

Foreword

SPEAKING UP: THE LITERATURE OF RACE AND PREJUDICE

Each volume of *Literary Themes for Students* brings together dozens of renowned works of literature that share a specific theme. The theme for this set of *Literary Themes for Students* is race and prejudice.

Examples of fear, ignorance, and misunderstanding dominate written human history until just a few hundred years ago. Written declarations of human rights date to the sixth century B.C. and Persia's Cyrus Cylinder. More than two millennia later, literature that gives voice to the voiceless began to flourish. With the Industrial Revolution came a boom in publishing, which was accompanied by a rise in literacy. The eighteenth century was also the Age of Enlightenment, which spawned the American and French Revolutions. At that time, people with inferior positions in society—namely women and slaves—began to tell their stories and make the case for equal rights.

The literature of race and prejudice serves a twofold purpose: to advance freedom and to protect it. Concentration camp survivor Martin Niemöller, vividly captures the power of testimony with this statement, which is engraved on the New England Holocaust Memorial:

They came first for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a
Communist.

Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade
unionist.
Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up because I was a
Protestant.
Then they came for me,
and by that time no one was left to speak up.

(*New England Holocaust Memorial*,
www.nehm.com/contents/niemoller.html
(April 30, 2006).)

Some of the selections in *Literary Themes for Students: Race and Prejudice* represent the capacity of literature to change history. Abraham Lincoln famously called Harriet Beecher Stowe “the little lady who started the big war” after her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* brought the horrors of slavery to life in the American imagination and rallied support to the cause of abolition. A century later, Martin Luther King Jr.'s celebrated speech “I Have a Dream” became the icon of the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Both masterpieces are as potent today as when they were written.

Literature can also change the way history is understood. For instance, Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* explodes the myth of civilization's victory over savagery in the settlement of the American West, describing episode after episode of ethnic cleansing. Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* (1947) gave a shocking

look inside the Holocaust and helped a still-reeling world comprehend the terror of the war and the basic humanity of its victims. Both these books, along with many others that inform the modern view of the past, are included in this exploration of race and prejudice.

Literary Themes for Students: Race and Prejudice represents many perspectives on the struggle for equal rights. Mary Wollstonecraft acts as a passionate, reasoned advocate in her essay “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (1792). Mark Twain’s protagonist in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) observes, records, and reacts to the injustice of slavery, even as he accepts it as a given. The nameless protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s “King of the Bingo Game” (1944) is a victim of societal racism, while the narrator of Ernest Gaines’s *Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) is a survivor. Selections that are studied include memoirs, polemics, novels, dramas, poetry, and histories—all bearing important contributions to the theme.

The works included in *Literary Themes for Students* represent a wide range of circumstances in which individuals experience prejudice. The

discussion goes well beyond race, religion, and gender into ethnicity, social status, mental and physical health, and personal beliefs and behaviors. Among the titles presented are *Nisei Daughter*, which recalls the internment of Japanese Americans and *Angels in America*, which dramatizes the early years of the AIDS epidemic. Several essays examine dominant and recurring subthemes in the literature of prejudice. Each entry further explores the component themes particular to that specific work, such as education, sexuality, and violence.

Literary Themes for Students cannot take the place of experiencing firsthand the books it presents. This overview of the topics, historical contexts, and critical interpretations presented in these entries can guide readers who want to discover more. It gives learners a platform from which to launch their own exploration of race, prejudice, history, and literature. It celebrates how far human rights have come in a relatively short time and underscores how much further there is yet to go. It pays tribute to those who have spoken up, because they speak for all humanity.

Margaret Brantley
Brantley is a literature critic and a
literary reference editor.

Introduction

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

The purpose of *Literary Themes for Students* is to provide readers with an overview of literary works that explore a specific theme. The volumes analyze poetry, plays, short stories, novels, and works of nonfiction that address the theme in some capacity, and the reader discovers how that theme has been treated in literature at different times in history and across diverse cultures. *Literary Themes for Students: Race and Prejudice* (LTSRP) includes “classic” human rights literature often used in the classroom curriculum, as well as more contemporary accounts of race and prejudice and works by minority, international, and female writers.

These volumes begin with three overview essays that introduce the theme of race and prejudice in literature, dividing it by geography and culture into American literature, British literature, and world literature. There are also nine sub-essays, which break these themes down further into subthemes that correspond to recurring ideas in the literature of race and prejudice. Sub-essays examine particular titles that exemplify the subthemes and show how that subtheme has developed over time.

Each work is discussed in a separate entry. These entries include: an introduction to the work and the work’s author; a plot summary, to help readers understand the action and story

of the work; an analysis of themes that relate to the subjects of race and prejudice, to provide readers with a multifaceted look at the complexity of human rights literature; and a section on important historical and cultural events that shaped the author and the work, as well as events in the real world (from the time of the author or another time in history) that affect the plot or characters in the work.

Additionally, readers are presented with a critical overview discussing how the work was initially received by critics and how the work is presently viewed. Accompanying the critical overview is an excerpt from a previously published critical essay discussing the work’s relation to the theme of race and prejudice. For further analysis and enjoyment, an extended list of media adaptations is also included, as well as a list of poems, short stories, novels, plays, and works of nonfiction that further address the theme of race and prejudice, and thus students are encouraged to continue their study of this theme.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The titles of each volume of *LTSRP* were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for a

number of school districts. Our advisory board provided input, as did educators in various areas.

