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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; its 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.

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.

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		

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<p>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.</p>		
<p>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.</p>		
<p>Teachers at the school are at first very hesitant to allow Sandra in and then condone the bullying she receives from other children.</p>		
<p>Sandra's only friend Elise is picked on for befriending Sandra and also challenging the idea that she is 'black'.</p>		
<p>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.</p>		
<p>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.</p>		
<p>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.</p>		
<p>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</p>		

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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.		

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<p>The white boys that Sandra goes out on dates with clearly regard her as coloured even if they claim not to. The dates are fraught. On one Sandra has to put up with all the stares from other white customers in an ice-cream parlour. On another one the boys sexually assaults her – demanding to know if her public hair is as curly as her head hair. She fights him off, but her father does not seem to notice the bruises the next day.</p>		
<p>Sandra starts a secret affair with a black man, Petrus. The consequences for both of them are disastrous. She is boarded up in her room and he risks being shot. Abraham does fire on him in front of the black customers and their children at the family store.</p>		
<p>Sandra runs away with Petrus. She is hunted down and arrested. She is pregnant with Petrus' child. Her father turns his back on her – and all the family are expected to follow suit.</p>		
<p>Abraham and his older son Leon ransack Sandra's room and burn most of her possessions as well as photographs and letters.</p>		
<p>This is a far from exhaustive list – it takes in about 60% of the film. Once you have seen the film you will be able to supplement the list with incidents exemplifying prejudice</p>		