Growing up means learning to make your own decisions. But parents are often reluctant to let go of their authority. In the traditional culture that Chinua Achebe portrays in the following selection, even adults are expected to get parental approval for some big decisions.

**What’s the Connection?**

All cultures have expectations about parents’ involvement in their children’s lives. But when cultures come together, expectations may change—and even clash. You’ll read about a moral dilemma arising from the clash of cultures in “Marriage Is a Private Affair.” Then you’ll read a transcript that explores the same topics and finally view a poster that provides another perspective.
**TEXT ANALYSIS: MORAL DILEMMA**

A moral dilemma is a difficult decision in which either option results in violating one’s moral principles. Moral dilemmas sometimes arise through cultural conflicts—a clash between the values and cultures of characters.

In “Marriage Is a Private Affair,” a father and son face moral dilemmas as to how they should behave when the father’s traditional values clash with his son’s decisions. Achebe reveals this tension through a character’s thoughts:

> In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city it had always seemed to her something of a joke that a person’s tribe could determine whom he married.

As you read, examine the forces that create the characters’ moral dilemmas and how the characters respond to these dilemmas.

**READING STRATEGY: PREDICT**

You can use text clues in a story to make predictions, reasonable guesses about what will happen next. When making predictions, consider:

- analyze characters’ words, thoughts, and actions to gain a sense of how the characters might react in a situation.
- tap into your own experiences and knowledge of human behavior.

As you read, use a chart like this one to record your predictions and to see how they compare with actual outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prediction</th>
<th>Reason for Prediction</th>
<th>Actual Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nnaemeka’s father will be upset about the engagement.</td>
<td>Nnaemeka says villagers are unhappy when they do not get to arrange an engagement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT**

Achebe uses the following boldfaced words to portray family conflict. Determine the meaning of each word from the context. Record your answers in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

1. Her travels had given her a **cosmopolitan** attitude.
2. He **vehemently** denied any wrongdoing on his part.
3. She would not accept attempts at **dissuasion**; her mind was set.
4. It is important to show **deference** to your elders.
5. We can still **persevere**, despite all the obstacles ahead.

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
“Have you written to your dad yet?” asked Nene¹ one afternoon as she sat with Nnaemeka² in her room at 16 Kasanga Street, Lagos.

“No. I’ve been thinking about it. I think it’s better to tell him when I get home on leave!”

“But why? Your leave is such a long way off—six whole weeks. He should be let into our happiness now.”

Nnaemeka was silent for a while and then began very slowly as if he groped for his words: “I wish I were sure it would be happiness to him.”

“Of course it must,” replied Nene, a little surprised. “Why shouldn’t it?”

“You have lived in Lagos all your life, and you know very little about people in remote parts of the country.”

“That’s what you always say. But I don’t believe anybody will be so unlike other people that they will be unhappy when their sons are engaged to marry.”

“Yes. They are most unhappy if the engagement is not arranged by them. In our case it’s worse—you are not even an Ibo.”

This was said so seriously and so bluntly that Nene could not find speech immediately. In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city it had always seemed to her something of a joke that a person’s tribe could determine whom he married.

At last she said, “You don’t really mean that he will object to your marrying me simply on that account? I had always thought you Ibos were kindly disposed to other people.”

“So we are. But when it comes to marriage, well, it’s not quite so simple. And this,” he added, “is not peculiar to the Ibos. If your father were alive and lived in the heart of Ibibio-land, he would be exactly like my father.”

“I don’t know. But anyway, as your father is so fond of you, I’m sure he will forgive you soon enough. Come on then, be a good boy and send him a nice lovely letter . . .”

1. Nene (nɛ̀-nɛ̀).
“It would not be wise to break the news to him by writing. A letter will bring it upon him with a shock. I’m quite sure about that.”

“All right, honey, suit yourself. You know your father.”

As Nnaemeka walked home that evening, he turned over in his mind different ways of overcoming his father’s opposition, especially now that he had gone and found a girl for him. He had thought of showing his letter to Nene but decided on second thoughts not to, at least for the moment. He read it again when he got home and couldn’t help smiling to himself. He remembered Ugoye quite well, an Amazon of a girl who used to beat up all the boys, himself included, on the way to the stream, a complete dunce at school.

I have found a girl who will suit you admirably—Ugoye Nweke, the eldest daughter of our neighbor, Jacob Nweke. She has a proper Christian upbringing. When she stopped schooling some years ago, her father (a man of sound judgment) sent her to live in the house of a pastor where she has received all the training a wife could need. Her Sunday school teacher has told me that she reads her Bible very fluently. I hope we shall begin negotiations when you come home in December.

On the second evening of his return from Lagos Nnaemeka sat with his father under a cassia tree. This was the old man’s retreat where he went to read his Bible when the parching December sun had set and a fresh, reviving wind blew on the leaves.

