

IDEAS 51

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



**International Online Teachers Society
Publishing Committee**



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THE 51ST INTERNATIONAL ONLINE TEACHERS SOCIETY ESSAY CONTEST

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CIVILIZED? OH, COME ON!

Kathlyn Q. Barrozo
Class of 1991, University of Santo Tomas
B.S. Medical Technology

Civilization is fundamentally an essential manner by which people come together. It is vastly different from an itinerant way of life in that a civilization has a group of people putting down roots at a certain area and establishing their legacy. Mankind has had a number of civilized societies that have established a way of living, education, writing, trade, literature and many other societal components in order to become recognized as an organized structure.

We are fortunate to be called “civilized beings”. We no longer beat each other up for no apparent reason nor consider hunting as a means to survive. We no longer waste our resources nor dispose of whatever trash we accumulate in the most unlikely places. We no longer use primitive means of communication and gibberish to express ourselves. We no longer have to fight for supremacy and survival nor claim our rights through barbaric methods. Oh, really?

Many eons after the species of Homo erectus gave way to a much more superior species, Homo sapiens remains as ignorant as the day when fire was discovered. Countries have fought endlessly for territorial sovereignty, with already large countries openly contesting for theirs against smaller, weaker ones. People get killed everywhere like chickens, while the criminals run free because the arm of the law is not long enough. We throw trash everywhere; even the oceans protest because of the amount of garbage that’s heaped on them. Couples, families and friends end up with broken relationships because of “miscommunication” and “missed communication”. You can’t even understand what many politicians who aspire to become actors and actresses, or vice versa, try to say on TV, mainly because of reasons that have nothing to do with static. Family feuds are nothing of the game show sort, with vendetta being carried out under the most barbaric means. If you come to think of it, where have we come, O Homo sapiens? Are we any farther from where our ancestors started many, many civilizations ago?

We have undergone millennia of evolution from the time of the monkey to the year of the dragon. Weren’t dragons slain by knights long before the advent of electricity? Have we slain our dragons yet, or do they still continue to haunt us within ourselves? Are we any better now than our ancestors were during their time?

I’d like to think that the movement we have taken has been nothing less than cyclical: we keep going back to our less-civilized, barbaric ways. If we look at the vitriolic means by which quarrels are waged on social networking sites and TV, can we aptly claim that man has become more civilized?

Can today’s modern civilization be magnitudes different from yesterday’s?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Define civilization.
2. In your honest opinion, has today’s modern man become more civilized? Why or why not?
3. What are the essential elements of civilization, in your own opinion?
4. How has today’s civilization become worse than before? Be as specific as needed.
5. Do you think there’s hope for today’s modern civilization to become truly modern? Do you have any suggestions?



WE DIDN'T START THE FIRE

Kathlyn Q. Barrozo
Class of 1991, University of Santo Tomas
B.S. Medical Technology

The Billy Joel hit of 1989 basically took the headlines between 1949 and 1989 and put them together in one song. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_Didn't_Start_the_Fire)It has been parodied countless times, but the original song still remains the best. Its refrain goes thus: we didn't start the fire; it was always burning since the world's been turning. The song seeks to exonerate the current generation at that time from the ills that had beset the world.

The song could very well be this generation's song, too. No generation can be held completely responsible for everything that has happened in the world. Although 1949 is about a couple of generations away from today's generation, there can never be one generation more significant than another. All of us have had significant milestones in our own generations, and no matter how civilization has grown, it has still not evolved as rapidly as past civilizations.

Life was simpler back then. All man had to do was put a roof over his head, hunt for animals to feed his family, clothe himself with tree bark and leaves, and stay alive. Now, staying alive seems to be a bigger concern than clothing oneself (ever wonder how fashions seem to espouse shorter skirts and near-to-naked blouses?), feeding one's family (mad cow disease, parasites in food, food- and water-borne illnesses) and housing (even your two-storey house can get flooded!). The world keeps getting smaller, but man seems to be getting nowhere near guaranteed safety and survival.

We face the world as civilized people able to make sensible decisions and wise choices. Yet, how many of those choices have led to one misstep after another? We have many who have double degrees, multiple master's degrees and doctorates, and yet the world has become more complicated and more convoluted in thinking. Our values have been eroded. We live in a world where freedom is never absolute in the sense that rules and responsibilities are not to be bandied about so easily. Many have trampled on the real meaning of freedom and have chosen dishonesty, cruelty and deception as supplements to the freedom they possess.

