

IDEAS 50

**International Online Teachers Society
Debate
Educational Materials For
Advance and Upper Intermediate
Students**



**International Online Teachers Society
Publishing Committee**



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UNCERTAINTY IN STORMY TIMES

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I write this as the rain relentlessly pours outside my window. Beyond the room where my workplace is located, the TV blares in the background, with my mother and my brood of children home and watching the news earnestly. My lunch break not a couple of hours ago, taken in only a few minutes because of the deadlines I have had to pursue, was spent eating and taking occasional peeks at the TV set. The news and footages all showed devastating damage done by the continuously pouring rain that has inundated lives, homes, property. I mumble over and over again: when will the seemingly ceaseless rains end? It's been three weeks of rain, rain, and more rain. Frankly speaking, I have never hated rain as much as I hate it now.

Rainy days have always been gloomy, depressing times for me. Everything turns dark and becomes drenched in cold and oftentimes clammy wetness. Trying to get anything done outside the house is pointless. Even laundry drying is a big question. You might have the most powerful dryer in the world, but nothing beats good, old-fashioned, sun-dried clothes. Yes, the rains have always brought a certain degree of uncertainty that never seems to go away as each moment passes.

The situation has even been more uncertain while the wheels of progress continue moving.

Roads have been built much higher than residential elevations, making it a toss-up between rain getting into your house or catching the most recent mutation of a skin disease when the floodwaters fail to recede immediately. Going to work and school also become uncertain because the paths you regularly traverse could just as easily be waist-deep or ankle-deep in water and swarming with various detritus and unmentionables. And for those who are able to get to where they need to be, there is uncertainty on whether they will be able to get back home, still dry and safe.

I fret that many of my countrymen are already in evacuation centers and makeshift shelters, trying to make sense of what has happened, what is happening and what will happen. Innumerable people have left their homes because safety is not guaranteed any longer. Food, water, peace of mind, health and safety are also not guaranteed in the temporary shelters; evacuees subsist on the generosity of more fortunate ones who can spare what they have for the needs of others.

I so hate storms, signal or no signal, tropical depressions or cyclones. They have always presented uncertain images of people who might have run out of bright perspectives temporarily---or even permanently. The only certain thing that storms bring is misery, and that has a host of uncertain attachments to it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What does the writer hate the most about stormy days?
2. Why is uncertainty worrisome and eventually annoying?
3. How does your country deal with storms?
4. How do you deal with personal uncertainties in life?
5. What makes you feel uncertain? Elaborate on your answer.



LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY

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Life is full of uncertainties. We might get up each and every day with concrete plans and strategies on how our entire day will go, but somehow, somewhere, there's always a Murphy's law that could easily place us in moments of doubt, moments of asking. We employ mobile devices to keep track of certain milestones or events in our lives, yet who is to say that we will ever reach those milestones or get to those events? Planners and organizers don't work when everything else has gone wrong. In such cases, all we end up is a reminder of what could have been. Pen on paper, graphics on LCD. What's the certainty in that?

We might have the best careers at present. We share laughs with colleagues we have come to love and share our busiest moments with the people we serve or the masters we work for. But who is to say that our jobs will continue to be stalwart incarnations of our dreams and ambitions? Who is to say that the industries we work in will not fold up five, ten or twenty years from now? With the way one successful business enterprise can spawn a wealth of copycats and wannabe's, the next year might very well be the last.

This is precisely why strategists and planners make a lot of money. They take the speculative aspects of anything and readily turn them to easily workable, seemingly concrete solutions that can work in the future. They have a host of tools and devices to do such: financial planners have financial modeling software; wedding planners have a network of contacts that assist them in all eventualities; advisors employ a battery of technological procedures to examine and scrutinize in the best ways possible whether something will work and where it is bound to fail.

Wow, how I personally wish I had a crystal ball so I would know how much longer I can be of service to my children, or how much longer I can enjoy doing what I've been doing. But on second thought, what if I had the certainty of knowing what lies next at the other end of the road? Wouldn't that debase the genuine pleasure that I have felt for each significant milestone, or take away the fun out of not knowing well ahead in advance?

