

Social Justice in THE GO-BETWEEN: an Educational Resource

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What is Social Justice?

Education strives to fully acknowledge the histories, past realities, and contributions of the many diverse groups of people that make up a country. Stories can help, providing enjoyment while also contributing to meaningful learning. At the same time, children learn intentional and unintentional lessons from what they read, and discussions of their reading can illuminate and extend learning opportunities. A novel of historical fiction can be both a revealing window into the past and a reflective mirror into the future.

Opportunities for developing a sense of social justice arrive in six separate ways through the reading of *The Go-Between* through:

- the presentation of new cultural knowledge;
- examples of how others demonstrate respect;
- a demonstration of negative stereotypes;
- a recognition of the need for social change;
- understanding the need to create change.

1) New knowledge

The Go-Between brings a sense of dignity to cultural, heritage, religious, and racial differences as readers will connect with distinct aspects of Japanese-Canadian culture. By finding similarities to their own likes and lives, negative stereotypes can be deconstructed.

Cultural Knowledge:

- Japanese Language School
- kimono making and embroidery
- flower arranging (ikebana)
- pottery making
- removing shoes
- Emperor Hiro Hito
- Japanese School of Good Housekeeping

Heritage Knowledge:

- The city of Kyoto
- Japanese landscapes
- Cherry Blossom traditions
- Japanese newspapers
- adoption policies
- Picture Bride practices

Religion:

- Buddhism

Race:

- Japanese parents

2) Respect for Others

This novel provides a climate of respect for diversity through examples of empathy, shared experiences that elevate music as an art form that crosses cultural lines, stories, sports, food, and language.

Empathy:

- the doctor's concern for all, without differentiation of culture or social class
- correct name pronunciation
- respect for animals and vegetation

Music:

- Japanese records
- Japanese love songs

Stories:

- Japanese folk tales
- Japanese proverbs

Sports:

- Sumo wrestling
- baseball

Food:

- chopsticks
- Japanese food – glossary and explanations provided

Language:

- Japanese vocabulary – glossary provided

3) Issues of Social Injustice in a Historical Context

In age-appropriate ways, this novel explores historic acts of intolerance, bias, racist acts, and violence. Readers will make links that show how the historical roots of oppression impact people today.

Educational Bias:

- assumption of not being able to read English
- other written languages of no importance (“chicken scratch”)

Institutional Bias:

- dismissal of foreign names

- ridicule of facial characteristics
- child-minding prejudices
- unfounded accusations of theft, germs, greed

Anti-Immigration Policies:

- restrictions on inter-racial marriage
- Picture Bride policies
- immigration limitations

Restrictive Employment and Living Conditions:

- limitations to neighbourhoods
- newcomer procedures
- housing issues
- wage issues
- regulations of motored boats
- newspaper reporting

Acts of Violence:

- White Labour March
- shoving
- slapping

4) Social Movements and Social Change

This novel shares examples of iconic and everyday people addressing the need for social change.

- marriage regulations
- matchmaking protocols
- arranged marriages
- strikes

5) Awareness Raising

This novel provides opportunities for readers who are passionate about particular issues to become advocates by raising the awareness of other students, teachers, family, and community members. It is important to understand that raising awareness is a necessary and important precursor for action. Examples of taking action within the storyline:

- pamphlets
- sit down protests
- letter writing

6) Current Social Actions (Ways to Go Forward)

The novel provides inspiration to identify and act on issues that affect students and their communities now. Students may identify current ways to participate in taking actions that support social justice such as:

- speaking at public meetings

- attending and/or organizing events
- marches and walks
- blogging,
- creating documentaries