“Father,” began Nnaemeka suddenly, “I have come to ask for forgiveness.”

“Forgiveness? For what, my son?” he asked in amazement.

“It’s about this marriage question.”

“Which marriage question?”

“I can’t—we must—I mean it is impossible for me to marry Nweke’s daughter.”

“Impossible? Why?” asked his father.

“I don’t love her.”

“Nobody said you did. Why should you?” he asked.

“Marriage today is different . . .”

“Look here, my son,” interrupted his father, “nothing is different. What one looks for in a wife are a good character and a Christian background.”

Nnaemeka saw there was no hope along the present line of argument.

“Moreover,” he said, “I am engaged to marry another girl who has all of Ugoye’s good qualities, and who . . .”

His father did not believe his ears. “What did you say?” he asked slowly and disconcertingly.

“She is a good Christian,” his son went on, “and a teacher in a girls’ school in Lagos.”

“Teacher, did you say? If you consider that a qualification for a good wife,

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3. **Ugoye** (ú-gó’ye).
4. **Amazon**: a woman who is tall, strong-willed, and aggressive.
I should like to point out to you, Emeka, that no Christian woman should teach. St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians says that women should keep silence.” He rose slowly from his seat and paced forwards and backwards. This was his pet subject, and he condemned vehemently those church leaders who encouraged women to teach in their schools. After he had spent his emotion on a long homily, he at last came back to his son’s engagement, in a seemingly milder tone.

“Whose daughter is she, anyway?”

“She is Nene Atang.”

“What!” All the mildness was gone again. “Did you say Neneataga; what does that mean?”

“Nene Atang from Calabar. She is the only girl I can marry.” This was a very rash reply, and Nnaemeka expected the storm to burst. But it did not. His father merely walked away into his room. This was most unexpected and perplexed Nnaemeka. His father’s silence was infinitely more menacing than a flood of threatening speech. That night the old man did not eat. When he sent for Nnaemeka a day later, he applied all possible ways of dissuasion. But the young man’s heart was hardened, and his father eventually gave him up as lost.

“I owe it to you, my son, as a duty to show you what is right and what is wrong. Whoever put this idea into your head might as well have cut your throat. It is Satan’s work.” He waved his son away.

“You will change your mind, Father, when you know Nene.”

“I shall never see her” was the reply. From that night the father scarcely spoke to his son. He did not, however, cease hoping that he would realize how serious was the danger he was heading for. Day and night he put him in his prayers.

Nnaemeka, for his own part, was very deeply affected by his father’s grief. But he kept hoping that it would pass away. If it had occurred to him that never in the history of his people had a man married a woman who spoke a different tongue, he might have been less optimistic. “It has never been heard,” was the verdict of an old man speaking a few weeks later. In that short sentence he spoke for all of his people. This man had come with others to commiserate with Okeke when news went round about his son’s behavior. By that time the son had gone back to Lagos.

“It has never been heard,” said the old man again with a sad shake of his head. “What did Our Lord say?” asked another gentleman. “Sons shall rise against their fathers; it is there in the Holy Book.”

“It is the beginning of the end,” said another.

The discussion thus tending to become theological, Madubogwu, a highly practical man, brought it down once more to the ordinary level.

“Have you thought of consulting a native doctor about your son?” he asked Nnaemeka’s father.

5. **Calabar**: a seaport in southeastern Nigeria.
6. **Okeke** (ô-ke’-kô).
“He isn’t sick” was the reply.
“What is he then? The boy’s mind is diseased, and only a good herbalist7 can bring him back to his right senses. The medicine he requires is Amalile, the same that women apply with success to recapture their husbands’ straying affection.”
“Madubogwu is right,” said another gentleman. “This thing calls for medicine.”
“I shall not call in a native doctor.” Nnaemeka’s father was known to be obstinately ahead of his more superstitious neighbors in these matters. “I will not be another Mrs. Ochuba. If my son wants to kill himself, let him do it with his own hands. It is not for me to help him.”
“But it was her fault,” said Madubogwu. “She ought to have gone to an honest herbalist. She was a clever woman, nevertheless.”
“She was a wicked murderess,” said Jonathan, who rarely argued with his neighbors because, he often said, they were incapable of reasoning. “The medicine was prepared for her husband, it was his name they called in its preparation, and I am sure it would have been perfectly beneficial to him. It was wicked to put it into the herbalist’s food and say you were only trying it out.”

Six months later, Nnaemeka was showing his young wife a short letter from his father:

It amazes me that you could be so unfeeling as to send me your wedding picture. I would have sent it back. But on further thought I decided just to cut off your wife and send it back to you because I have nothing to do with her. How I wish that I had nothing to do with you either.