The only weapon we have in an uncertain world is faith. We may not have the technology to see the future and become certain of our actions. But it is precisely our strong belief and faith in ourselves that we can rely on to see us through even the most uncertain of times. Be certain of your faith, even if your fate faces much uncertainty.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are your greatest sources of uncertainty in life? Why do you consider them so?
2. How certain are you of your future success?
3. How do you deal with an uncertain future? Your uncertainties in life?
4. How do you feel when something you are certain of fails to materialize? How do you deal with such a situation?
5. Define faith. What makes it special?



DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY AS A PARENT

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Of all the creatures I am most deathly-afraid of, it's snakes that evoke the greatest fear in my heart. What snakes embody for me is a host of uncertainties and abhorrence for the ghastly creatures. Although some species are inherently harmless and not possessing venom of any kind, it is the cunning and sinister representations that they have that make me find them revolting in their very nature.

My son saw a small snake lying in front of our front gate just as he was about to get inside, coming home from work last night. It was on the ground and unmoving when he saw it. He even took a picture of it in the darkness. He said that he picked it up with a stick and threw it into the ditch. He showed us a picture of it during lunch. It brought out fears and uncertainties in me. What if it was still alive? What if it had a mother, a brother or sister? What if the continuous rains brought on more creatures out there? What if our uncollected garbage became homes for God-knows-what? What if....?

The funny thing about those questions is they can not be answered with definite, certain answers. They will continue to be uncertainties that will always have loose ends and more questions to spawn. Unfortunately, such uncertainties are stupid, for there are more important things in life that we have to worry about, more essential factors that I have to struggle with as a mother who has lost a husband.

What lies in wait for my seven children? How will I work more to ensure that they will be able to reach their dreams? Can I even be man (or woman) enough to provide for their needs? To support them in all their undertakings? What dish will I prepare that will meet their differing tastes?

I add that final question in jest. But seriously, having a large brood can be intrinsically difficult because of the many questions that I have to face everyday. Nothing is ever certain with just a single child, what more when you have more than half a dozen?

We all face our own uncertainties. It's never a mean feat to face them, each and every single day. We often have to rely on instinct, good sense and sensibility just to get by. The road is never easy, but no matter how bumpy, potholed or uneven the ground we walk on may be, or no matter how many snakes and unsightly creatures there are, lying in wait on the ground we walk on, we must always carry our responsibilities well.

Many years down the road, we might proudly declare that all our questions and uncertainties have found answers and definitions that we have determinedly worked on.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are your uncertainties as a parent? Why are they so?
2. Why is it difficult to plan your children's future?
3. What, in your opinion, can ensure that the plans we have will materialize?
4. How do you deal with your uncertainties?
5. How can you teach your child about facing uncertainties in life? Be as specific as you need to be.



WATCH AT HOME OR GO LIVE?

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There is no such thing as certainty in life. In high school, I learned that the only certain things in life are death—and taxes. Let me add that life is designed to carry a lot of uncertainties, for sure.

How can we be sure that the things we are certain of are true or right? We have religion to guide us, the expert opinions of others that we can derive inspiration from. Yet, we can never be certain that outcomes remain the same all throughout, and expectations can be easily met when we do as others do. No two situations are ever alike in all aspects. There will always be variations of one sort of another.

Dealing with uncertainties takes a lot of courage and perseverance. Yet the beauty of it lies in not knowing for sure. Isn't that the ultimate mystery in life? That we are never able to know for sure what lies ahead? It's pretty much like the analogy of looking at a TV set that's switched off, and staring at images on the screen when it's been turned on. The dark, silent screen is boring, dull, and simply dead. But watching a TV program could lead to hours of amusement. But then again, watching a TV show live can prove to be a lot more exciting. You could become a studio contestant, have photos taken with famous stars, or just enjoy the whole show and live to tell the tale. Definitely, the uncertainty in being part of a live show promises a greater degree of excitement.

