Marriage – for better or for worse

Discussion

Work in pairs. Discuss the quotations below. What do you think they mean? Which ones do you agree with? Which do you disagree with? Which do you find amusing?

Love conquers all things.
Virgil

Love is blind.
English proverb

Marry in haste. Repent at leisure.
English proverb

When a girl marries, she exchanges the attention of many men for the inattention of one.
Helen Rowland, American writer

Marriage is like a dull meal with the dessert at the beginning.
Henri, Comte de Toulouse-Lautrec

Reading

Read these two opinions about divorce. Which one do you agree with more?

Julia Casper – getting divorced for the sake of the children

The only surprising thing about divorce is that it doesn't happen more often. What people want from a marriage may be the same when they get married, but, as we all know, people can change.

What he wants may be very different from what she wants five years down the line. Very often, men have the attitude of, "She looks after me and she is there when I want her; but I have my own life." Women, on the other hand, think, "He is my best friend; I want him to share my interests, my emotions and my life." One or both of the partners begins to feel trapped. They start to live separate lives, which results in tension, arguments and battles, which then also has a negative effect on the children if there are any. So, what is the point of staying together? It's better for children to grow up in a relaxed, loving environment with one parent than in a tension-filled home with both parents.

Of course it's better to avoid splitting up – it hurts everyone, especially the children – but if a marriage is over, it's best to accept the situation and move on before more harm is done.

Sue Hardcastle – staying together for the sake of the children

Too many people see divorce as the easy way out. I admit that in some cases it may be necessary – for example, if your partner was physically or mentally abusing you. Getting divorced should be absolutely the last option. It's not just a lifestyle choice.

Part of the problem is that people seem to have an impossibly idealistic view of marriage. They expect love, romance and excitement to fill their lives all the time. But the fact is, married life is not always perfect love and harmony. There will be arguments and disagreements. It is boring at times and, especially when children come along, it can be hard work! You've got to be willing to make the effort to make a relationship work. It is this effort which makes marriage a rich and satisfying experience.

And what example is it to children if you decide to split up? What message does it give? "When things get difficult, you can just quit." It's no surprise that people whose parents divorce often get divorced themselves. How can they believe in the possibility of a permanent relationship if the people they most trusted couldn't do it?

Who believes what?

Mark the sentences below with 'S' if they are what Sue says and 'J' if they are what Julia says:

1. People expect too much from marriage.
2. Children can experience negative things in a bad marriage.
3. Children whose parents split up can find it difficult to trust other people later in life.
4. Living with one parent can be better than living with both.
5. You shouldn't give up just because a relationship is difficult.

Do you agree or disagree with the statements above?

"If the police start asking questions, I shall just say that you packed your things one night and left me."

Language

Complete the text below with the correct form of these words:

last *contest* *sign* *break* *split up* *break down* *work*

In the USA couples sometimes (1) . . . . . a contract before they get married called a 'prenuptial agreement', which puts in writing what will happen to their money and possessions if the marriage (2) . . . . . It doesn't surprise me that some of these marriages don't (3) . . . . . long. Before it has even started, the happy couple are already planning what to do when the marriage doesn't (4) . . . . . And, of course, a prenuptial agreement only works if both partners are reasonable. But what happens if one person doesn't want to (5) . . . . . and (6) . . . . . the divorce? Or what happens if someone tries to (7) . . . . . the contract? Well, what it really means is lots of work – and money – for the lawyers!

Do you think prenuptial agreements are a good idea? Would you have one?

Discussion

Work in pairs or small groups. Discuss these questions:

1. What experience do you have of divorce? Your own? Your parents? Other family members? Friends?
2. Can divorce ever really be amicable?
3. Research shows that the children of divorced parents are more likely to get divorced themselves. Why do you think this is the case?
4. How easy do you think it should be to get a divorce? Which of these are you in favour of?
   a. divorce on demand – whenever one party wants it.
   b. wait for a year to see if the couple can get back together again.
   c. compulsory counselling for six months before a decision is taken.
5. What do you think are suitable reasons for getting divorced? Consider these:

He's been unfaithful to me.
Life is so boring.
She doesn't sleep with me any more.
We just have nothing in common.
We've just grown apart.
He hits me.
I want my freedom back.
I just married the wrong person. It's as simple as that!