

Assignment 4A – Fiction

Write an analytical essay (900-1200 words) in which you analyze and interpret Fiona Maazel's short story "Let's Go to the Videotape".

Part of your essay must focus on the father-son relationship. In addition your essay must include an analysis of the style of writing in lines 102-113.

Your essay **must** include references to the short story.

Material: Fiona Maazel, "Let's Go to the Videotape", 2016.

Assignment 4A, fiction – "Let's Go to the Videotape"

To lose a person who you always have been close to and shared almost all your life with is one of the hardest things that life offers. And knowing that you're never going to see that one person again is a nightmare. Yet, unfortunately, the majority of people experiences it one way or another. The short story "Let's Go to the Videotape" by Fiona Maazel discovers some of the following consequences of losing a closely related family member such as grief, loneliness and isolation.

The short story presents, how the father-son relationship between Nick Slocombe and his 5-year-old boy Gus unfolds in the wake of the loss of Gus' mother, who died three years ago in a car accident. Since Nick's wife passed away, he has been struggling with single parenting, "Nick had been so proud (..) But who could he tell besides his wife?"¹

Obviously, Nick goes through a hard time suffering from deeply repressed emotions of loneliness and sorrow. But instead of coping with his grief, he attempts to push his past under the carpet by avoiding talking about his loss with anyone including his son.² When Nick refuses to seek help from support groups and/or declines any sorts of relationship, he distances himself from his own feelings and thoughts of the past. Yet, Nick isn't the only one whose mind is filled with trauma. Gus, in spite of his age has also been mentally and visible damaged and gets diagnosed with a speech impediment shortly after the accident. However, during Nick's attempt to reestablish his own life, he turns a blind eye to his son's mental condition, "Which probably had not mollified Gus, but which had filled Nick with the kind of anticipation he hadn't felt since his second date with his wife."³ Nick ignores the

¹ Page 2, line 55-56

² Page 2, line 65-67

³ Page 1, line 36-38

fact, that Gus actually is in need for a deep and reassuring talk to clear up the traumatic experience.

Anyhow, Nick doesn't appear as a cruel or unresponsive parent. Contrarily, he shines through as an overprotective and engaging parent, who cares about his kid's development, which especially is clarified in Nick's participation in Gus' school life.⁴ Yet, Gus and Nick never really get to talk about, what really matters below the surface and causes their father-son relationship to collide and become superficial. The mental distance between Nick and Gus is further demonstrated in the symbolism of the title.

The title symbolically suggests, how Nick and Gus differently use videotapes and social media to approach their problems. During Gus' childhood Nick has felt very lonely having to experience his son's big and small threshold moments all by himself without anyone to share them with.⁵ Yet, as a result of Nick's loneliness he begins to record and upload videos on the internet of Gus' development in order to share the little moments with people, who care, *"After she was gone, he found himself unwilling to entrust his hurt to anyone but her. But now he was replying to these inquiries with the story of her death, and within a few minutes, he'd been added or invited to multiple groups having to do with widowhood and single parenting."*⁶ The quote illustrates, how Nick discovers the possibility of using videotapes of his son's private experiences as a tool to start connecting with other people again. However, by constantly having to experience the world behind a screen, Nick manages to become even more distant to his son. His phone serves as a distraction filter, which keeps him from realizing, how Gus really feels through it all. Additionally, the title can be understood as a hint to the climax of the story, in which, Gus finally finds a way to put his own feelings of survivor guilt and sorrow into words on a videotape.⁷ Nick and Gus clearly deal with their feelings on two completely different scales, which also is distinct in the style of writing in the text.

The style of writing in the lines 102-113 varies depending on, whose perspective is being followed, because the personality of Nick and Gus clearly is reflected in the language usage. Gus' perspective is illustrated through reported speech, in which the reader gets to

⁴ Page 3, line 90-102

⁵ Page 2, line 52-54

⁶ Page 2, line 66-69

⁷ Page 4, line 139-140

know his own way of expressing, *““Okay, lemme get my stuff (..) “Vroom! Vroom!””*⁸. The contraction of the two words “let” and “me” together with the appearance of diminutives and onomatopoeia indicate Gus’ low style of language, which emphasizes his state in life. In addition, Nick’s perspective and language is expressed through descriptions of his thoughts, when watching the video of Gus, *“(..)because such things were telltale of a boy whose psyche was generally untrammled by the grief galloping through their lives.”*⁹ Obviously, the language is related to Nick’s thoughts based on rather complex English by use of personification and alliteration. Their different way of expressing undoubtedly fits with their age and state in life, however it also communicates their different way of thinking. Gus’ short sentences and simple word choice illustrates, how he deals with sorrow in a tangible and hard-headed way, whereas Nick’s complex and long-sentenced use of language points out his more complicated and unhealthy way of coping with grief. The character’s different way to deal with mourn plays a significant role throughout the text and therefore appears as one of the important themes.

The main theme of the short story is grief, and how to cope with it. Clearly, Nick and Gus have both been affected by the accident, which they in fact, took part in themselves. For the last couple of years, they have been facing a lot of feelings of isolation, loneliness and grief; partly because of the loss of their beloved wife and mother and partly because of the lack of dialogue between them, *“You’re sad about Mom. I am, too. Though of course you know it’s not your fault, right, bud? I mean, we’ve talked about this a lot.” Except they’d never talked about it, though Nick had always meant to.”*¹⁰ The quote illustrates, how Gus’ attempt to show his need for a deep talk about the past, yet again gets rejected by Nick, who is too afraid of confronting his grief face to face with Gus, and instead chooses to deal with his own problems through the internet. Consequently, Nick leaves his son in despair with a feeling of survivor guilt and with no one to share his frustrations with. However, Gus ends up expressing his feelings of sadness and grief in a school-project video, perhaps because he perceives it as the only way left to reach his father’s awareness.

The short story paints a gloomy yet realistic picture of how grief ruins the life of Nick and his son Gus. However, the grief itself doesn’t stand alone as the only circumstance

⁸ Page 3, line 102

⁹ Page 3, line 105-106

¹⁰ Page 3, line 128-130

causing chaos in their life and relationship. Nick's way of coping with grief without involving his son prevents Gus from processing his deeply ingrained trauma from the past. It can be a heavy burden as an individual to suffer from grief and despair all by yourself. However, usually conversation seems to be the key to remove some of the weight from the heavy coat of grief, which everybody sooner or later has to encounter.