

Because it is bitter  
and because it is my  
heart essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Because It Is Bitter and Because It Is My Heart Can a person's desire to fit in among society be so strong that it becomes the driving force of his life?

Throughout Joyce Carol Oates's "Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart", the main characters are so desperate to be accepted by the society that this very desire molds their decisions and their lifestyle. The longing to be accepted burns so deep within Duke and Persia Courtney, Jinx Fairchild and most importantly, Iris Courtney that their lives are built around it. Duke and Persia Courtney clearly base their lives around their desire to belong.

First, Duke Courtney does this through his gambling habit. Through gambling, he can obtain acceptance in two aspects of his life: society and finances. Duke Courtney attends horse races where he not only makes bets, but also socializes with people of the upper class. By socializing with the men at the racetrack and forming friendships with them, he makes a place for himself in society. Although Mr. Courtney can satisfy his need to be socially accepted through gambling, his main motive is money.

Money, to Duke Courtney, seems to be able to buy all happiness. With the little money he wins as a result of his bets, he indulges himself and his family with material things. By accumulating things such as expensive clothing and furniture, the Courtney family can establish a deceptively-high financial standing in society as well. Mr. Courtney, without a doubt, strives to fit in which molds his lifestyle. In addition to Duke, Persia Courtney also has the need to feel accepted by others.

While Duke is consumed in gambling to make friends and money, Persia resorts to alcohol. This lifestyle is adopted mainly after Persia's permanent

separation from Duke. Iris recalls many accounts of her mother arriving home late in the night escorted by many different men. Not only does Persia drink to feel socially accepted, but she obviously feels like she needs to be accepted by men as well. She believes that love and acceptance go hand in hand. In retrospect, Persia turns to a life of dependency, on both alcohol and men, to fulfill her need to feel accepted.

Another character that struggles with the need to fit in is Jinx Fairchild. It would be, of course, impossible to fit in while being the known murderer of Little Red Garlock; therefore, Jinx does not confess to the crime. Instead, he does everything in his power to blend in with the rest of society. Later in high school when Jinx becomes the star of the basketball team, a lot of pressure and attention is put on him.

To punish himself for the crime he has committed, Jinx purposefully or at least sets himself up to have an accident that breaks his ankle while playing in a game. This in turn takes Jinx out of the spotlight, and allows him to fit in with everyone else. Jinx also goes through the necessary steps to seem normal. He gets married, has children, and maintains a normal union job as a factory worker at McKenzie Radiator. Jinx also ignores any feelings towards or connections with Iris Courtney in order to keep up with the norm. Since the story takes place during the 1950s and 60s, race was a very controversial topic.

Interracial dating was altogether scorned and looked down upon. If Jinx were to acknowledge his connection with Iris Courtney and pursue a relationship with her, it would be impossible for him to fit in. It is apparent through Jinx's

decisions that he too thrives to fit in. Finally, Iris Courtney desires to fit in, possibly more than any other character in the novel. Due to her rough childhood growing up in a dysfunctional family, the murder to which she was a witness and her connection to Jinx, Iris longs to put it all aside and fit in for once in her life.

A main way in which Iris attempts to fit in is through her love life, or lack of. Jinx and Iris both realize that they share a common bond because of the murder, a bond that will never go away. However, Iris realizes that in their society, a long-term relationship with Jinx is nearly impossible, scandalous and no way to blend in, therefore, Iris gives up on pursuing a relationship with Jinx. Iris shares Persia's conception that love and acceptance go hand in hand. Therefore, this belief leads Iris to acquire a source of love, with which she will finally be happy.

Dr. Savage and his wife fix Iris up with their son and the two eventually got married. Iris convinces herself that she is happier than ever with her new life and is finally at peace with herself. Through her decisions and lifestyle, Iris Courtney doesn't quite fulfill her yearning to fit in. Joyce Carol Oates "Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart", clearly and completely proves that a person's desire to fit in can become the driving force of their life.

In a small city in upstate New York, in the decade before the upsurge of the civil rights movement, when racial prejudice seemed inflexible and habitual, the characters pushed their desire of to be accepted. By means of characters like Duke and Persia Courtney, Jinx Fairchild, and Iris Courtney, Oates makes

it clear that one's decision making and way of life can be significantly altered by the need to belong.