

Dr. seuss's the sneetches



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The Sneetches Book Analysis By: Matthew Strong The Sneetches by Dr. Seuss is the title story in a playfully written series of short stories that subtly illustrate very crucial moral and social issues that are still very relevant in today's society, despite the book being published in 1961. Now, obviously this story can be read for sheer pleasure, however upon rereading it as an adult I, walked away with a much more profound enlightenment at the overall message conveyed by The Sneetches. There are multiple dilemmas/ social issues that significantly stand out, and these will be the ones addressed and analyzed in more depth.

Issues such as racism and the keeping up with the Joneses mentality that is so prevalent in today's consumerist society. Of course these are not the only issues brought up within The Sneetches, but simply the ones that I feel are conveyed the strongest by Dr. Seuss through his illustrations and his obscure, yet delightful use of literature that has made him such a world renowned author of children's books. Keeping up with the Joneses is a popular term that summarizes the widespread and cyclical effect of defining oneself by what they possess, in an effort to reach a higher social status.

Dr. Seuss precipitates this effect by introducing the very clearly spoken and keen character of Sylvester McMonkey McBean (Giesel, 9). After effectively raising the social status of the Plain-Bellied Sneetches by adding a star to their bellies he immediately initiates the consumerist cycle by stating, "belly stars are no longer in style" (Giesel, 17). Dr. Seuss illustrates the ensuing dilemma that perfectly depicts the desire to achieve social and cultural superiority by the Sneetches, while also detailing Sylvester McMonkey McBean amassing a large fortune in the background (Giesel, 20).

The character of Sylvester McMonkey McBean represents an uncanny similarity to that of the big business industries that use consumerism as a means to control the buying public. He continually raises his prices and dictates the newest trends so that the Sneetches raced through the machines constantly changing their stars every minute or two (Giesel, 22). Dr. Seuss is discreetly pointing out that by constantly defining our social status by what we possess, we will inherently cause conflict and unfortunately in today's consumerist society, there will always be people who take advantage of humanity's desire to define ourselves for a profit. Racism is arguably the most prominent moral issue portrayed within *The Sneetches*. Dr. Seuss almost immediately starts off the story with a seemingly irrelevant difference between two otherwise indistinguishable Sneetches. The line "Those stars weren't so big. They were really so small, you might think such a thing didn't matter at all" (Giesel, 3) is used to foreshadow how such a small star will have such a vast impact throughout the story.

Racism can be defined in many ways, however in this context it can be put simply as a belief that members of a certain race possess characteristics that they use to distinguish themselves from another race, in an effort to be perceived as superior. I see the theme of racism throughout the entire story but it is most evident in the first few pages, where as a reader you become acclimated to the fact that the Star-Bellied Sneetches truly do believe they are more privileged by the way that they carry themselves with their snoots in the air and such a pretentious demeanour (Giesel, 4).

Dr. Seuss further emphasizes this belief of superiority during the following paragraphs when he describes how the Plain-Belly Sneetches were not

allowed to join in games of ball or attend parties and picnics hosted by the Star-Belly Sneetches. The Plain-Belly Sneetches remain depressed and oppressed, clear indicators that the factors of racism have been evidently established between the two types of Sneetches for a long period of time. Dr. Seuss uses very thin horizontal and diagonal lines to really capture the energy and excitement of the Star-Bellied Sneetches, while also using the same technique to convey the depressed and divided mood of the Plain-Bellied Sneetches (Giesel, 6). Furthermore, Dr. Seuss practically reverses the colour palate from the previous pages to strengthen the emotion displayed by the two types of Sneetches (Giesel, 7). The illustrations on pages six and seven compliment the text perfectly as Dr. Seuss describes how deep rooted and developed the segregation between the Sneetches truly is when he says " They left them out cold, in the dark of the beaches.

They kept them away. Never let them come near. And that's how they treated them year after year" (Giesel, 7). It is with that paragraph that Dr. Seuss used seemingly primitive imaginary creatures to emphasize a very realistic and relevant human rights issue. Racism and all of its awful subcategories such as prejudice, discrimination and segregation don't emerge overnight; they are the result of a small-minded belief that has cultivated and grown over time like an untreated disease. Although *The Sneetches* is a beloved children's book, Dr. Seuss is conveying a valuable message for all ages.

With his iconic use of subtle metaphors, he is saying to not allow our trivial differences act as dividing lines in society, and that the human race can exist peacefully despite our exterior differences. Through playful commentary and

relatively simplistic illustrations Dr. Seuss is able to send a very subtle, yet powerful message to the readers of *The Sneetches*. It becomes vividly apparent and shockingly unfortunate that a story published in 1961 can still address so many moral and social issues that are still very relevant in today's society. Disguised as a children's story, Dr.

Seuss has conveyed very valuable lessons in racism and the desire to define ourselves by what we possess. We are all born with innocence to the world, and therefore, how we identify ourselves, and tolerance towards others are all qualities that are taught. The overall message of this story is aimed at the adults who will be reading *The Sneetches* to the children of today/ tomorrow. To teach them to accept others for who they are because we are all but one component of the greater human race. Works Cited Giesel, Theodor Seuss. *The Sneetches And Other Stories*. New York: Random House Children's Books, 1961. Print.