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Humanities - B

12/5/23

Satirical Sneetches

Beloved children's author, Dr. Seuss, published a collection titled *The Sneetches and Other Stories* in 1961. Written in the wake of World War 2, and in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, these stories are filled with ideas of compromise, diversity, and acceptance. *The Sneetches*, the first book in the collection, poses a satirical solution to the issue of racial discrimination. Through an examination of *The Sneetches*, it is evident that Dr. Seuss successfully uses satirical devices to convince an audience of young and old how silly and hurtful it is to discriminate against someone based on their physical appearance.

Seuss wasted no time characterizing the Star-Belly and Plain-Belly sneetches. The book's first illustration (Figure 1) depicts the Star-Belly sneetch as proper, refined, and confident, while the Plain-Belly sneetch is bad-postured, disheveled, and poor-looking. This immediately gives

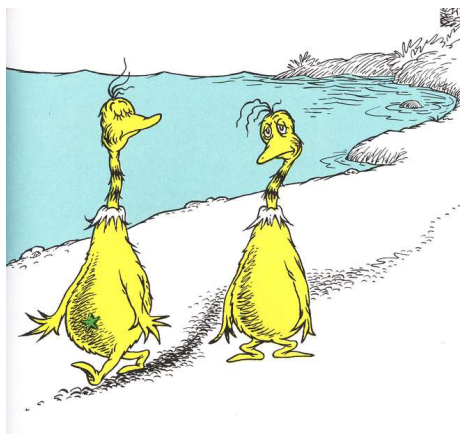


Figure 1: A juxtaposed Star-Belly (right) sneetch and Plain-Belly sneetch (left)

the reader the impression that the Star-Belly sneetches are elite, while the Plain-Belly sneetches are something to be ashamed of. Additionally, Dr. Seuss' use of a five-point star to distinguish the sneetches further categorizes one group as "good" and the other as "bad". Stars are commonly used to rank prestigious restaurants and hotels. Restaurants and hotels with more stars are more luxurious and expensive.

They cater to the elite only, not the working class. Based on

these societal connections, it is clear that having a star on your belly is superior to not having one. However, the satirical persona recognizes that a star “so small” on one’s belly shouldn’t “matter at all” (Seuss, 3). This craftily uses reduction to make the large issue of racism and discrimination as small as a single star. This helps the reader to see that there is no significant difference between those with stars and those without. This cues the audience to begin empathizing with the Plain-Belly sneetches.

Throughout the beginning and middle of the piece, Seuss selects diction that portrays the Plain-Belly sneetches as sad, helpless creatures. While the Star-Belly sneetches were enjoying their frankfurter parties and games, the Plain-Belly sneetches were seen “moping and dopping” in the “cold, dark of the beaches” (Seuss, 7-8). This negative language in association with the Plain-Belly sneetches makes the problem at hand blatantly evident to audiences of all ages. It says, “Because those sneetches were born without stars, they are inescapably predestined for a life of sadness and inferiority”. Seuss uses repetition to deepen the message that there are those with and those without. Several times throughout the text, Seuss states that some “had bellies with stars” and others “had none upon thars” (Seuss, 3-5). This strengthens the idea of there being “haves” and “have-nots”. It is understood by the reader that to have is always better. At the end of the story, once all of the sneetches are living in harmony, the phrase “none upon thars” is used again. Contrasting to previous uses, this time the phrase was used in a positive sense, showing that the sneetches had successfully changed their ways and were now accepting of their differences. This shows the reader that their society can also change, inspiring hope, and potentially action.

Dr. Seuss successfully used satirical devices including caricature, reduction, diction, and repetition to warn audiences of all ages of the harm that can be caused by racism and

discrimination. As a children's author, it was especially important that Seuss could effectively caution his younger audience. He did this by including elements of pathos throughout the entirety of the story to make the scenario relatable to an elementary school aged audience. Eight-year-olds can empathize with the Star-Belly sneetches because they know what it feels like to be left out of games when others go "out to play ball" (Seuss, 5). Since they can empathize with the pain the Plain-Belly sneetches are experiencing, they are encouraged to act more inclusively, so that no one else has to feel the way the Plain-Belly sneetches did. This understanding, and empathy with those who are being discriminated against, fulfill the purpose of Dr. Seuss' satire.

Works Cited

Seuss, T. (1961). *The Sneetches and Other Stories*. Random House.