That is how we should see life---as a show being beamed live to our own TV sets. How we interact with the people we know and do not know, how we react to specific situations, how we deal with every little situation that we encounter will demonstrate how far we've grown as individuals. It is not in the planned, heavily-strategized instances of our lives that we find the greatest amount of encouragement and achievement: it is in the heart-pounding, heavily-uncertain moments that we can derive the greatest pleasure from. Lying in bated breath for an uncertain moment to pass may be relatively difficult. But just imagine what a pleasant surprise it will ultimately be when we find that the hard work we put in has contributed much to the success we reap.

The beauty of not knowing lies in the unexpectedness of the outcome. That's what counts a lot more than all the planning and gut-wrenching wishes we have.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What gives you greater satisfaction in life, the joy of not knowing or the expectedness of planned outcomes? Why?
2. Why are surprises great?
3. What kinds of uncertainties do you have to face each day?
4. Can people incite uncertainties in you? How?
5. Are there things you are certain of? Why do you consider them certain?



LIFE IS UNCERTAIN

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We are not used to contemplate on death or even come to terms with it, for death is certain to come and the fact remains that life is uncertain simply because we will never know when we are going to kick the bucket. What we usually do is to avoid talking about it and try to live as if we were never going to die. On the contrary, we should be fully conscious of this reality and also know the reasons as to why we should consider the contemplation of death. We are not trying to be morbid or depressed when we contemplate about death but it is rather for the purpose of helping ourselves to overcome our fear. As long as we have fear of death, we cannot live our life to the fullest and at its best.

Life is uncertain but if we will be fully aware that death is certain, then it will change the way we live and it will apparently change our attitudes towards life. Our values in life will drastically change once we consider the fact that we are not going to live forever. Come to think of it, we should develop the ability to approach and face death in the right perspective and in a peaceful way. In that manner, we could say that when we contemplate on death, we can have a three-fold benefit. We can actually be relieved of fear; we could also bring a new quality to our life which will enable us to live life in a higher value and it will enable us to die in dignity too.

We deal with our life as if we are sure to know what comes next or what we could do and always think of what would happen years from now. More often than not, we sometimes say, tomorrow we will go to such and such place, stay there for a year or two, sell and make profit; whereas, we are not sure what will happen tomorrow. For what is our life? It is just like a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. It is like the grass that withers and dies, as written in the word of the Lord. Shouldn't we instead say, "If the Lord wills, we should do this or do that."

Life is short. It is uncertain for there is no guarantee that we will still live to see tomorrow. Life can be so vain without God. There are so many people who live their lives without giving God a second thought. We have to bear in mind that without God in our life, all we do is in vain and a waste of time for He is the giver of life. So let us live a good life and die a good death for we may never pass this way again. We've got one life to live so let us not put it to waste but live it to the fullest. For we know that life is uncertain and the only way to combat this is to live as if today will be the last day of the rest of your life.

Questions for discussion:

1. What can we do to make our lives worth living?
2. Do you believe that life is uncertain and death is certain? Why or why not?
3. Do you try to live your life to the fullest or just try to wile your time away? Explain your answer.
4. What do you do with life's uncertainty; do you always try to make the most out of it? How?
5. How do you deal with your life here on earth to make it worth living? Justify your answer.



UNCERTAINTY - Who Knows more than Karachites?

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I like to share some real situations about uncertainty where I'm living. I think uncertainty is best described only by presenting situations where people live in such uncertain situation. Uncertainty is not only a word but a situation or result of a group of e...

Karachi is a city where the only rule of police you can see is snap-checking vehicles and getting bribes (money) if their papers are incomplete. On the other hand the person whose mobile phone was not snatched by a robber is the one who doesn't have a mobile phone. Almost every person has faced a robber and if you're robbed you can't go to Police station as they also want to get some money from you.

Traffic in Karachi is so fast that motorcycles are normally running at more than 60 kph and on the wrong direction of road. Now imagine you are peacefully going on a road and a fast driver is coming on the wrong side of road. If you, ever, asked that person to come right side he'll prove you guilty. Motorcyclists only overtake you from wrong side and you can't find any motorcyclist running as the rode rules.