HOW EACH ENTRY IS ORGANIZED

Each chapter focuses on the ways in which an entry relates to the theme of race and prejudice. Each entry heading includes the author's name, the title of the work being discussed, and the year it was published. The following sections are included in the discussion of each entry:

Introduction: a brief overview of the work being discussed. It provides information about the work's first appearance, any controversies surrounding its publication, its literary reputation, and general details about the work's connection to the theme of race and prejudice.

Plot Summary: a description of the events that occur in the work. For poems, some additional insight into the context and interpretation of the poem—and discussion of symbols and elements—is provided. The plot summary is broken down by subheadings, usually organized by chapter, section, or stanza.

Themes: a discussion of how the work approaches the issues of race and prejudice through various themes. Each theme is addressed under a separate subheading. Several of the major recurring themes are discussed at more length in individual sub-essays.

Historical and Cultural Context: a discussion of the historical and cultural events that appear in the work or that affected the writer while the work was being written. This can include large-scale events such as wars, social movements, and political decisions, as well as smaller-scale events such as cultural trends and literary movements. If the work is set during a different time period from that in which the author wrote it, historical and cultural events from both periods are included.

Critical Overview: a discussion of the work's general critical reputation, including how it was initially received by reviewers, critics, and the general public. Any controversy surrounding the work is treated in this section. For older works, this section also includes information on the ways that views of the work have changed over time.

Criticism: a previously published critical essay discussing how the work addresses the

issues of race and/or prejudice. When no appropriate criticism could be found, commissioned essays were written to deal specifically with the work.

Sources: an alphabetical list of sources used in compiling the entry, including bibliographic information.

In addition, each entry includes the following sidebars, set apart from the rest of the text:

Author Biography Sidebar: a brief biography of the author, including how he or she was affected by or led to write about race and prejudice.

Media Adaptations: a list of film, television, and/or stage adaptations, audio versions, and other forms of media related to the work. Source information is included.

OTHER FEATURES

LTSRP includes "Speaking Up: The Literature of Race and Prejudice," by Mo Brantley, a writer and editor of language arts reference books. This is a foreword about how the literature of race and prejudice can help contemporary readers appreciate how far human rights have come in a relatively short time and how far there is yet to go.

Each entry may have several illustrations, including photos of the author, depictions of key elements of the plot, stills from film adaptations, and/or historical photos of the people, places, or events discussed in the entry.

Nine sub-essays discuss various subthemes of race and prejudice literature: ethnicity; gender; religion; sexual orientation; social class and caste; disability, illness, and social stigma; ethnic cleansing, genocide, and exile; slavery; and segregation. Each sub-essay addresses approximately ten works that deal directly with the subtheme, and discusses how treatment of that theme has changed over time.

A Media Adaptation list compiles nearly seventy films, plays, television series, and other media that deal with the subjects of race and prejudice. The adaptations are organized by subtheme for easy access.

The *What Do I Read Next?* section provides over ninety plays, short stories, poems, novels, and nonfiction works on the subject of race and

prejudice. These works are also organized by subtheme.

An overview essay about prejudice in British literature analyzes how the depiction of prejudice and the quest for equality have changed since Shakespeare's time. Poems, plays, short stories, novels, and nonfiction works that exemplify Britain's attitude toward race and prejudice are examined and provide students with an overview of British literature about human differences since the country's days as a colonial superpower.

An overview essay on the themes of race and prejudice in American literature analyzes how the history of the nation is tied to its "melting pot" identity and the ways in which its literature reflects America's attitude toward race and its relationship with peace. Discussion of key poems, plays, short stories, novels, and nonfiction works reflect the evolving place of race and prejudice in the literature and culture of the United States.

An overview essay on the themes of race and prejudice in world literature analyzes how such issues have been viewed in differing cultures and time periods around the world. Discovery, interaction, fear, and the quest for understanding have left their imprint on world literature throughout history, and this essay provides students with a brief survey of how that literature reflects the values and attitudes of the cultures that produced it.

CITING

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of *Literary Themes for Students: Race and Prejudice* may use the following general formats. These examples are based on MLA style. Teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples should be adapted as needed.

When citing text from *LTSRP* that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., from the Themes or Historical Context sections), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"*The Awakening.*" *Literary Themes for Students: Race and Prejudice*. Ed. TK. Vol. TK. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006. TK–TK.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of *LTfS*, the following format may be used:

Khan, Shahnaz, "Reconfiguring the Native Informant: Positionality in the Global Age," in *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture and Society*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 2005, pp. 2022–2023; excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Themes for Students: Race and Prejudice*, Vol. TK, ed. TK (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), pp. TK–TK.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of *LTSRP*, the following form may be used:

Sinsheimer, Hermann, *Shylock: The History of a Character*, Benjamin Blom, 1963, p. 17; excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Themes for Students: Race and Prejudice*, Vol. TK, ed. TK (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), pp. TK–TK.

WE WELCOME YOUR SUGGESTIONS

The editorial staff of *LTSRP* welcomes your comments, ideas, and suggestions. Readers who wish to suggest themes and works for future volumes, or who have any other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may do so via email at ForStudentsEditors@thomson.com or via mail at:

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