

# 'Socratic' Conversation about Discrimination

Combining *Journey to Jo'burg* by Beverly Naidoo

and current news coverage focused on discrimination and dilemmas raised about discrimination

*a lesson by Cynthia McFadden*

*CCSS: gathering nonfiction material from a variety of reliable sources; relating the nonfiction information to the plot of a novel; forming opinions based on readings.*

- *Journey to Jo'burg* is a 75-page novel by Beverly Naidoo. It is suitable for read-a-loud or any group/ independent learning. Naidoo's book would serve well as anchor text for a "text set" on the question students are asked to answer.
- The goal of the lesson/discussion is to consider the question and resulting moral dilemmas: *Am I my brothers' keeper?*
- Students should collect information from several sources (text set) to use as background for participation in a 'Socratic' discussion.
- Students should gather current news stories about issues raised in the book, using print and online editions of area newspapers. Students should use key words to search electronic editions for recent news stories, relevant to local communities and North Carolina as well as the nation and world.

*For students:*

- A Socratic discussion is based on the teaching method of the Greek teacher, Socrates, who was born~ 470 B.C. Socrates taught by asking his students questions. The questions require students to think and question their thoughts and feelings about ideas. Today the discussion usually takes place in a circular setting. Students listen to others' ideas and consider others' thinking. Students also share their ideas with those in the group.
- The process: listening, questioning, evaluating, sharing, rethinking...
- The purpose of this activity is to examine the following: **AM I MY BROTHERS' KEEPER?**
- This year, teachers, students and others who follow news are currently experiencing:
  - The recent death of Nelson Mandela
  - The wars in Syria, South Sudan, Afghanistan, the Republic of Congo and other places in which people are fighting over resources:
    - Think about the following chant: *The Have-nots want what the Haves have, and the Haves do not want the Have-nots to have what the Haves have – Balance is about the equity of resources.....*
    - *How do you personally feel about the above chant?*
- *Journey to Jo'burg* is a novel is based on the situation in the country of South Africa (1948-1994) when the nation was ruled by a minority of white people while the majority of the people, the non-whites, were unable to vote, to go into the parts of the country where the white people lived or to get a good education. The non-whites were required to do the dangerous jobs such as mining for

gold or working as servants in the homes of the white people. The system was called *apartheid*, which means 'living apart'. The races of people were separated; white people benefited from apartheid while non-whites suffered. Nelson Mandela, a non-white man, wanted to change apartheid, and as a result of his actions, he was imprisoned for 27 years by the leaders of the white government. To support change, many nations refused to trade with the apartheid government, thus causing the ruling white government to fail economically. Blacks gained the right to vote, and Nelson Mandela was elected the first black president of South Africa. Later, Mandela and F. W. de Klerk, the last white government leader of apartheid-era South Africa, won the Nobel Peace Prize for working together to set up a democratic government that allowed all citizens to vote.

- So, how does the apartheid problem affect our family? Do any of us (we) experience discrimination in our lives? Is there anything we can do to make things better for the 'have-nots' whom we know?
- About discrimination - What does discrimination mean in the context of daily living? Does discrimination mean the same in the context of apartheid and South Africa?

### **Is it necessarily a bad thing?**

- We all do it. By some definitions, discrimination is the simple act of treating people, places things differently. For example, as babies, we discriminate – we pick out our parents' voices and respond to them.
- We discriminate when we choose our favorite flavor of ice cream ...
- We discriminate when we choose our friends...when we choose to sit with our friends at lunch

What does discrimination mean in context of stories about South Africa? What are the literal and/or implied meanings of the word? How does the meaning differ from discrimination in daily life?

- One more definition – **What is a moral dilemma?** A moral dilemma occurs when someone faces difficult choices and must weigh what their actions or inactions mean. An example would be someone who decides to break the law because the person feels the law is wrong. Think about the people who express opposing views, such as the individuals who are protesting laws made by the North Carolina General Assembly; the protesters do not think the laws are right. **Civil disobedience** is when a person breaks a law to protest something that he/she feels is unfair.
- So, pick a question to start the discussion...use paper-rock-scissors to decide who speaks first....Remember there are no right or wrong comments....the purpose is to jog your thinking....to support an argument on whether 'we are our brothers' keepers'.... Focus on details in the book and issues the book raises that apply to current news.
  - What would be the worst thing about a family member having to go far away to earn money so that his/her children can have food and go to school?
  - How would you feel if you had to have a 'pass' to go outside your neighborhood? What if you could not leave Sanford?

- In the book, Mma says, “We have to work hard and earn very little.” How do you feel about that?
- What was ‘good’ about Dineo’s sickness? How was Dineo’s sickness a ‘silver lining’? (Think about the saying that ‘every cloud has a silver lining...’)
- How is education a pathway toward solving moral dilemmas?
- Is travel educational? Is it true that one is forever changed by travel? Is education ‘learning to fish’ as opposed to giving or receiving a fish?
- Imagine living without electricity and running water in the home....what are the problems connected to walking hours to get water?
- What do you know now that you did not know before reading the book?