

**Many Cultures, One People**

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**ELA 30-1**

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**The world is divided by many religions, languages and cultures. This is to such an extent as to suggest that mankind no longer has a common identity.**

**Examining the intricacies of these such religions, languages and cultures would also attribute to the assertion that humanity is truly a disjointed race. There is however one element of humanity which brings all of mankind together. This is basic human nature, man's underlying controlling instinct. Human nature encapsulates humanity's basic needs to preserve life, reproduce, and to seek knowledge and understanding. The final element of human nature, the need to explain, is what divides the world the most. Almost every culture and religion has a different explanation for existence, but their need to explain is constant.**

**The primary purpose of organized religion is to explain that which can not be explained through conventional means. These events are often explained as miracles performed by those who do the work of a deity or the deities themselves. Individuals need to know why things are the way they are and for many, that is why they belong to a religion. Either unable or unwilling to establish a reason for what is for the themselves, they rely on a religion to provide them with such a reason. This can however hinder man's quest for knowledge as religious followers often become complacent with what they believe and the religion itself discourages and condemns individual reasoning as it threatens its often oppressive control over its followers.**

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Another major aspect of many organized religions, especially Christianity and Islam is the often overzealous defense of their established ideology. While most religious individuals will argue vehemently and often with blindingly uncompromised reasoning against those who would question their beliefs, some take extreme measures and respond violently. This is human nature, to believe and to defend what you believe. It matters not which god(s) and/or goddess(es) a person worships nor is exactly what they believe significant, the fact that they believe and defend their beliefs is what is important.

The short story *Shakespeare In The Bush* by Laura Bohannon is an exploration into the differences of cultures and how they explain what is, was and will be. The story is of an American woman who travels to West Africa to learn from its people, who in turn learn from her. Before this individual left for Africa, her English friend spoke to her, stating that Americans can not understand the intricacies of Shakespearean literature. The woman refuted this claim, stating that human nature is constant the world over, and despite cultural differences, that all people can understand the general meanings of Shakespeare, and of course existence in general. The woman sought the wisdom of the village elders on several occasions, asking for them to share with her their stories and to explain the meanings of these stories. On one morning many of the villagers filled a hut and as they drank beer the American was asked to regale them with a story from her land. Before she had left the woman was given a copy of Hamlet by her friend, and she thought what better way to prove his point of human nature being constant than to attempt to explain

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Hamlet to these African tribes people. Her endeavor to do so was certainly no easy task.

The villagers and especially the elders questioned almost every aspect of the play. The elders stated that the woman's understanding of the story was incorrect, and that many of her explanations of what transpired throughout the story were not accurate. It is often common in many parts of Africa to explain the inexplicable as acts of witchcraft and this was certainly true when it came to Hamlet. From the ghost of Hamlet which the elders explained as an omen to the madness and strange behaviors of Hamlet, Laertes and Ophelia, all of these were supposedly caused by witchcraft. To most western cultures this would be perceived as utterly preposterous as they do not believe in witches and omens but to the Africans, it is often the only explanation that can be given for peculiar occurrences. The elders also had differing thoughts in regards to the actions of Claudius and Gertrude's behavior after Hamlet's death. One of the main aspects of Hamlet is the deplorable incestuous relationship which transpires when Claudius marries Gertrude just a month after her husband's death. To most western readers, this is despicable and certainly causes them to perceive both Claudius and Gertrude in a negative fashion. The African elders however did not see this at all. For most women in Africa, they must have a husband to survive. Without a husband, African women have little means of providing for themselves and their families and for that reason if their husband does perish, they must quickly find another. These are just two examples of the numerous misunderstandings between the American woman and the African

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villagers in regards to Hamlet. This may seem as though The American was incorrect in stating that human nature is constant, but in fact it enforces the exact opposite, though not for the same reason. The African tribes people perceived Hamlet differently but they perceived it and defended their beliefs in regards to what transpired in the play, this is human nature.

Different cultures may have different ways of explaining things, but the fact that they do explain them and are rather intent on defending their beliefs exemplifies human nature. Whether it is the defense of the divinity of an entity or the existence of a god by a religion or the simple debate in regards to the meanings of a story, most people have different ideas and that is the way people are meant to be. No matter how different people are, they are still humans and they have a common nature.