

Student handout 6.1

Milan makes a choice

Milan was nearly ready to leave for school when his father came into the kitchen.

“Milan, I really need your help today in the fields. Can’t you stay at home and not go to school? The crops will be damaged if we leave them any longer.”

Milan was not happy.

“Dad, I need to go to school today,” he said, “it’s the first meeting of the student council and I’ve just been elected as one of the 8th grade representatives.”

“But you won’t be the only one, will you?” said his father, “it won’t matter if you don’t go. There are other 8th grade reps, aren’t there?”

“Yes, but I’ll be letting down the people who elected me if I don’t go. Besides, we have our science lesson today. I don’t want to miss it. I have got to pass my exams if I’m going to get to university.”

Milan’s father grunted unhappily.

“You talk about going to university as if your family doesn’t matter. Why can’t you see that we need you at home? What help will you be to us if you go away to university? And where will you go when you have got your qualifications? You aren’t likely to come back here, that’s for sure.”

“You should be pleased that I want to get on in life,” Milan shouted angrily, “unlike most of the boys round here. They have got no ambition. They’ll end up doing what their fathers did.”

“There’s nothing wrong with a bit of respect for the older generation,” Milan’s father replied, his temper rising. “All this talk of education these days, it makes me sick. It seems to me you have forgotten some of the old values, where we all pulled together. You’re just out for yourself.”

Milan sighed. He had heard all this before.

“Dad, if I do get a good job, I won’t forget you and the family. How could you think I’d do that? Do you really want me to leave school and not achieve what I know I’m capable of? All my teachers say I could be a good scientist. Maybe one day I’ll make discoveries that will help everyone in the world.”

Milan’s father banged the table.

“Your first duty is to the family and this community, especially now times are so hard. You’re filling your head with dreams. What do you care about the real world?”

This hurt Milan but he didn’t want to show it. For a second he stared at his father in silent defiance. Then the old man turned round and left the house, slamming the door as he went.

Milan sat down and sighed. He thought for a minute and then made up his mind. He picked up his school bag and turned towards the door. Then he stopped, took out a sheet of paper and sat down to write a note to his father. It was the hardest thing he had done in his life.