

On the Island

Section B: Essay

As we approach the 21st century our lives are changing dramatically. With the aid of computers and robots much of what used to be tedious labour is done automatically. Our modern society now allows us to dedicate more of our time to our families and our friends. Unfortunately many people do not realize the benefits of a closely connected family. Once they have grown up, the love for their parents diminishes slowly until the relationship becomes nothing more than an empty shell. They might go through the motions of affection, but it has become an obligatory performance. Often this development is prompted by the integration of a stranger into the family through marriage, as would seem to be the case in this short story. Doris' son John has in a subconscious way transferred his love to his wife Annette. As children grow up, the need to free themselves from their parents grow stronger. This is a perfectly normal process, but it does not have to mean that they should completely ostracize their parents. Doris has recognized that she is no longer very necessary in John's life and has accepted this with quiet resignation. She still looks for signs of affection however, but they seem few and far in between. She has virtually no relationship with Annette whom she sees as a representative of the new, efficient generation. While Doris does not fear progress, she fails to see the use for many of the modern products. Annette on the other hand has adopted a somewhat colder attitude towards John's mother. It is hard to accurately pinpoint the passages where this is expressed, as it is more of a general feeling throughout the story. As his wife, she is constantly waging an unseen and unfelt battle with Doris for his attention. Battle may be too strong a word for it, but there is certainly a state of hidden rivalry between Doris and Annette. John's attitude towards his mother has changed considerably since his childhood. The deep, limitless love that can only exist between a boy and his affectionate mother (I have no reason to think that she could have been anything less) has been replaced with an indifferent love, if such a thing exists. In fact, both John and Annette talk to her as if she was a child: He reminds her that she is a frail old lady, she corrects her at every turn and

so on. In short, their relationship is not in the best of health. The fact that her son and her daughter-in-law are contemplating to sell her house without her knowledge embodies the feelings they have towards her: They no longer see her as an individual, but as a helpless puppy that needs to have all her decisions made for her.

Doris does not feel that she belongs in today's society. I have the impression that she sometimes feels like a ghost; floating silently around, she is sometimes seen, but always ignored, unable to exert any real influence on her surroundings. The trip to the island puts her in touch with a side of life that she had almost forgotten: Nature. When she sits down on the reef and begins singing, she leaves the chaotic world behind and enters a higher state of awareness. She sees that the sea is eternal, that our amazingly complicated society is dwarfed by the sheer simplicity of Nature. Our daily worries mean nothing; the waves will keep breaking on the reef a thousand years after we have passed on. As if to confirm these thoughts, many seals slowly emerge from the water, drawn to her by her song. At that moment she becomes at peace with herself. She no longer cares for the ways of modern times. She has found the strength to break free from the dull and meaningless routine of her life.

I think that "On the Island" is a very moving story that touches upon essential facets of our society. Respect for one's elders is a thing of the past. Now we institutionalize them at every opportunity, we take away their selfrespect and we expect them to adapt to a completely different environment. My generation grew up with computers, they are as natural to us as electricity was to our parents. It is important for us to be as tolerant and as patient as possible when it comes to dealing with our parents and grandparents. However, this does not mean that we should guide them every step of the way. They have a lot more experience than we do, and it is only through a combination of new and old ideas that we can create a world where everyone has their place. Whether one likes it or not, progress is inevitable in all aspects of life. We cannot stop progress, but we can control its speed and direction. If properly handled, it is a tool that will benefit us all in the end. One must be carefull not to underestimate the importance of the human factor. It does not matter that we have all the knowledge of the world at our fingertips, if we do not know how to use it for the common good. Our society is heading in a dangerous direction. We are destroying the very thing that guarentees our life here on planet Earth. It is

crucial that we slow down and take a look around at what we are doing. Only then can we stop the growing alienation.

#### Section A: Summary

In the beginning of the story we find ourselves in the home of John and Annette. John's mother Doris is visiting and she is invited to join her son and her daughter-in-law on a vacation to a small island west of Scotland. Doris knows that the invitation is half-hearted, but she decides to accept it anyway. After their arrival they split up and in the morning Doris goes exploring alone, much to the dismay of John and Annette. The rest of the morning the three of them drive round the island, but Doris manages to sneak off. She has a brief conversation with a local fisherman and is fascinated by the purity of the surroundings. The following days Doris continues her solitary wanderings with regular protests from her son and his wife. One day as she is sitting on a reef, she begins singing, inspired by the legend that seals are drawn to song. Amazingly it works, and she achieves a feeling of inner peace and greater understanding. Invigorated by the experience she finally takes a stand against Annette and John, who seemed to be purposefully taking over her life: She announces that she is selling her house and moving to the island.

#### Translation

The world famous author of spy novels John Le Carr, recently admitted what his readers had been suspecting for a while: The highly respected writer was once a spy. "But I do not want to talk about what I did. You just cannot do that", said Le Carr,. However, he does not mind divulging the fact that he left the intelligence business at the age of 33. At that point he had already published several spy novels. The interview furthermore revealed that even though real life spies generally are critical towards spy novels, they seem to accept his description of their secret world.