Our civilization has grown from emancipation of slaves to hate crimes against people deemed "not normal" or "so unlike us". Notions of civilization have encouraged misspellings in messages, and letters used in place of whole words (wer r u? y r u hir?) See, even autocorrect refuses to recognize those sentences.

Despite the advances in civilization that we have spawned, let us not forget the true essence of civilization: to create a more contemporary concept of conventional things without leaving the more desirable values and virtues behind. Let us not become more barbaric in our movement through civilization.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are the elements of civilization, in your opinion?
2. What advances in civilization do you like the most? Why do you like them?
3. Which country is the most civilized one in the world? Why do you think so?
4. Are there any nations which you would like to be more civilized? Why do you think those nations need to be more civilized?
5. What's the difference between a third world country and a first world country? Is there a second world country? Cite examples of each.



IT'S COMPLICATED.....

Kathlyn Q. Barrozo
Class of 1991, University of Santo Tomas
B.S. Medical Technology

When people say, "Let's try to remain civil to each other", it basically means "Let's try to be nice or amicable." I guess that could very well serve its purpose, because it entails a kind of collected demeanor in an otherwise highly-tense situation.

This applies to erstwhile friends and associates, estranged couples as well as separated partners. The situation is actually difficult to comprehend for those who have managed to remain comfortable within their own relationships, mainly because there is no apparent pattern or arrangement involved—just...just civil, that's all.

I have often been amazed by blatant declarations in social networking sites about current relationships that go 'it's complicated'. I have watched the movie with the same title and found it quite hilarious, and which had given me a glimpse of the meaning of relationships that are characterized as, well, complicated.

As civilized beings, we are expected to act in an educated manner befitting our stature in life or our status in society. Openly bickering in public is uncalled for; even eating with one's bare hands has been qualified as 'so primitive' by a certain food seasoning brand.

I still remember a particular episode that happened more than six years ago involving a Filipino child who was reprimanded for what the modern school's authorities deemed as, to put it mildly, 'bad table manners': the poor child had used a spoon and fork instead of just a fork while eating. That shocking episode created huge brouhaha on the net and off, with a host of reactions ranging from disgust to extreme anger to bland acceptance.

We cannot pass judgment on the poor child and neither are we in a position to beg the heavens to rain down stones upon the punishers. I believe the case was closed a few years back, with the child getting indemnification for his trauma and exoneration for his perceived infraction. I dare use the word "perceive" here because the poor boy was just employing a mode of using utensils that has been widely accepted in my culture. I eat with a spoon and fork, which is an upgrade, I guess, from what I used to do as a child: eating with my bare (clean) hands.

As enlightened beings, we should never think that we belong to a more "civilized" culture than that of our neighbors'. What is considered civilized in our own culture might just be looked upon as novel in others', a new way of doing things that other people can learn from but not exactly copy, espouse or emulate.

This is the 21st century. Hearts are bolder and minds are broader. So what if relationships continue to be complicated and many people eat with two utensils instead of one? To each his own, right?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Would you consider a person who is unable to eat with chopsticks "uncivilized"?
2. Have you ever been in a "complicated" relationship? If yes, be able to tell why you characterize that particular relationship as "complicated".
3. What attitude/s or behavior/s would you characterize as barbaric, uncivilized or primitive? Be as specific as needed.
4. What is a civilized society? What makes it different from older ones that have come before?
5. If you had a time machine that could take you to less civilized societies in the past, what particular period in history would you visit? What would you tell the people in that era?



YES, MA, IT'S POSSIBLE!

Kathlyn Q. Barrozo
Class of 1991, University of Santo Tomas
B.S. Medical Technology

We live in a modern era where messages are no longer carried by the wind as smoke signals but as electrical or digital impulses that literally travel at the speed of light. You can Bluetooth anything, as long as they're in compatible packets or frameworks.

When my son Bluetooth-ed a song I'd heard from his phone that I liked years ago (when I still had a cellular phone, he!he!), he was laughing at how awed I was upon getting the song on my phone in mere seconds. "Yes, ma, it's possible!" If truth be told, it's been a long time since I last handled a cellular phone. My one and only phone was commandeered by my son several months back when his newer, feature-packed one decided to, well, write 30. There's just no beating the old models of the modern era of cellular devices: fewer features but definitely hardier.

