

Class divided

Sociology, Racism



When I first read the title a Class Divided; the first thought that came to my mind was another story about Blacks and Whites being separated. I really had no idea that what I was about to see and read would be a learning lesson like one I had never had before. But to my surprise once I started reading the article One Friday in April 1968 I knew that this was going to be different than any thing I had read. So I allowed myself to fill what the writer was writing to try and fill what Jane Elliott had felt that day in April in 1968. As she prepared to face a group of 3rd grade students who happened, to be white and teach them about racism and discrimination something she hoped they would understand the rest of their lives. Jane Elliott had taught her class about what the two things had meant before but not on the level she had planned to go to today; she hoped that with what she was planning to do would not mean she had crossed the line too far, but if not her then who and if not then when. It was not something that Jane Elliott could put off any longer. With the assassination of Rev Martin Luther King the night before this assignment was sure not to be an easy task. Jane Elliott knew things would be different in class this morning! But she was a woman who knew in her heart what task laid before her and not quite sure how the outcome would be, or how or what response the children or their parents may have it was too late to turn around now. This was a situation that was going on all over the world not just in her town or in America. And it was time that someone brought right to the face of Americans children I mean who is the leaders of tomorrow but the children of today. And they might as well get a taste of the real world now; really what could the worst that could happen? You might find out that even at that young age, some of them might even understand

that racism and discrimination is something they never want to be a part of or on the flip side you would have a bunch of racists' running around; it was best to know now what kind of people were being raised instead of finding out later when they get to old to even change. The technique that Jane Elliott used was very different then any I had heard about and since by the video I knew there where no blacks in her class to see how she would divide the class I was very interested. And here white women a teacher from a rule town was willing to put and idea a solution of an age old question of how to stop discrimination. Something the nation had no solution to and countries and people were battling over everyday. How was this demonstration with kids going to change anything? Jane Elliott took a chance not just for wanting to teach students about racism and discrimination but teach it in a manner in which you as a person could actually feel acknowledge and understand the experience that they just went through to know how it feels to walk in another man shoes. Jane wanted her students to understand that at the end of the day no one is superior or inferior to anyone else no matter what your status is in life. Now I admit I had no idea how she was going to approach this difficult task and get the point across but as I continued to watch on, it was becoming clearer. When Jane Elliott started her class the following morning it started off I guess you could say any normal class day would start the students seem to be as happy as the average 3rd grader would be. The normal inquisitive minds of most kids; as the kids hung up there coast and put away their coat and lunches away she started getting the kids in order and as class started she asked them a question like did they know what were some of the things that made other people different from themselves and

other whites. Some said size one said clothes but color was the one they all could agree on and so she asked them what where some of the skin colors that where different then their own? Blacks and sometimes they were called Negros and Indians. So she asked the kids and how did they think that people of other colors felt by feeling different about being different they said they felt that blacks did not feel as smart by not being white, and they felt stupid because they were black. And so with that she asked them how they would fill if they were treated different because of their color! Now keep in mind this is the week of national Brotherhood and you are suppose to treat your fellow mates with respect and love show them you care because they are your brother. And Jane Elliott was about to do just the opposite. She asked them how would they fill if they where treated different because of the color they where now at first I'm thinking how is this going too work they are all white. But she told them that she was going to divide them up by the color of their eyes. Now for that day all people with blue eyes were going to be better then the brown eyes and it was like immediately you seen a whole different reaction from the class, it was if these weren't even the same kids the brown eyed kids started to withdraw almost immediately and the blue eyes were in full bloom. Some of the blue eyed kids even gave a solution on how Ms Jane should handle the brown eyed kids with a yard stick incase they got out of hand. Now by lunch time the blue eyes felt on top of the world they told not to play with brown eyed kids and that they could have seconds on food the brown kids could not. Now for the brown eyes you could see the confusion on their faces the hurt they actually tried to rationalize how the same kids they had been friends with and played with change so much. And I