Youghert is famously used in Karachi and as soon as the price of milk is increased price of youghert is also increased. But, just at the start of this winter I found that Youghert's price is increased by Rs.9 per kg. When I asked a shopkeeper if the price of milk is increased he said no which means that in the summer Youghert is consumed more so instead of increasing the supply they increased the price. Ramzan is the month of Fasting. When this month is started it is tradition that people breaks the Fast with some items including fruits as a must. So, at the start of the month of Ramzan prices of all the fruits is doubled.

One thing I forgot to mention is that Karachi has Law ministry, courts, traffic dept., price control dept., etc. Now, can you be certain of any thing in this situation? When you go out even for your job your wife is uncertain of you come back or not and she keeps praying until you are back home. This is same for the children as mothers keep praying until children are back. Even, you yourself can't be certain of coming back to home and thus life is just not a life but a fear. Pakistan has almost highest number of migrations from the country and you can understand why.

This is called uncertainty.....

Questions for discussion:

1. Would you like to live in Karachi? Justify your answer.
2. Do you think that govt. departments can be faithful to their country? why or why not?
3. How to teach motorcyclists not to break traffic rules? Explain your answer.
4. How to teach shop keepers and other business to earn instead of looting the people?
5. Do you know situation(s) more uncertain than above mentioned situations?



UNCERTAINTY OF THE FUTURE

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We always come into the realization that life is too short and fleeting and even when we manage to survive daily, we are still faced with the uncertainty of the future as a reality. Aually, people worry about a lot of things. We worry about the past, the present and most especially about the future, that is of what lies in store for us. We always worry of what the people will think of us, if we are successful, or what will happen to us. We keep on thinking to the extent of worrying about the things that have the probability of never happening, and still worry of what will ever happen to our future.

We all will agree that the very reason why people worry about the future is simply due to the uncertainty that the future holds. Within the period of the framework and the context of time, as we come into that knowledge, tomorrow is a period which is close at hand. And yet none of us knows how it will begin, progress or end. We cannot even begin to imagine what incident will occur, whether health or sickness, safety or danger, joy or sorrow. It can actually be a day of unexcelled happiness or of an unexcelled agony of spirit.

Tomorrow may be filled with all that can bless us but despite the preparations for the dangers that may arise, still holds our inability to control and hold the future. Yes, the inability to control the future is what makes us worry about the future. The control that we have in our life to protect us from danger or any kind of harm and the ability to decide as to what route are we threading in life also make us worry about the future. Our life is like a stage, we act it out, play our roles, be it good or evil, then take our final bow, retire and seen no more. Nobody is ever exempted of this, for we are all bound to face our Creator even how feeble the apparent impression it makes on our hearts and lives.

What then is the solution to all these worries and anxieties? To overcome it is to live one day at a time. Instead of worrying of what to come and what has already transpired, why don't we treasure the time that we all have at hand? Bear in mind that no one can ever predict the future for our lives are contingent to the will of God. In His infinite wisdom, His decisions are perfect, holy for God and God alone, the Governor of the universe, is the only one who can decide whatever condition we are to be in and whatever the tenure of our life is.

Let us all then inculcate in our mind that we are just pilgrims here on earth and that this world is not our resting place. Let us then make our daily desire and unswerving purpose to glorify God in our life. Even though the future is uncertain, the great consolation of God's people is that even amidst all the mutations of the earth, the word of our Lord abides forever and that we could rely on His promises. Who may ever know of what the future lies ahead of us, for we are uncertain of it. Life's uncertainty is also the uncertainty of the future.

Questions for discussion:

1. How do you view the future? Are you certain of your plans? Explain your answer.
2. Do you believe that we are uncertain of our future and that we cannot carry out the way we plan our lives to be? Elaborate on your answer.
3. What then is the best way to combat the uncertainty of the future? How do we do it?
4. Have you always thought of what tomorrow may bring you? Justify your answer.
5. How does uncertainty of the future affect us?



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