.

They cited two main reasons:

Pluralistic ignorance:

- Collective inaction by a large group encourages individuals within the group to accept that nothing is seriously amiss

Diffusion of responsibility

- People have a tendency to avoid taking responsibility in critical situations, instead relying on another person to step up
A key issue in *The Quiet American*, is whether and how to become intervene in situations of conflict.

In particular, as a ‘reporter’, Fowler for the majority of the novel, feels that it is his job to ‘report’ not to become involved or have opinions. As we know, this changes after he is confronted with the horrors at Place Garnier.
This struggle confront photojournalists charged with recording conflict (and not just in war zones) and they grapple with the complex moral implications of becoming involved, or simply taking the photograph.

Full stories of the photographs that follow (and additional examples) are available at: http://www.theguardian.com/media/2012/jul/28/gutted-photographers-who-didnt-help
The London Riots: Kerim Okten

“I feel bad about it. I was frightened, so I just stuck to my professional duty. But life as a photojournalist teaches you that during this kind of violence, getting involved won't end it; it will just lead to more people getting hurt. With the lootings, you're dealing with group psychology. A looter won't act like a person, they'll just go with the wave of action. You feel powerless, but the power you hold is in your job: to tell the story.”
Mob Attack - Greg Marinovich

“It was my first exposure to such a thing. And although, as a journalist, my reaction was fine, as a human being I felt I'd really let myself down. It wasn't how I'd expected I'd react – I thought I'd try to intervene, or do something more noble. Yet I hadn't. I was really quite torn up about that. I was gutted that I'd been such a coward. From that moment, I was determined that, no matter what, I'd try to intervene and save someone if I could”
Stoning in Congo – Ian Berry

“To my shame, it never occurred to me to do anything...Suddenly I realised that Tom (another photographer) had walked into the crowd and stood over the guy...The man was able to stagger up, around a corner and escape. It was an amazing thing to do. Tom undoubtedly saved the man's life. And, frankly, it had not for a moment occurred to me to intervene. When you're working with a camera, you tend to disassociate yourself from what's going on. You're just an observer. We were there to record the facts. But there are moments when the facts are less important than somebody's life.”
Pro-hunting protests, by Graeme Robertson

“I picked up my camera and he said, "Help me, help me. Please help me." And I didn't do anything. I took a picture – and he got dragged off...I thought, "I didn't really do anything there. I didn't really help." But is it the job of a photographer to get involved in this sort of thing?...If you manage to get a picture that shows the scenario, that is you helping them. I'm not in this situation to help them physically...I know of photographers who have thought, "I can't not help this kid" and taken the kid away. And they've got themselves into so much trouble. Because they don't know the situation or how things work. They have a different culture, different views, different medication, and often in a situation like that you end up being more of a hindrance than a help.”
Vulture Stalking a Child
1993
In March 1993, photographer Kevin Carter made a trip to southern Sudan, where he took now iconic photo of a vulture preying upon an emaciated Sudanese toddler near the village of Ayod. Carter said he waited about 20 minutes, hoping that the vulture would spread its wings. It didn’t. Carter snapped the haunting photograph and chased the vulture away. (The parents of the girl were busy taking food from the same UN plane Carter took to Ayod).

The photograph was sold to The New York Times where it appeared for the first time on March 26, 1993 as ‘metaphor for Africa’s despair’. Practically overnight hundreds of people contacted the newspaper to ask whether the child had survived, leading the newspaper to run an unusual special editor’s note saying the girl had enough strength to walk away from the vulture, but that her ultimate fate was unknown. Journalists in the Sudan were told not to touch the famine victims, because of the risk of transmitting disease, but Carter came under criticism for not helping the girl. “The man adjusting his lens to take just the right frame of her suffering might just as well be a predator, another vulture on the scene,” read one editorial. Carter eventually won the Pulitzer Prize for this photo, but he couldn’t enjoy it. “I’m really, really sorry I didn’t pick the child up,” he confided in a friend. Consumed with the violence he’d witnessed, and haunted by the questions as to the little girl’s fate, he committed suicide three months later.
Jonathan Glover in “Humanity: A Moral Conflict” identified the systematic process by which soldiers are conditioned to kill and see killing as acceptable.

