

Sample Student Essay

Experience Life and Confront Death:

Theme of Mortality in a Country Song

In modern society, many people live apathetic lives without much care or concern for their inevitable demise. There seems to be a commonality among social mindsets that although death is known, it's so far away that worrying about it now would be pointless. In actuality, most people unconsciously believe that they will live forever; that when they go to sleep tonight, they will most assuredly wake tomorrow. Usually this is the case; however, death is a ubiquitous, enigmatic force that could strike anyone at any time. In Tim McGraw's "Live like You Were Dying," Tim recognizes through personal experience to not take life for granted and to live it to the fullest. Listeners of this song are forced to confront the reality that any day could be their last. Through listening to its admittedly catchy lyrics, many listeners are compelled to treat every day like a gift, to "live like you were dying." Through this piece, a bridge between song and reason can be made to better the quality of human life.

One of the focuses of the song is to convey the truth that any day could be your last. Every day people walk to their jobs, homes, friends, etc..., oblivious that any moment could be their last. After listening to the lyrics of "Live like You Were Dying," I could not help but realize that so often I take the precious time that I have been given for granted. I walk seemingly incessant routes day-in and day-out, as routine as can be until one day it will hit me just as it did in Tim's friend's case. Tim begins his moving song by helping the listener to experience that moment when they finally come to grips with the realization that their days are numbered. "He said I was in my early 40's, with a lot of life before me, and a moment came that stopped me on a dime. I spent most of the next days, looking at the x-rays, talking about the options and

talking about sweet time.” Here, Tim’s friend realizes that an unmentioned ailment will claim his life, confronts his death, and what he will do with his remaining time. This becomes a crossroad that all people who come to realize their impending death must face: Will you live life? Or let your disease live life for you? Tim uses this song to chronicle his friend’s journey as he chooses to live his remaining life to its fullest.

Another interesting focus in the song is to demonstrate the benefits of living life to its fullest. Throughout the chorus, his friend comes to experience many of the crazy, dangerous things that many people never would because of fear for life and limb or complacency. “I went sky diving, I went Rocky Mountain climbing, I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fu Manchu. And I loved deeper, And I spoke sweeter, And I gave forgiveness I’ve been denying, And he said I hope someday you get the chance, to live like you were dying.” The chorus is a very complex realization of all the things that most people neglect in their life: Adventure, Love, and Forgiveness. Too many times, dreams die, marriages grow cold, and suns set on angry hearts. This chorus attempts to persuade the listener to experience life in all its grandness by convincing the listener of how great it is to take that risk, to feel that compassion, and to realize that life is too short to stay angry with someone. I believe that he, like I, feel that a life spent angry at the world is a wasted life. Too many times, people waste time hating the world rather than accepting it for its flaws and experiencing all it has to offer.

In the next stanza, Tim’s friend continues to share all the great things that made his remaining days into memorable experiences. He said, “I was finally the husband that most the time I wasn’t. And I became a friend a friend would like to have. And all the sudden going fishing wasn’t such an imposition. And I went three times that year I lost my dad. Well I finally read the good book, and I took a good long hard look at what I’d do if I could do it all again.” Through being the man that he never was before, Tim’s friend fulfills the path he felt destined

to walk. He came to grips with his waning spirituality and realizes that suddenly, all the little obligations he avoided were not such impositions. He encourages listeners to realize that even the small things matter in life, like taking that little trip or kissing your loved ones goodnight and that even minute things can enrich your existence. So many times the seemingly trivial matters in life go by the wayside because they do not fit into "The Big Picture." This stanza encourages listeners to break out of their everyday rhythm and take in each experience rather than getting too caught up with all of the hustle and bustle of deadlines and bottom lines.

As the song ends, Tim finally comes to the realization of his own life and eventual death. He poses himself with the same question that so many people refuse to. "Like tomorrow was a gift and you've got eternity to think about what you do with it, what could you do with it, what can I do with it, what would I do with it?" These closing lyrics give absolution and purpose to his friend's story. The true intent of the song was to help people realize that while they may not live forever, they still have time to be everything that they want to be and that each little thing they do should not be taken for granted. Though his friend eventually dies, Tim is left with the lasting impression that his friend's death was not in vain, that he had lived to his fullest, that his life had purpose, that he'd lived life like he was dying.

The final theme that was evident in "Live Like You Were Dying" entailed its ability to connect to its listeners and enrich their lives. I feel this song connected with me on numerous levels. When I was younger, I lost an uncle who was in his mid-thirties. He was a great man and loved his children deeply. Every time I hear this song, it reminds me of the time I got to spend with him and it makes me wonder whether or not he lived his life to its fullest. Did he kiss his children goodnight every night or did he let the pressures of work cloud his focus? Did he forgive people for the little things here and there or did he let the sun go down on an angry heart? Did he get to do all the things he had wanted to do? Sadly, I doubt he ever truly became

what he had wanted to be in his eyes, yet he was everything he could be in ours. After listening to this song, I finally realized that I have been taking so many things for granted and that I wanted to change my life for the better. That even though I know that my life could be long and lasting, I should stop to take in the world from time to time. After long, deep thought, I came to this solution: At the end of life, it is not how I died; it is how I lived that matters.

Tim McGraw's "Live Like You Were Dying" reaches out to people on many levels. It challenges people to break out of their humdrum routine and take in the beauty around them, to show more love to the people they care for, and to take risks for the things that matter most to them. I feel that many listeners, like me, connected to this song through its powerful lyrics and intense topics that many of us fail to realize until it is too late. Through listening to the song, I felt compelled to change myself for the better even down to the smallest thing. I hope that any reader or listener of the song chooses to live life to its fullest, not take anything for granted, and to live like you were dying.