

# Walking in other people's shoes



"First of all," he said, "If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view-" "Sir? " "-until you climb into his skin and walk around in it. " (Lee 30). This message, shared by Atticus Finch to his daughter, Scout, is a commonly shared method to promote understanding.

Climbing into another person's skin and walking around in it", or " walking in other people's shoes", as it is often told to today's young children, means to think about what it would be like to be that person and understand why they have their beliefs and ideals. " Walking in other people's shoes" is an ongoing theme throughout history; it has been displayed in present times and in the past, by people as famous as Gandhi, fictional characters, such as Scout, and today's children.

Like Scout, I learned how to consider others' point of view by " walking in their shoes". Until the sixth grade, I attended church and Sunday School at Saint James Lutheran Church every Sunday. Sunday School activities were mostly limited to the contents of a pamphlet, provided by the teacher for each age group. These pamphlets often stressed empathy for others by asking children questions such as, " How would you feel? " or " What would you do? ". Little stories or puppet shows provided the scene and the problem and the students provided the answer.

Questions such as those were important as I was learning to " walk in other people's shoes" because they made me consider what it would be like to be that person and share their problem. A new television show, Walk in Your

Shoes, produced by Nickelodeon, is a creative approach to teaching tolerance among children and young teens by showing them what it is like to be another person. The show takes two real people and transplants them in each other's lives. The cameras capture the trials and tribulations of being the other person and viewers learn about differences.

The show has been running two years and has switched an Alaskan and a Hawaiian, a Catholic and a Jew, a country singer and a rapper, and a retirement home resident and a middle-school student, and others(Noggin 1). A particularly interesting episode starred a thin, athletic, girl and another, although active, genetically overweight girl. The thin girl was covered in stage makeup and a fat suit to alert viewers to prejudices associated with overweight people, even if they can't help it (Noggin 1). She felt generally ignored or received discouraging looks, just because of her " weight" (McAleer 1).

Afterwards, she expressed how impressed she was that the overweight girl could maintain such a healthy attitude (McAleer 1). Another interesting switch occurred when the show switched two boys of the same age, one attending military school and the other a commune resident, and sent them to each other's school. The commune resident was used to a very liberal life; he grows the vegetables he eats every night for dinner and doesn't have to worry about his grades in school (Cable in the Classroom 1). The military school student is required to wear a uniform and lives a strict, disciplined life (Cable in the Classroom 1).

When the two switch, the military school student joins a singing circle and takes classes about the animals living in the nearby pond(Cable in the Classroom 1). The commune resident marches in a parade and wears a uniform (Cable in the Classroom 1). Both enjoy the experiences, but would much rather be at home (Cable in the Classroom 1). The goal of this show is " to help young people understand the importance of accepting themselves and others for who they are" said Joanne Ikeda, who worked with Nickelodeon to produce the show (Yang 1).

In the past, national leaders worked to unify their country; Mahatma Gandhi's method to achieve this goal involved " walking in other people's shoes". He is often referred to as one of the greatest national leaders. His policy of nonviolent disobedience, Satyagraha, has influenced many political activists. Perhaps his political success is due to his attempts to understand and accept all types of people. From 1893 to 1914, Gandhi worked for an Indian law firm in South Africa (Franda and Franda 1).

During that time the Indians in South Africa were victims of prejudice, very similar to the blacks in America's past. Here, he learned firsthand about how it felt to be an outcast based on something you had no control over. Gandhi led protests for Indian rights and developed his technique of Satyagraha while in South Africa (Franda and Franda 1). Gandhi returned to India in 1915 and fought for an independent India, free from British rule(Franda and Franda 1). During this time, Gandhi also fought for the minorities of India (Franda and Franda 1).

Traditionally, Indians are born into one of six castes. Castes are divided into classes that determine your status and, to some extent, your career. The lowest caste, Untouchables, are outcasts of Indian society. They are often unemployed or receive the worst jobs (Standing and Stirrat 1). They were banned from Hindu temples and couldn't even be looked upon by members of higher castes (Standing and Stirrat 1). Gandhi called these people Harijans, or children of God (Standing and Stirrat 1).

He believed all people were equal under one God and treated the members of this caste as equals (Franda and Franda 1). He and his followers went on to walk throughout India to raise money for the Untouchables (Schmidt 1). He traveled throughout India in the third class train cars and tried to experience what it would be like to be poor in India (Schmidt 1). He spun his own clothes and lived as though he was poor, like most of India at the time (Schmidt 1). He also tried to unify the Muslims and Hindus in India.

He preached Muslim and Hindu ideals and lived with Muslim and Hindu families during his life ("Gandhi, Mahatma." 1). By living many different ways, Gandhi could understand all types of people. This made him a well-loved leader. From Sunday School classes to television shows to Gandhi, tolerance and understanding are important issues. People must learn to respect each other. If people took more time to "walk in each other's shoes" and understand the reason for their conflict, there would be much less tragedy.

Terrorism, wars, starvation, and sickness would become less and less widespread issues. Many of us now have our own life stories of "walking in

other people's shoes". On television today, children are learning how to accept different religions, disabilities, races, and interests. Although India was experiencing a time of political and religious upheaval during the time of Gandhi, he managed to keep most of the peace by unifying the nation under God. Harper Lee inspired many to disagree with racism. These victories in the battle against prejudice and violence will help the world achieve peace.