When Nene read through this letter and looked at the mutilated picture, her eyes filled with tears, and she began to sob.
“Don’t cry, my darling,” said her husband. “He is essentially good-natured and will one day look more kindly on our marriage.” But years passed, and that one day did not come.

For eight years, Okeke would have nothing to do with his son, Nnaemeka. Only three times (when Nnaemeka asked to come home and spend his leave) did he write to him.
“I can’t have you in my house,” he replied on one occasion. “It can be of no interest to me where or how you spend your leave—or your life, for that matter.”

The prejudice against Nnaemeka’s marriage was not confined to his little village. In Lagos, especially among his people who worked there, it showed itself in a different way. Their women, when they met at their village meeting, were not hostile to Nene. Rather, they paid her such excessive deference as to make her feel she was not one of them. But as time went on, Nene gradually broke through some of this prejudice and even began to make friends among them. Slowly and grudgingly they began to admit that she kept her home much better than most of them.

The story eventually got to the little village in the heart of the Ibo country that Nnaemeka and his young wife were a most happy couple. But his father

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7. herbalist (ərˈba-ləst): a person who is expert in the use of medicinal herbs.
Comparing Texts

was one of the few people in the village who knew nothing about this. He always displayed so much temper whenever his son’s name was mentioned that everyone avoided it in his presence. By a tremendous effort of will he had succeeded in pushing his son to the back of his mind. The strain had nearly killed him, but he had *persevered* and won.

Then one day he received a letter from Nene, and in spite of himself he began to glance through it perfunctorily until all of a sudden the expression on his face changed and he began to read more carefully.

. . . *Our two sons, from the day they learnt that they have a grandfather, have insisted on being taken to him. I find it impossible to tell them that you will not see them. I implore you to allow Nnaemeka to bring them home for a short time during his leave next month. I shall remain here in Lagos . . .*

The old man at once felt the resolution he had built up over so many years falling in. He was telling himself that he must not give in. He tried to steel his heart against all emotional appeals. It was a reenactment of that other struggle. He leaned against a window and looked out. The sky was overcast with heavy black clouds, and a high wind began to blow, filling the air with dust and dry leaves. It was one of those rare occasions when even Nature takes a hand in a human fight. Very soon it began to rain, the first rain in the year. It came down in large sharp drops and was accompanied by the lightning and thunder which mark a change of season. Okeke was trying hard not to think of his two grandsons. But he knew he was now fighting a losing battle. He tried to hum a favorite hymn, but the pattering of large raindrops on the roof broke up the tune. His mind immediately returned to the children. How could he shut his door against them? By a curious mental process he imagined them standing, sad and forsaken, under the harsh angry weather—shut out from his house. That night he hardly slept, from remorse—and a vague fear that he might die without making it up to them.
After Reading

Comprehension
1. Recall Why does Okeke oppose Nnaemeka’s choice of a wife?
2. Recall What does Okeke do when his son sends him a wedding photo?
3. Summarize What happens at the end of the story?

Text Analysis
4. Examine Predictions Review the chart you created as you read. How accurate were your predictions about Okeke? Cite specific examples in your response.
5. Analyze Moral Dilemmas What beliefs cause moral dilemmas to develop for Nnaemeka and Okeke? Record your answer in a diagram like the one shown.

Text Criticism
10. Critical Interpretations The critic G. D. Killam has said about Achebe’s work, “Through it all the spirit of man and the belief in the possibility of triumph endures.” How might this comment apply to “Marriage Is a Private Affair”?

Whose LIFE is it, anyway?
How involved should parents be in their adult children’s decisions?
Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Decide whether the words in each pair are synonyms or antonyms.

1. cosmopolitan/provincial
2. vehemently/fiercely
3. persuasion/dissuasion
4. deference/respect
5. abandon/persevere

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• acknowledge • community • contemporary • culture • role

In a paragraph, describe the moral dilemmas that Nnaemeka and Okeke face. How does the clash between cultures help create their dilemmas? How much does each acknowledge the other’s point of view? Try to use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your response.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE kosmos WORD FAMILY

The root of the vocabulary word cosmopolitan can be traced to the Greek word kosmos, which means “world.” This root has given rise to a family of words. If you are familiar with the other word parts in a word with the root cosmo or cosm, you can often figure out the word’s meaning.

PRACTICE Using a dictionary or a glossary, find four words containing the root cosmo or cosm. Define each word.

WORD LIST

- cosmopolitan
- deference
- dissuasion
- persevere
- vehemently

Interactive Vocabulary

Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML10-993
GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Write Concisely

Review the Grammar and Style note on page 988. Like Achebe, you can use gerunds and gerund phrases to make your writing more fluid and concise. A gerund is a verb form that ends in –ing and functions as a noun. A gerund phrase is a gerund plus its modifiers and complements. Here is an example of Achebe’s use of a gerund phrase. Notice how “pattering of large raindrops on the roof” functions as a noun in the sentence.

