

Ralph ellisons battle royal

Literature



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" Battle Royal" holds a permanent interest because its underlying themes are human ones, with those being the battle against prejudice and the struggle to find a place in society.

On the surface, Ellison's focus is upon the racial prejudices which confronted African Americans during a specific time in history. As that time has passed, the theme should have no continued, relevant current interest. The fact that it does is because racial prejudices are not the only form of discrimination that confronts people. Any and all differences are a cause for prejudice and discrimination. In this sense, Ellison addresses all people and in the grandfather's words, provides advice for survival against prejudice. As the grandfather advises: " Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome'em with yeses, undermine'em with grins, agree on 'em to death and destruction, let'em swollen you till they vomit or bust wide open" (Ellison, 1952: 938). While it may have been offered to a young black male in the pre-civil rights era, this advice is valid for all. It warns against confrontation, insists upon the possibility of defeating one's enemy through passivity, and, indeed, provides a strategy for survival. The permanent interest emerges from within this approach to prejudice and the strategies for confronting it; permanent interest emerges from the fact that the story only appears to discuss the plight of African Americans but, as a matter of fact, is discussing the plight of everybody who, past, present or future, has suffered any form of prejudice or discrimination.

Within this short story, permanent interest also emerges from the protagonist's search for an identity and a place in society. In this story, the narrator subjects himself to humiliation, including a battle royal,' or brutal boxing match, in order that he may gain an opportunity to fulfill his dreams

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and become someone. Certainly, none of today's college students have entered into boxing matches where the victor gains a place at university but, in a symbolic sense, we do much the same thing. Many fight over scholarships, lose friends in the process, and, to an extent, humiliate themselves. Like the narrator, we do so because we want an opportunity to be what we can be and, hence, make a place for ourselves in society. Consequently, should readers look beyond the surface, they will discover that this short story holds permanent interest because it is relevant to each of our present-day struggles to make a place for ourselves in society. In the final analysis, it is apparent that Ellison's " Battle Royal" has survived over the course of five decades and continues to be read with interest and feeling because it is about the human condition. Certainly, its main focus is the plight of African Americans during the pre-civil rights period but, beneath that, it is about the human struggle against discrimination and for a place in society. It, thus, has a permanent interest.