

film education

Activity - Prejudice in SKIN

Prejudice on its own is unpleasant but in the end it is an attitude. It becomes truly wicked when it is allowed, even encouraged by the state and is backed up with a state's power – its laws; it's police and other security forces. For children growing up under such a system it is especially hard to develop any perspective. This is true both for white children growing up believing that they are superior and black children growing up thinking they must be inferior or trained to believe that white people deserve to have greater power and comfort. It is getting on for two decades since Apartheid started to be dismantled, but it will probably take many generations to cancel out the inequalities that fuel prejudice in that country.

Here are some examples of prejudice in action in the film. Some of them may not show actual examples of prejudice rather the symptoms of prejudice. Indicate which you feel are just symptoms by writing that word against the relevant description in Column Two. From the examples of prejudice that remain try to rank them according to which you feel is the most objectionable.

Remember – some of the prejudice on show here may not just be about race. Apartheid attitudes to women's roles and place in society were limited.

Incident	Rank	Contribution to prejudice
We first meet an adult Sandra working in a cosmetics factory. The production line is made up entirely of black and coloured women while the supervisor is white.		
When Sandra is about to leave for school Abraham leads the family in a prayer – while Nora – the black maid and Sandra's Swazi friends stand watching outside the car.	Possibly a mild example of prejudice. Certainly this is a scene that underlines the separateness of black and white.	Sandra is being sent away to go to school. Quite apart from it being illegal for her to attend the local school for black children, the education there was vastly inferior to the one Sandra as a white child could expect. It is clear that the Laing's servants and the black children are not a part of the inner family circle. They are tolerated but public intimacy is certainly not encouraged while Abraham is around. Clearly such exclusion has an impact on both the black children and the white children suggesting where they stand in the hierarchy and what kinds of behaviour is acceptable between the races.
On the road, the Laing's car passes a truck carrying black workers on their way to a		

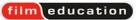
Use column two to categorize how this incident might contribute to prejudice according to the different sources above 1-8. The first one has been filled in to help you.





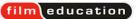
mine. They travel on the back in the dust and heat. As they pass the Laings jump to close their car's windows – mainly against the dust the lorry is throwing up. The action also seems suggestively symbolic.	
As they pass the Laings jump to close their car's windows – mainly against the dust the lorry is throwing up. The action also seems suggestively symbolic.	
to close their car's windows – mainly against the dust the lorry is throwing up. The action also seems suggestively symbolic.	
to close their car's windows – mainly against the dust the lorry is throwing up. The action also seems suggestively symbolic.	
mainly against the dust the lorry is throwing up. The action also seems suggestively symbolic.	
lorry is throwing up. The action also seems suggestively symbolic.	
action also seems suggestively symbolic.	
suggestively symbolic.	
The parents at Piet Retief	
School shy away from	
Sannie and Sandra when	
they arrive on the first day of	
school. No one replies to	
Sannie's greetings.	
Teachers at the school are at	
first very hesitant to allow	
Sandra in and then condone	
the bullying she receives	
from other children.	
Sandra's only friend Elise is	
picked on for befriending	
Sandra and also challenging	
the idea that she is 'black'.	
A teacher gives a class in	
which she suggests black	
and white people should live	
apart and that black people	
are capable only of doing	
certain jobs. She	
congratulates children if they	
share these views, answering	
her questions as she	
expects.	
Sandra has her skin colour	
assessed and her facial	
features are measured. The	
person doing the examination	
chain-smokes throughout the	
examination blowing smoke	
on Sandra and refusing to	
answer her questions.	
Sandra is inexplicably picked	
on in a class and beaten	
most savagely by the	
headteacher Mr Van Tonder.	
The other children witness	
this beating. Sandra is	
doubly humiliated: wetting	
herself in front of all her	
classmates.	
Abraham is furious with	
Sannie for being friendly with	
the black customers. He	
insists that they do not hand	
money to him directly but	
requires them to lay it on the	





counter.	
Sandra is expelled from	
school thanks to a campaign	
by parents and teachers.	
Sandra's race is re-classified.	
She is now officially	
'coloured'. If the authorities	
chose to follow through they	
were within their rights to	
remove Sandra from her	
white family.	
We see Sandra visiting Nora	
 the maid. She lives in a 	
small, unheated room. The	
light is provided by candles.	
Nora has to look after a small	
baby in this space and is not	
allowed to have her husband	
with her.	
Abraham embarks on a	
campaign to have Sandra re-	
classified. He comes under	
pressure to send Sandra to	
an international school where	
the rules of Apartheid do not	
apply and where she will mix	
with non-South African	
children.	
On a visit to a hearing at	
some government offices,	
Sandra is told she cannot sit	
on the seat in the main lobby	
as it is reserved for 'whites	
only'.	
During the public hearing	
Sandra is subjected to a	
fuller examination. Her skin	
colour and her gums are	
compared to special charts	
and she undergoes the pencil	
test to see whether or not her	
hair is too dense or curly to	
be that of a white person.	
Sandra overhears her brother	
Leon saying how hard it is	
having a sister like Sandra.	
As a direct response we see	
Sandra attempting to bleach	
her skin white – she ends up	
burning her skin.	
A crowd watches a teenage	
Sandra select a dress. Her	
mother has to show it to her	
through the shop window	
glass. Sandra evidently	
cannot go inside the shop.	





The	e white boys that Sandra	
	es out on dates with	
clea	arly regard her as	
	oured even if they claim	
	to. The dates are	
	ight. On one Sandra has	
	but up with all the stares	
	n other white customers in	
	ice-cream parlour. On	
	other one the boys	
	ually assaults her –	
	nanding to know if her	
	olic hair is as curly as her	
	ad hair. She fights him off,	
	her father does not seem	
	notice the bruises the next	
day		
	ndra starts a secret affair	
with	n a black man, Petrus.	
The	e consequences for both	
of t	hem are disastrous. She	
is b	oarded up in her room	
	he risks being shot.	
	aham does fire on him in	
	nt of the black customers	
	their children at the	
	nily store.	
	ndra runs away with	
	rus. She is hunted down	
	arrested. She is	
	gnant with Petrus' child.	
	father turns his back on	
	- and all the family are	
	bected to follow suit.	
	aham and his older son	
	on ransack Sandra's room	
	burn most of her	
	ssessions as well as	
pno	otographs and letters.	
_		
	s is a far from exhaustive	
	 it takes in about 60% of 	
	film. Once you have	
	en the film you will be able	
to s	supplement the list with	
inci	dents exemplifying	
pre	judice	