He tried to hum a favorite hymn, but the pattering of large raindrops on the roof broke up the tune. (lines 175–177)

The revisions in blue use a gerund phrase to make the following first draft more concise. Revise your response to the prompt by incorporating gerunds and gerund phrases into your writing.

STUDENT MODEL

When you choose a spouse, you are making a decision that is too personal to put in anyone else’s hands.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION

Enhance your understanding of “Marriage Is a Private Affair” by responding to this prompt. Then use the revising tip to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPT

Extended Constructed Response: Analysis
What kinds of moral dilemmas arise from a clash of cultures? How can these dilemmas be resolved? Write a three-to-five paragraph answer, using examples from “Marriage Is a Private Affair” and “Adam and Rosie” (page 995).

REVISING TIP

Review your response. Did you use gerunds and gerund phrases to make your writing more fluid and concise? If not, revise to incorporate more gerunds and gerund phrases.
Adam and Rosie

When we were first going out, Rosie’s parents were extremely upset by her dating a non-Korean. They refused to meet me. One day Rosie decided to take me to visit her grandmother, who lived only a few blocks from Rosie’s parents. It was hard to read her reaction. She didn’t speak much English, and I didn’t speak Korean. She offered us tea, and after a half hour we left. We started to visit her regularly, and even though Rosie’s parents wouldn’t accept our relationship, it was clear that her grandmother enjoyed our coming over. Finally she had a talk with Rosie’s mother, and soon after that we received our first invitation to the house.

Now we have a child, and Rosie’s parents have relaxed. I was really touched when her father said at the baby naming, “After a hundred generations our family tree has a different color branch grafted onto it. I was very worried about the colors harmonizing, but now that I can see the results, I am pleased.”

I think if it wasn’t for her grandmother, we would never have made it as a couple. When I visit my in-laws these days, I take my mother-in-law’s hands and kiss them in front of her friends. She and her friends giggle like schoolgirls. In their culture they’re not used to direct expressions of affection—especially between men and women. It wouldn’t be considered proper nor would they tolerate that kind of behavior if Rosie had married another Korean. But my being white puts me in a different category. I think for them, as upset as they initially were by Rosie getting involved with me, they enjoy the novelty I have introduced into their lives.
Poster
Images can also help you consider what happens when different cultures interact. Think about the poster below in the context of the short story and transcript you have just read. The questions to the right will help you.

**FESTIVAL OF WORLD CULTURES**

2010

Brooklyn Arts League

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**A. INTERPRET**
Why do you think the designer of the poster chose the format of nine small images?

**B. ANALYZE**
What view of society is the poster promoting?

**C. ANALYZE**
Do you think festivals like this can help prevent cultural clashes from occurring? Why or why not?
Assessment Practice: Short Constructed Response

**LITERARY TEXT: “MARRIAGE IS A PRIVATE AFFAIR”**

Assessments often expect you to analyze the relationship of literary elements featured in a literary text. Practice analyzing the relationship of setting and conflict by answering the short constructed response question below.

At the end of “Marriage Is a Private Affair,” a sentence reads “It was one of those rare occasions when even Nature takes a hand in a human fight.” What effect does the thunderstorm have on Okeke’s internal conflict? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

**STRATEGIES IN ACTION**

1. Reread the section closely.
2. Identify what Okeke’s internal conflict is. Then note what happens to this conflict as the storm builds.
3. Support your answer with evidence from the story.

**NONFICTION TEXT: “ADAM AND ROSIE”**

Assessments often expect you to identify and to analyze conflicts that are present in the texts you read. Practice these skills by answering the short constructed response question below.

What is the cultural conflict in “Adam and Rosie,” and how is it resolved? Support your answer with evidence from the selection.

**STRATEGIES IN ACTION**

1. Notice that this question has two parts.
2. First, reread the transcript and note the conflict involved. Then read it a third time, looking for details that explain how the conflict ends.
3. Use evidence from the text in the form of a direct quotation, a paraphrase, or a specific synopsis to support your answers.

**COMPARING LITERARY AND NONFICTION TEXTS**

Tests often expect you to answer questions that ask you to make connections between literary and nonfiction texts and the everyday world. Practice this valuable skill by applying the following short constructed response question to “Marriage Is a Private Affair” and “Adam and Rosie.”

In “Marriage Is a Private Affair” and “Adam and Rosie,” having grandchildren seems to help the parents accept their children’s marriage to someone from a different culture. Why might grandchildren have this effect? Support your answer with evidence from both selections.

**STRATEGIES IN ACTION**

1. This question is asking you to make an inference, an educated guess based on evidence in the texts and on your own knowledge or experiences.
2. Review the details in both texts, and connect that information with what you know about the grandparent and grandchild relationship. Use evidence from the texts and even your own life to support your answer.