

Elizabeth Gilbert was ridiculed for shelving her Russia-set novel, but I quite admire her

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Read the definition below. Then, discuss the questions in pairs or small groups.

cancel culture: when you exclude somebody from social/professional life because they've said or done something that some people do not agree with

1. Do you know who Elizabeth Gilbert is? Have you read or seen *Eat, Pray, Love*?
2. Think of a famous person that other people cancelled because they said something wrong. Was it right that they were cancelled? Why (not)?

2 Key words

a. Fill in the gaps using these key words from the text. Then, reinforce your understanding by using the words in context.

annoy

arrogant

destroy

gesture

novel

1. A _____ is a long story about imaginary people and events.
Her latest _____ is about two friends who go on a trip to India.
2. To _____ is to break or damage something permanently.
Did the fire _____ all the books in the library?
3. To _____ is to make someone angry or upset.
I know you don't like noise, but don't let the neighbours' music _____ you.
4. A _____ is something you do to demonstrate how you feel about something.
John got his nephews and nieces Christmas presents. It was a small _____, but they were really happy.
5. If someone is _____, they act like they are more important than other people.
Sometimes she's _____, and people don't really like her.

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admire

apologise

creative

mEEK

negative

6. To _____ is to respect someone and have a favourable opinion of what they do.
I really _____ him. He's my favourite writer.
7. To _____ is to express that you are sorry for something that you did.
It is important to _____ when you arrive late, and someone is waiting.
8. If something is _____, it is not positive.
Sally doesn't like horse riding because her first experience was _____.
9. If someone is _____, they have new and unusual ideas.
They are so _____! Have you listened to their latest song?
10. If someone is _____, they are quiet and shy and don't always say what they think.
Daniel was _____ as a child, but he learned to say what he felt when he was a teenager.

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- 1 Few writers will agree to do something that makes them lose money. But that's what Elizabeth Gilbert did. The writer and self-help expert posted a video on social media with big news: she has decided not to publish her new novel because of people's feelings about the war in Ukraine. She received many angry comments, and many people started talking about Gilbert.
- 2 Gilbert's novel is set in Russia but has nothing to do with Vladimir Putin. *The Snow Forest* follows a family in 1930s Siberia trying to escape the Soviet government. It also talks about how industrialisation is destroying the natural world. But many readers in Ukraine sent messages. They are angry and sad that her book's story happens in Russia. Because of this, she decided not to publish it.
- 3 After watching the video, I first thought, "Wow, her publishers must be really unhappy about this!" But later, I started to admire how Gilbert can annoy so many people in so many ways. Some people say there is a weak connection between the subject of the novel and the situation in Ukraine – so there is no good reason not to publish it.
- 4 I can see what people mean. It was a big gesture by Gilbert. Since she wrote *Eat, Pray, Love*, almost 20 years ago, some people think Gilbert has become arrogant. She calls her readers "dear ones". But it looks like she really believes that not publishing her book is the right thing to do.
- 5 In the end, I admired Gilbert's actions. She didn't apologise. It seems to me that she absolutely believes in what she is doing.
- 6 I think Many negative comments about *Eat, Pray, Love* are wrong. The book was published in 2006. It is about a year in Gilbert's life in which she travelled – to Italy, India, and Indonesia – trying to become happier again after her divorce. It wasn't sold as self-help, but people use it as self-help. Twelve million copies later, some say Gilbert sold the book before going on the journey.
- 7 Some comments are accurate. Not everyone likes her writing style, but it has not changed across her nonfiction books. (Her book about being creative, *Big Magic*, is very useful.)
- 8 Now, I think that Gilbert is more interesting than people think. I'll never accept "dear ones", but I think this kind of honesty is welcome in a world where people expect you to be meek on social media.

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Glossary

self-help: giving ways to help you end a habit, learn something new or solve a problem by yourself

guru: a leader or someone who gives advice

industrialisation: the process of developing companies and activities to sell goods

publish: make information available by creating and selling a book, newspaper, or magazine

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Elizabeth Gilbert won't lose money because she is not publishing her new novel.
2. Her novel is about Putin, so many readers in Ukraine are upset.
3. Not everyone agrees that she should not publish her new book.
4. Elizabeth Gilbert also wrote a self-help book called *Eat, Pray, Love*.
5. The writer thinks that Gilbert did the right thing.
6. The writer likes her book *Big Magic*.
7. The writer thinks Gilbert is boring.

4 Key language

a. Look at these verbs from the text. Match them to form a phrase from the article.

agree annoy destroy go receive post publish send

1. _____ to do something
2. _____ a video
3. _____ a novel
4. _____ comments
5. _____ the natural world
6. _____ messages
7. _____ people
8. _____ on a journey

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b. Now complete the sentences below so they are true for you.

1. I agreed to _____ at home/school/work.
2. _____ annoys me.
3. I always/never post _____ on social media.
4. I want to go on a journey to _____.
5. People should not destroy _____.
6. I would like to publish a book about _____.

5 Discussion

a. Answer these questions.

- Do you think Gilbert was right not to publish her novel? What else could she do?
- Should famous people try to protect people's feelings with the way they act?

6 In your own words

a. You will discuss the statement, 'Cancel culture is a good thing.' Write down some ideas for or against the statement. You can use the phrases below to help you.

Expressing your opinion

I think/believe that cancel culture is a bad/good thing because ...

Here is an example. ...

I also think that ...

Agreeing

Totally!

I agree.

That's a good point.

Interrupting

Excuse me.

Can I say something?

Sorry, but ...

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Disagreeing

I don't think so.

I see your point, but ...

That's not always true.