

Stacy Dunham

Mr. Bronkar

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Nonconformity

"Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood" (Emerson 367).

All of these people were misunderstood in life because they were nonconformists. Not one of them followed the crowd and succumbed to the trends. We see nonconformity in life, many literary works, and other resources. At certain times it is best to conform to the crowds, but my advice for future generations is to be a nonconformist; if you feel strongly about something, always follow your conscience and your heart, even if others are doing the opposite.

Henry David Thoreau was one of the greatest American writers ever published. He wrote many works on nonconformity and believed strongly that it was the greatest answer to man's many troubles in life. "Men think that it is essential that the nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt whether they do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain" (Thoreau 377). These are all examples of a man conforming to society's ways of doing things. Thoreau believed that people should live their own way, and he often criticized men for following the trends and doing the same thing day after day.

Many people use the analogy "living like cattle, or sheep" when they have to do the same thing as everybody else. This is the same thing Thoreau is talking about when he mentions living like baboons. He goes on to say:

"The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which by the way, are all external and superficial, is just such and unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it as for them is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose" (Thoreau 377).

Thoreau is talking about how men put too much emphasis on worldly possessions that do not really mean anything. The common man does get caught up on things of the world, but one should try not to conform to the idea that one needs all of these extra things to be happy. The only way a person will be happy is to follow her own heart, and only keep what is truly important to her.

Another example we see in literature of nonconformity is in the novel *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding. A young boy nicknamed Piggy is one of many boys who get stuck on a deserted island. Throughout the whole novel, Piggy is the only link to reality that the other boys have. The boys on the island pick on Piggy because he does not want to conform into a savage to fit with the group. "The place of assembly filled quickly, Jack, Simon, Maurice, most of the hunters, on Ralph's right; the rest on the left, under the sun. Piggy came and stood outside the triangle. This indicated that he wished to listen, but would not speak; and Piggy intended it as a gesture of disapproval" (Golding 78). Piggy excludes himself from the group the whole time the boys are on the island, and he sticks to what he believes is right, even when he knows it could get him into real danger.

There are many examples of nonconformity in real life instances also. In an interview with Rachael Buchanan, my nonconformist friend, she pointed out to me that one cannot be completely isolated from society, but she should try to be a nonconformist and have her own opinions and points of view. When asked what does she not conform to and why, she replied, "I do not conform to your normal high school routine. I just don't fit in with the kids that get drunk and go to parties every weekend. I would much rather just go hang out with a few of my really good friends." Rachael also said that she wanted to get dreadlocks in her hair, which is definitely not a normal thing for a girl to do. "I just don't want to be every other girl at my school. I want to be somebody and do something with my life that means something." Rachael was not your everyday girl attending Edison High School; she is a determined nonconformist.

Being a nonconformist, although not always easy is the best advice I can give to our future generations. One should not always try to be an individual just to be one, but you should follow your mind, and heart to know when it's right. You can find nonconformity in many places including literary works, and real life. Many great people have been nonconformists and remain in our halls of fame today.

Works Cited

Buchanan, Rachael. Personal interview. 30 October 2002.

Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies*. The Berkley Publishing Group. 1954.

Thoreau, Henry D. "From *Walden*". Excerpt from *Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes*.
Prentice Hall. 1999.