Anyways, the modern era has seen a rapid succession of technological advancements: tablets with LCD's and touch screens, a far cry from the stone ones that Moses was given for the Ten Commandments; phone applications on technological devices such as laptops, where before, phone applications had lain piled one atop the other because the service areas were impossible to reach; role-playing games that could be played among gamers from all over the globe, where before, role-playing had been confined to "You play the big sister and I play the little sister. Let's have a tea party." ; and phone cameras that could capture an entire movie at the cinema, where before, cameras used to literally spout smoke after a picture had been taken. It's a wonder how the photographers back then didn't die early of lung cancer!

We must acknowledge the efforts of many Tech giants that have produced and continue to produce a wide array of technological conveniences that astound us to no end. The arms race has been replaced by the electronics and technological race. Companies are suing each other, all in the name of one-upmanship. Such bickering creates confusion as to who built what first, but the advantage is passed on to the consumer: competition breeds better products and ultimately, more competitive pricing schemes. All we have to do is stay by the wayside until the best device is created and its price heavily-slashed.

I have not ceased hoping that someday, I will get hold of a new cellular phone in my hand. It will have the most basic functions for calling or texting. Who knows, it might even have a teleport application. Today's civilization is full of surprises, you know...

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What particular technological advances do you consider the most significant for this civilization?
2. What would you like the modern civilization to leave as a lasting legacy?
3. If you were an inventor in this era, what specific device would you create? Why would you create that device?
4. Do you think the current technological race has been beneficial to consumers like you and me? Why or why not?
5. What technological invention would you consider the most destructive? The least useful?



BEING CIVILIZED

Marian Baltazar
Class of 1980, University of the Philippines College of Manila
AB Political Science

What qualities does an individual see as defining being civilized? Is it being able to adapt to the modern world that we live in? Or is it simply because of the kind of lifestyle that one lives with? Will a person be called uncivilized if he prefers to live life in an inhabited area? Or is it when you prefer waking up in a hassle-free traffic or din of city life? Maybe you are being uncivilized too if you don't go much for modern conveniences or maybe when you prefer to ride a horse rather than a car?

The question still remains then, "How can a person act as being civilized?" If we don't have good manners and good conduct, does it mean we are not being civilized? Does that hold true even when we interact with other people rationally and go about modernization the way it is? Is there really something more about being civilized than just being branded as a "civilized person" or is there something more to it than meets the eye? Maybe the way we see things now, being civilized has exploited the people and even the animal's environment.

Actually, all these things can be considered taboo. Being civilized represents the highest form of being a human. So here we define civilization as anything that expands or broadens the human scope that is making the human life better, richer and freer. It connotes getting along with other people but not because we are forced to. Civilization is even sometimes defined as simply a word that means "living in city". With modernization comes civilization too, simply because as technology creeps in, a lot of improvement and modernization are seen and experienced by the people.

The dictionary defines the word "civilized" as having a highly developed society and culture and it is also marked by refinement of taste and manners. Another meaning is showing evidence of moral and intellectual advancement or it simply means being ethical, humane and reasonable. To be civilized means to show simple respect for the quality of human life against the elements of this world. We should never ridicule a person because of their differences. We should carry ourselves with honesty and dignity. In all honesty, let us be true not only to ourselves but to also one's family, one's friends and to the people around us. If a person takes all of these things into consideration, then we could take pride and say that we are civilized people.

In this crazy world we live in where survival of the fittest is prevalent, we should be able to get along and understand the people around us and never put up a facade that you interact with them in an honest manner at all times. Let us be true to ourselves and learn to live in diplomacy with the persons we deal and get along with. Despite the crises that we are faced with in this challenging world, we can still say that people do get along with others and that have gone along well with each other. I guess after all, being civilized is acting in an optimistic way where you do not trod or hurt other people's feelings and when you do not really think highly of yourself and lowly of others.

Questions for discussion:

1. What does it really mean to be civilized?
2. Can you argue with the fact that being civilized is being humane, ethical and reasonable?
3. Do you think there were times when you did not act in a civilized manner? During when are those times?
4. Are you being civilized when caught in a fix situation? Explain your answer.
5. In your entire life, can you say that you have been acting in a civilized way most of the time? Justify your answer.



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