

Irony in "once upon a
time" by nadine
gordimer



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The essay "Once Upon a Time" by Nadine Gordimer, is a moral story about the racism in South Africa that occurs between the wealthy and the poor. Gordimer explains this story came about when someone wrote her and said that "every writer ought to write at least one story for children." The story depicts a wealthy white family continuously investing in security measures in order to keep the poor, who they deem to be dangerous, out of their home. This essay unveils a large amount of irony as the story progresses. This allows readers to better understand the conflicts that arouse when a community consistently makes decisions about a social class that are based on the actions of one member of that same social class.

The irony in the "Once Upon a Time" begins with the name of the essay and first words of the children's story. The words once upon a time are a "fairy tale approach and style" and they create a certain expectation that comes along with those words. The irony in that is the disastrous ending that is very unusual for a story that starts with such a cliché name and title. The fact that this family, "who felt extremely insecure in the changed environment and who inculcated imaginary fears within themselves, and in order to keep themselves protected from the wronged black populace" they put a huge fence that had barbed wire on the top just to feel comfortable. The ending of the story with the boy dragging a ladder to wall, climbing it and getting extremely hurt and possibly even dying is not exactly the result they expected from that fence.

The biggest example of irony that I see, is that she is supposed to be writing a children's story; as you can tell this story is anything but meant for children. At the end of Gordimer's story, the boy who lives in the house, has

the idea to fight a dragon like the knights in his children's stories. He begins to try and climb the fence around his home that is named " DRAGON TEETH, " as he climbs he becomes entangled in the barbed wire. As the boy tries to get out he just gets pulled deeper into the barbs causing scrapes and cuts all over his body.

I believe that this part of Gordimer's story is meant to serve as a warning. The majority of children's stories end happily, with the hero coming out unscathed. This causes children to believe that all of their adventures will be successful, and the world is a happy place without any conflict that cannot be resolved.

The story " Once Upon a time" is a warning to the community not only about the nature of storytelling to children about major conflicts but also to the South African audience that the conflict of the state is not getting any better and you shouldn't just expect it to go away because this isn't a fairytale, this is reality and we have to do something about it and she communicates a lot of this through irony.