

1986

ENGLISH EXTERNAL

**Essay Question:** How are the two texts *Warriors Don’t Cry,* and *Gifted Hands* able to be comparatively analysed and evaluated to show language features, stylistic features and conventions that are used by the creators, to represent ideas, perspectives and cultural aspects in way that is meaningful to the audience?

The autobiography book *Warriors Don’t Cry,* and filmed biography *Gifted Hands,* portray to the audience messages about courage and resilience through the lives of Melba Pattillo, in *Warriors Don’t Cry,* and Ben Carson, in *Gifted Hands.* In both texts, the creators’ perspectives on courage and resilience are developed by themes about the importance of family, the value of education and the crimes of racism as Melba and Ben struggle with education and/or racism. The audience is also informed how the American culture of the late 1900s contributed and influenced these perspectives about what it means to be resilient and courageous. The two texts’ ideas point of views, and messages on American culture are similarly developed through use of symbols, storytelling structures and methods, emotive language style and historical photographs and music. These features and conventions are effective because they increase impact of the message about courage and resilience on their young audience.

The creators of *Gifted Hands*and *Warriors Don’t Cry* similarly employ emotive language to communicate themes and messages to the audience about resilience and the importance of family as a source of encouragement. In *Warrior’s Don’t Cry,* Melba’s beloved Grandma India encourages her to keep fighting for integration at Central High school by viewing her trials as part of a greater battle for justice[[1]](#endnote-1). For instance, Grandma India says to crying Melba, “God’s warriors don’t cry”, because she believes that Melba must be brave for the good of her people, as she is one of many warriors “on the battlefield for your Lord” (pg44) who must be strong in the dangerous war to reverse the racist American culture of the 1950s[[2]](#endnote-2). This mindset allows Melba to overcome the racism she faces[[3]](#endnote-3). Thus, emotive language, like this metaphor, are used to convey ideas of resilience and bravery and the importance of family support as, without her Grandma’s encouragement, Melba would not have been so resilient. This influences the young audience to appreciate the support of family as a source of strength. Similarly, in *Gifted Hands*, Sonya Carson, Ben Carson’s mother, is used to convey ideas of resilience and the importance of family support through the emotive language. For example, when Ben is struggling with school Sonya says, “Boy, your brain ain’t dumb… you got all the world in there, you just gotta see beyond what you can see”. The concept of seeing is linked to knowledge, therefore, to “see beyond what you can see”, means to push beyond one’s current boundaries and achieve greater things. Such encouragement from his mother proves beneficial for Ben throughout the film as he begins to succeed and finally excel. These inspiring words and their effect show to the audience the importance of persevering and the positive impacts of family support in helping an individual overcome difficulty which is part of the creator’s main message. Thus, emotive language features are used by the creators of the two texts to demonstrate to the audience how families inspire courage in one another, thus influencing the audience’s values about family and resilience.

The creators of the two texts also use conventions like music and images, to increase the meaningfulness of the message about resilience, from the perspectives of racism and education. The *Gifted Hands* film is a replication of the 1950s[[4]](#endnote-4) so utilizes music as a primary resource to accurately recreate the tone of the Negro culture. For example, the African American song, “What a Wonderful World” by Sam Cooke in 1960[[5]](#endnote-5). This jazzy Negro melody lends a light-hearted tone to the text influencing the audience to view Carson’s ethnic group positively. The lyrics express the Negro singer’s lack of academic knowledge reflecting on the racist stereotype that Negros are poorly educated or the idea that education is valueless. Yet, this song is played in unison to young Ben’s entry into a library – a place full of knowledge. Thus, with his simple desire to learn, Ben defies the past and current racism by not accepting the paradigm that, because he is Negro, he will be poorly educated. Thus, this song is included *Gifted Hands* to help the audience connect with Negro culture through the music style and to highlight the American culture’s racist assumptions about African Americans conveying to the audience a message to not accept the stereotypes of society but to have the boldness and resilience to rise above such challenges. In *Warrior’s Don’t Cry,*Beal’s uses original photographs to increase the reality of the extreme racism she recounts and emphasise the fearful tone of the text thus establishing a strong negative perspective of racism. Two examples are the photograph of Melba walking out the school protected by soldiers, and the picture of Elizabeth Eckford being verbally abused by a mob. These photographs show *normal* teenagers living in a western world like today. But it is clear these teenagers were prevented from receiving a *normal* education at Central High because racism in Little Rock was so terrible that elite forces were required to guard them from violence. Therefore, these photographs strengthen Beal’s message about racism by strengthening the young audience’s empathy for the young victims of racism because the events have become more real which emphasises the courage and resilience of these young people to the audience. Thus, original images and music are effective techniques for conveying to the audience an accurate appreciation of American culture and ideas about courage and resilience meaningfully.