Soldiers are physically and psychologically removed from everyday life, thus beginning the process of replacing an individual’s values and judgements with that of the ‘group’.
Away from the restraints of social pressures and in an environment that is highly regulated and ordered, the urge for independent thought is further suppressed. An individual’s moral resources are further neutralised with the presentation of the justification of combat.

The loss of a moral landmark is reinforced by the loss of familiarity in a foreign landscape and amplifies a sense of a surreal existence.
Opponents are systematically dehumanised, allowing combatants to see them as animals, and thus allowing inhumane behaviour. The arena of battle reinforces a sense of comradeship and shared experience which serves to fortify the justification of the combatant behaviour.
On the morning of March 16, 1968, a company of American soldiers entered the village of My Lai, located in Quang Ngai Province in central Vietnam. The men had been told that this was their chance to finally meet the Viet Cong head on.
By the end of the day, they had shot and killed between 300 and 507 unarmed and unresisting men, women and children, none of them apparently members of the enemy forces.

Most of the survivors hid under the dead bodies of their families and neighbours.
Second Lieutenant William Calley was commanding officer of the 1st Platoon, C Company which undertook the massacre at My Lai.

In one incident, Lt Calley ordered two of his men to fire on a group of 60 civilians they had rounded up. When one refused, Calley took over and, standing 10 feet from the crowd, blazed his gun at them.

Calley was charged with premeditated murder and faced a court marshal. Found guilty he was sentenced to hard labour for the term of his natural life. This sentence was later commuted to time served by President Nixon.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPHEvaNjdhw

Calley apologises
Helicopter pilot Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson witnessed the massacre.
Landing the helicopter between the civilians and advancing troops, Thompson told his crew that if the US soldiers shot at the Vietnamese they were to open fire.
Thompson was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. In 1998, his medal was replaced with the Soldier's Medal, "the highest the US Army can award for bravery not involving direct conflict with the enemy." The medal citation said it was being awarded "for heroism above and beyond the call of duty while saving the lives of at least 10 Vietnamese civilians during the unlawful massacre of non-combatants by American forces at My Lai".
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkFa2lSNAGc
Postscript

- In 1998 Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson and his Gunner Specialist Lawrence Colburn returned to My Lai, meeting here two of the women they saved 30 years before.
My Lai Documentary

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpyFXt6oovc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpyFXt6oovc)
  - 10 minute interview – Varnado Simpson

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHvzOSRIBlo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHvzOSRIBlo)
  - 8 minute interview with victim

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Doz_nfzYNjY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Doz_nfzYNjY)
  - 9.5 minute interview re Charlie Co
From Ideological to Cultural Conflict

- Samuel Huntington
‘War on Culture’
Impact on the Innocent
Finding Hope in Conflict
Palestinian Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish came to international attention in early 2009 when, tragically, three daughters and a niece were killed by Israeli tank shells fired into his home.

Despite his personal tragedy, he is an outspoken peace activist.

Dr Abuelaish argues that even in the face of such loss, “hate is destructive. It is a toxin that affects all aspects of life. It doesn’t just affect the individual who carries it, it affects the community. If I hate, who is going to suffer? Myself. My children. My relatives. My community.”
Dr Abuelaish believes that “no one is born violent. The violence is environmental. The violence is the symptom of a disease. Change the environment and there will never be violence. No one is born to hate.”

Ultimately, he contends that “the antidote of hate and revenge is success, to move forward, to not collapse, to not be destroyed, but to stand steadfast.”

Interviews with Dr Abuelaish
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uslS-ln4hPQ