remembered thinking how could in such a short period of time could these sweet kids turn into the ill monsters they has become. For me it was like if it took them such little time to embrace such a cruel sprite then I knew how it must be for grown people who exercise this kind of behavior for a long period of time how bitter and angry they must be not at the world but themselves. Now one of the scenes on the playground when the blue eyed boy taunts the brown eyed boys and they get into the brawl it hurt because before this experiment they were friends. And just in a couple of hours all there upbringing and brotherly love had went out the window. Now when Jane asked the boys what happen the blue eyed boy said it made him fill powerful and in charge? He said it made him fill like a king. The brown eyed boy to me on the hand seemed to be more affected by what had happen at lunch he said he was hurt and they use to be friends that the eyes had nothing to do with it they had been friends and even though he hit the blue eyed boy it did not make him fill better. This made me see that even though this was the first time they had put a division among the students the lust for power emerged quickly in some with out hesitation and others went along with it because that's what they were told to do while again the brown eyed boy stood up for himself regardless of what the teacher said even though he admitted that he did not like being treated different and fighting did not make it better he just knew it was not fair. On returning back to class Ms Jane also noticed how the blue eyed kids were getting there work done faster and even being more helpful she noticed how the brown eyed kids looked like they where helpless and not really participating in class time you tell they felt rejected. It was as if had caught the essence of creating a bad

situation but had the answer for straitening it out all was not lost. Jane announced to the that the roles had changed the following morning in class and believe me the blue eyes where not to happy with the change this mint they would be on the bottom and the brown eyes were on top. Some kids did not want to do it anymore while others could not wait to be on top. What this showed me with kids is that they do as they see being done just as well as what they hear. When it was time to go back to being normal no more blue eyes no more brown eyes over all the kids seemed to be happy to return to the normal class setting; she allowed the kids to tell what they like and disliked better about it and in the end the all promised not to ever dislike somebody because of there skin color. When Jane Elliott did this same experiment in the jail there was a whole different reaction here the video was showed to the inmates not as a test but more as a teaching tool which I kind of understood discrimination is something that most of the prisoners had encountered some where along the way either in there or one of the reasons they where in jail in the first place. But she did use the correctional officers and parole agents and I could not believe what was going on one man early on caught on that it must have been some kind of test because he notice the obvious brown eyes only signs blue eyes only signs seating situation while others tried very heard but it was this one lady she was a blue eye and a correctional officer she questioned and taunted everything that Jane wanted them to do prior to the blue eyes meeting in the room with the brown eyed people she sort told them that the group of people entering were going to be rude loud dominant and disruptive once the seminar began. No one knew what was going on but she was setting the blue eye people to fail.

She made them annoyed in every way possible so about time the group was together it would seem that the blue eyed people were just as she described. Now the Lady with the blue eyes seemed to be the type of person that was easily irritated to start with her whole persona was if she was in charge and not Jane she answered questions with questions kept getting smart like she was going to be in charge no matter what it was her life and job were one in one and nobody was going to make her fill less she controlled the inmates at work and that was how her personality came off as if she did not come second to anyone things went her way or no way and that there is only one right answer hers; she became very annoying too me and she made me fill like some people In authority position now like its only their way that works does on like individuality love making people fill less in order for them to feel good about themselves. It seems if the other blue eyed people were willing to try and work out was being taught she kept a defensive block up all the time. Her behavior had begun to annoyed a lot of the people in the room including some blue eyes This also made me see how much easier it was for the children to grasp what was being taught; more then the adults the kids were willing to say that how they were able to treat people even when they were told to do so if it mint treating them bad they did not like it. Of course for the one kid who felt like it gave him power. The correctional officer Acted, as if to admit that you are not better then the person next to you then there better then you. I think she had control issues; me, personally fill that you can learn something new ever day if you are willing to learn you have good and bad I every race good and bad comes in many shapes and sizes. But if you be the best you can be treat people with kindness and respect you will

get treated the same. As long as you know there are exceptions to all rules and some people are just not nice no matter what. But don't let that change who you are. Smile and somebody bound to smile back.