The two texts can be further compared by the creators’ use of symbols to deliver ideas about education, racism and ultimately resilience in great depth. Also, these symbols inform the audience about the contribution of American culture to these themes. In *Gifted Hands* the perspective of the value of education is highlighted by contrasting television, which symbolises confining ignorance, and books, which symbolise liberating knowledge. These symbols are introduced by Mrs Carson’s rejection of television in family life when she passionately says, “you boys watch too much television,” provoking an argument in which they defend their hobby as being a common past-time in their culture; “no more than anyone else… we cannot possibly survive without television”. An American history book, written in 1966, says, “Never has a series of educational or informative programmers been included among the top 10”[[6]](#endnote-6) showing that television was never used to increase knowledge. Even though her children are content with this social normality, Mrs Carson is determined to reject television and replace it with learning because she is deeply concerned about her boy’s future and their academic struggles. She says, “…Why you waste all that time watching the TV? If you used that time to develop your God-given gifts, it wouldn’t be long before folks was watching you on TV.” In saying this Mrs Carson presents a core message of the film – the value of education and knowledge and that anyone can attain it. In rejecting television, she rejects ignorance because it would confine her boys to the poverty cycle, that was common in Negro culture, and instead she encourages them to read which allowing them to become overcome their previous learning difficulties and granting Ben career success. Thus, these symbols convey *Gifted Hand*‘s that knowledge brings success, a message that Ben Carson strongly believes now[[7]](#endnote-7), that no matter the individual’s background they can overcome their difficulties by rejecting ignorance and striving for success. Whereas, in *Warrior’s Don’t Cry,* there is the strong symbol of being a warrior in the book which symbolises the resilience was induced by racism as the tool for Melba to survive Little Rock rather than resilience being a chosen mindset as in *Gifted Hands*. Resilience and courage that transformed a young girl into a hardened warrior. Besides the symbol of the warrior fighting for justice against racism, there is also the symbol of Negro people as Ethiopia[[8]](#endnote-8). This is portrayed in a Bible verse Grandma India reads, “and Ethiopia shall stretch forth her wings”. This symbol consoles Grandma India when she is frustrated by the oppression white supremacy in American culture that prevents her people receiving justice[[9]](#endnote-9). The verse gives her hope that God will soon answer her prayers and the Negro people, descended from colonised areas of Africa like Ethiopia, will be released from the oppression of racism and have the freedom to soar as a bird[[10]](#endnote-10). Thus symbols facilitate Beal’s message about how overwhelming the racist culture was and the helps the author promote to the audience the idea that God is a source of courage, hope, and, consequently, resilience. Therefore, symbols are an effective technique used in both the texts to convey messages to the audience about the wrongs of racism and the value of education in a powerful way.

The text’s creators also use various narrative structures to enhance their ideas about courage and resilience to the audience so that they may have a greater understanding of characters and therefore the story’s message. In *Gifted Hands* a flashback convention contrasts Ben’s difficult background with his incredible future. The flashback transports the audience from the scene where Carson is solving an impressive medical feat, back to his childhood with his many personal struggles. This show the audience how a love learning, improving and resilience allows an individual of any background to achieve incredible things. It also develops the film’s key message that learning, which is about resilience, shapes a person’s future. This perspective is achieved by the flashback because it creates contrast between Ben’s meek childhood where he struggles to learn but continues to persist and his future where he is reaching new medical heights. Beal’s instead uses a simplistic chronological structure with first person perspective to help her younger audience to empathise with Melba as the persecution intensifies. For example, is Melba’s diary entry that allows the audience to here her perspective before the beginning of integration, “Dear Diary, it’s happening today. What I’m afraid of most is that they won’t like me and integration won’t work….”. This personal perspective gives the audience insight into Melba’s feelings and her trails increase allowing them to better empathise with her increasing the impact of the adult Melba’s message to the audience about the horrors of racism. Thus, carefully chosen storytelling methods are an effective way of communicating a message to the audience.

In conclusion, the both creators of the two texts both employ techniques like symbolism, appropriate structures, emotive language and features like historical music and images to help the audience understand the racist culture of America and the oppressed Negro culture, the value of education, and family. Beal’s focuses on the emotional resilience in the face of adversity such as racism whereas the creators of *Gifted Hands* focus on the value of resilience in achieving your personal best and overcoming obstacles and both perspectives on resilience require courage. Such techniques have proven to be highly effective in evolving ideas about courage and resilience to the audience in a deeper and impactful way throughout the two texts.

Word Count 1986

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