
RACISM IN ESSAYS

Is an author's main purpose of writing only to entertain his readers? Authors sometimes use their literature to demonstrate their opinions about a certain issue. One of these topics may be racial and ethnic discrimination. We see how authors express their views about racism through the literatures "Walk Well, My Brother", "Lark Song", and "Cowboys and Indians".

In "Walk Well, My Brother", Farley Mowat focuses on racism against the Eskimos in 1951. As the character of Charlie Lavery unfolds, one is able to see how racist he is. He discriminates against Konala's entire life, including the way she lives, eats, and dresses. Lavery acts very bitter towards Konala, and he thinks that she is useless. "What a fool he'd been to take her aboard at all... now she was a bloody albatross around his neck." (Mowat, 171). Mowat, however, also shows how one's experience can profoundly change one's opinions about something. Because Konala saves his life, Charlie is very grateful to her; and from then on, he sees her in a different perspective and learns to adjust to the way she lives. "Watching her, Lavery slowly came to understand that what had seemed to him a lifeless desert was in fact a land generous in its support of those who knew its nature." (Mowat, 177). Charlie Lavery clad in caribou-skin clothing, a dark beard ringing his cheeks, and his hair hanging free to his shoulders, also marks the extremity of his changes. Farley Mowat believes that even a racist person can easily change their opinion about someone, and one is able to see this occurring in "Walk Well, My Brother". Just as Mowat resembles his thoughts on racism in "Walk Well, My Brother", W. P. Kinsella presents his views on the topic in his essay, "Lark Song". The narrator, Silas Ermineskin, talks about how the white people are racist towards the Indians. "White people don't like nobody else to touch their kids, especially Indians." (Kinsella, 115). Even authoritative figures, such as the government and RCMP, get involved after Joseph Ermineskin picks up a little white girl who is crying because she fell; and they say that Joseph must be put in a mental institute. Joseph is mentally challenged, but he would never even harm a fly. The government and RCMP know that, or else they would have laid charges, but they are just racist towards Indians; so they find another way to punish Joseph. "At first I want to laugh it sound so funny, the voice of a summer bird on a frosty morning. Then it come again, that sweet, bubbly, blue-sky-colored lark song. I do laugh then, but for happy, and I toss the wood on the ground and run for the meadow." (Kinsella, 120). Kinsella uses this quote to present his beliefs that even mentally challenged people are very smart because Joseph escapes from the mental institute and finds his way back home; therefore, one should not make fun of them.

Although Kinsella takes a more serious approach to racism in "Lark Song", "Cowboys and Indians", by Basil Johnston, looks at the issue in a more humorous way. The producer making the movie decides to use real Indians because it would be more advantageous to him. "With real Indians the advantages were obvious. Besides lending authenticity to the motion picture, Indians represented a substantial saving. Their natural pigmentation...; their national horsemanship...; their possessions of herds of ponies...; and their natural talent for art... would all contribute to lowering the cost of making the movie." (Johnston, 70). The producer has a very stereotypical image of Indians and is not afraid to show it because he thinks he is right. "Now chief. We want 500 warriors; 500 horses, bows and arrows and... maybe fifty or so rifles... feathers, head-dresses, buckskin jackets, and... buckskin leggings... and four or five people who can paint designs on horses and put make-up on warriors!" (Johnston, 72). In "Cowboys and

Indians”, however, Basil Johnston also shows the producer’s reaction when he finds out that Indians do not live the way he thinks they do. ““This is astounding... I can’t believe it... No horses... can’t ride... no teepees... no buckskin... no... no moccasins... no... no head-dresses... and... probably not even loin-cloths...’ and he was quivering.” (Johnston, 73). But he decides to go on with his idea of using real Indians in the movie, and it turns out to be very successful.

In “Walk Well, My Brother”, “Lark Song”, and “Cowboys and Indians”, Mowat, Kinsella, and Johnston all express their views on racial and ethnic stereotyping. Racism is a topic that occurs very often in literature because it is a major part of everyday life. Therefore, authors will sometimes address important issues that occur in society in their literature instead of just trying to create a mood or entertain their readers.

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