

Amazing grace summary 4



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Using the themes we have examined in this course discuss the situation of the children in Jonathan Kozol's *Amazing Grace*.

Who defines them as 'other'? How? What makes them feel like 'nobodies'? What makes them feel like 'somebodies'? What is the role of religion in this daily struggle for human dignity? Drugs, violence, prostitution, pollution, infestation, and sickness of all kinds are present in South Bronx, New York. Unfortunately, children are surrounded and involved in all these problems and more. In Jonathan Kozol's novel *Amazing Grace*, an evil reality full of racial segregation and alienation affect the people living in the ghetto. The personalities of these children are changed forever due to the existence of discrimination.

When people from the South Bronx neighbourhood go to stores, hospitals, or churches outside of their own area, there is a sense of rejection. "They're right. I don't belong in a nice hospital. My skin is black.

I'm Puerto Rican. I'm on welfare. I belong in my own neighbourhood. This is where I'm supposed to be." (Kozol, 176) This is the common reality that plagues the adults. Consequently, a society that discriminates against people due to their skin colour and status contributes to the negative way these children think.

If the adults are having a difficult time dealing with the issues already, what possibly could be on the minds of their children? Majority of the children believe they do not fit the social norms of the American society and therefore are treated like outcasts. The poverty-stricken children discuss with Kozol the reasons why they feel this way. "If you go downtown to a nice

store, they look at you sometimes as if your body is disgusting. You can be dressed in your best dress but you feel you are not welcome. " (Kozol, 41)

The sixteen year old girl Maria believes this is how people of the ghetto are viewed; they are viewed dirty, hopeless, unwanted and different.

Furthermore, the children feel like they are nobodies because of their segregation from the rest of society. It's skin colour and it's being poor. This is something more than disrespect. It's as if they wish you did not exist so they would not have to be bothered. " (Kozol, 41) Strong feelings of rejection make these children believe they are segregated nobodies.

The segregation and hatred changes the personalities of the children. In order for the children to remain rational while growing up, they look to their faith. Most children have witnessed so much injustices that they can only turn to religion as a source of comfort and strength to live on. Even racial segregation is present in the churches where people pray for better times. The children pray for the safety of their loved ones and hope that they will live in heaven after death. They believe that God is out there to hear their prayers.

" God hears. He sit up high and look low, even here. " (Kozol, 203) This statement reveals that even though the rest of society may not hear the desperate cries of the people living in the Bronx, but God does. Therefore the people still have hope and struggle to survive. Adolescents think about heaven because death occurs frequently in the Bronx.

Everyday the children pray for their protection and well-being. " God bless Mommy. God bless Nanny. God, don't punish me because I'm black. " (Kozol,

69) To imagine that children need to pray to be accepted in society suggests evil in the current society.

Their faith and religion is all they have. Finally, one of the most important roles of religion is educating the unaware. Reverend Overall explains to Kozol of how creating a ghetto itself is evil. So long as there are ghetto neighborhoods and ghetto hospitals and ghetto schools, I am convinced there will be ghetto desperation, ghetto violence, and ghetto fear because a ghetto is itself an evil and unnatural construction. " (Kozol, 162) Reverend Overall is relaying the message through Kozol that for the society to allow a ghetto to form is unnatural.

In addition, to let children live in the ghetto is evil. Evidence of an American society alienating children due to racism only breeds more racism. This is why children living in the Bronx already face enough hardships while growing up and do not need the addition of racial segregation. In Martin Luther King's response to the letter from Birmingham, " all segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality.

It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. " (Module, 11c) The readers of Amazing Grace have seen the children's personality damaged and soul distorted. The role of religion is to comfort the children through these hard times.