



Sample Paper 1 Text: Comic

LIFESTYLE COMIC

Text Adapted from: <http://www.incidentalcomics.com>

Guiding Question: How does the artist use text and image to communicate a message?



Thesis and Rudimentary Outline:

Guiding Question: How does the artist use text and image to communicate a message?

Thesis:

Through the creative combination of language and image, Grant Snider communicates human's innate curiosity and insatiable desire to find meaning and purpose in life and the existential frustration that results in learning about one's tiny place in a vast universe..

Introduction

Language of text

Subject of Cartoon

Symbolism

Use of Color and lack of color.

Exaggeration of the building of the tower

Student Response:

The more we know, the more we realize that we don't know. From Aristotle to Henry David Thoreau to cartoonist Grant Snider, thinkers and philosophers have pondered the meaning of life and human's place in the world. The introspective comic by Grant Snider published in 2022 provokes the reader to think about this quest for higher purpose as the narrator describes his desire to find life's true meaning. Through each of the eight panels of this short multimodal text, Grant Snider uses language and image to communicate human's innate curiosity and insatiable desire to find meaning and purpose in life and the existential angst that results in learning about one's tiny place in a vast universe.

The language in each of the eight panels describes the subject's constant search for meaning and the eventual realization of the futility of his own existence. Panel 1 initiates the melancholy tone with the admission that "it's difficult to remain content." This short syntax and blunt statement describes the inability of human's especially modern day humans in the West to "remain" content,. Sniders diction in the word 'remain' implies that at one time he was content. Panel 2 then describes how he "always searches for a higher purpose." This is the first of many comparative phrases as the idea of more, better, higher pervades the cartoon. Then in a series of short phrases in subsequent captions he describes this search for "hidden meaning," "chances to be daring," "insight" and "balance" This listing of many avenues of the search shows the reader the subject's drive. In the penultimate panel, the subject admits the paradox of "the higher I seek, the more I sense..." Snider's use of ellipsis leads to the final punch line admitting his "cosmic insignificance." This punchline helps to capture the subject's tragic epiphany that life's higher purpose might be fleeing and less substantial that he initially thought. Thus, the language of the text, while introspective and melancholy reflects a deep idea regarding existential dread.

The visuals of the text, especially the depiction of the subject, help to underscore this search for meaning and eventual disappointment. The subject has rather indistinct features and takes up very little space in the frame. The vast amount of white space in these early panels helps us see the subject clearly and see his attempts to find meaning. His facial features and expressions are unknown to the reader and perhaps Snider is inviting the reader to picture him/herself atop the tree stump. The placement of the subject in each panel changes as he begins his search and climbs higher and higher atop his man-made tower of Babel searching for meaning. His actions and his posture help to show his quest with him looking, reading, meditating, climbing and fishing. All of these attributes of the subject show him in constant movement and change as he searches for purpose.

The visual symbols in each panel and the visual representation of the search help to underscore Snider's message of the search for higher purpose. The tree stump is used to show contemplation as the subject sits and reflects. The yo-yo could be used as a symbol of playful and repetitive entertainment and his lack of contentment. Later in Panel 3 we see the subject reading a book, symbolic of humans' search for truths found in literature or philosophy. The ladder is also a symbol of the constant climbing and searching. Snider even inserts a cat in a tree, showing risk-taking. Finally, the planets and the sun help to symbolically represent the "cosmic insignificance" of the subject.

Color is another visual element that enhances Snider's cartoon and contributes to the message of life's ungraspable purpose. The use of white panels for the first 4 panels helps to illustrate the first stages of the search and then the sudden emergence of color helps to add depth to the loftier ideas of 'insight' and "balance" depicted there. The bright orange used in Panel 5 might be associated with the positive 'insight' that he searches for while the rich blue tones in the final three panels combined with the tiny stars and the orange planet convey mystery and richness. The visual complexity of the final panel in terms of color and graphic detail puts emphasis there and shows the realization of the subject and directs the reader's gaze to the final punchline.

The final and perhaps most important visual detail of the text is the tower that the subject cobbles together in his fruitless search for existential truth. The growth of the tower over each subsequent panel and the gradual increase in exaggeration helps to represent the subject's desperation and need to find truth. This tower may be Snider's playful biblical allusion to the Tower of Babel constructed to try to reach God. This tower constructed of ladders and poles and chairs (all manmade items) is a rather comedic representation of the precarious balance human's have as they navigate through life in search of meaning.

It is through the combination of visuals and language where Snider has his impact. Taken alone, the language in the captions are quite serious and reflective in tone and perhaps not appropriate for a cartoon. The visuals add a subtle touch of humor and humanity that help to enhance the cartoon and show Snider's ability to perhaps have some fun with his serious philosophical musings.

Grant Snider has created a cartoon that shows something timeless and important and somehow captures the Zeitgeist of 2022 as we try to understand our place in the world and how

we have arrived at this place with a seemingly endless pandemic and the world on the brink of climate catastrophe and widespread poverty. Human's want to find a reason for our existence and Snider shows some of the unanswered questions that we must confront as we continue to build our towers and ponder our place in the universe. Perhaps Snider is telling us that it is in the search when we can feel most human. After all, as Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

Word Count: 1015

Light it up!

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The **language** in each of the eight **panels** describes the **subject's** constant search for meaning and the eventual realization of the futility of his own existence. **Panel 1** initiates the melancholy **tone** with the admission that "**it's difficult to remain content.**" This short **syntax** and blunt statement describes the inability of human's especially modern day humans in the West to "**remain**" content,. Snider's **diction** in the word "**remain**" implies that at one time he was content. Panel 2 then describes how he "**always searches for a higher purpose.**" This is the first of many **comparative phrases** as the idea of more, better, higher pervades the cartoon. Then in a series of **short phrases** in subsequent **captions** he describes this search for "**hidden meaning**," "**chances to be daring**," "**insight**" and "**balance**" This **listing** of many avenues of the search shows the **reader** the subject's drive. In the penultimate **panel**, the **subject** admits the **paradox** of "**the higher I seek, the more I**

sense..." Snider's use of ellipsis leads to the final punch line admitting his "cosmic insignificance." This punchline helps to capture the subject's tragic epiphany that life's higher purpose might be fleeting and less substantial than he initially thought. Thus, the language of the text, while introspective and melancholy reflects a deep idea regarding existential dread.

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Be sure to check out the companion video to this document: [Countdown to Paper One - Comic - Close Reading](#). This will enable you to further understand key concepts and develop the critical skills necessary that lead to success in IB English.

