

A class divided documentary review

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A class divided is a documentary about a teacher named Jane Elliot who teaches her students about racism first hand. She divides the students into two groups, the blue eyes, and the brown eyes. For the first day, the "brown eyed" children are not able to go to recess, or lunch at the same time as the rest of the children. They wear a blue collar around their necks so that they are obviously different at a distance from the other students. They are not allowed to drink from the same water fountains, use the playground equipment, or even play with the blue eyed children.

The next day, the roles are reversed. During these two days Jane Elliot would make comments about the children wearing the collars to degrade them. She would point out if one of them wasn't ready on time, or if they forgot something. She would say things like "That's how blue eyed people are" "Brown eyed people are better than blue eyed people" (J. Elliot, A Class Divided, 1985). After the children who weren't wearing a collar noticed Mrs. Elliot saying these kinds of things, they would also chime in and begin saying things about the kids wearing the collars.

Mrs. Elliot said "I watched wonderful, thoughtful, children turn into nasty, vicious, discriminating little third graders." (J. Elliot, A Class Divided, 1985) . The movie showed the students come back for their fifteenth class reunion to talk about this life long lesson that their third grade teacher taught them. All of the students said it was a lesson they have never forgotten and something that changed their lives forever. They talked about how it affected their lives growing up, and how it affects the way they raised or were currently raising their children.

Since she got done teaching, Jane has been doing trainings and conferences to teach others. Her movie *A Class Divided* has been shown in prisons to inmates who are trying to earn a degree. She also did training at a prison in Iowa for the guards and other staff members. When people signed into the meeting they had to log whether they had brown eyes or blue eyes. Those with blue eyes had to wear a green ribbon. The people with brown eyes were able to go in and sit when the training was scheduled to start, where the blue eyed people had to stand out in the hall. The bathrooms were labeled "browns only".

The blue eyes weren't told what was going on, they were just told to wait outside, and administration would come out and tell them to be quiet. Meanwhile, Jane Elliot talked to those with brown eyes and told them that they were not to allow blue eyed people to sit beside them. She told them that brown eyed people were better than blue eyed people. She said that blue eyed people were no good and the brown eyes were to treat them as such. A while after the meeting started the blue eyes were able to come into the room. They had to sit in the back, and some people didn't even have a seat.

During the meeting Jane talked to the people with blue eyes a lot like she did to her students 30 years ago. The reaction she got from the adults were a lot like they were in her experiment with the children, however there was one woman who was a lot more outspoken and rebellious toward Jane. Jane Elliot does a great job at not only telling people about racism and discrimination, but also showing how it affects us, and how easy it is to go with the crowd.

Some of the movie takes place in a school, and this is a place where children are taught to socialize.

Teachers play a huge role in how students are molded, especially at such a young age. In this day and age, I don't think teachers really think about how much of an influence they are on their students. Most of the children spend more time with their teachers than they do with their own parents. Jane took on this role and helped her students understand that there is an issue with discrimination and taught them a valuable lesson. When this documentary was filmed not everyone was taught that the color of your skin doesn't make up the type of person that you are.

They were taught that if you are not white, you aren't "normal". They associated people that had a different skin color as "bad" or even "stupid". In those times it was totally acceptable and some people sincerely believed this. Things that are social acceptable change over time and this is something that has changed in a big way. I'm not saying that everyone doesn't care about the color of your skin. There is a lot of racism going on in our world today, but it is no where near as bad as it was forty years ago.

It reflects what we are taught by our parents also. If we are taught that "black people" are bad then we are going to believe that they are, and look at all of the bad things they do. We like to be the same as everyone else; we do not like to stand out. In the film a lot of people didn't dare to stand up for those wearing a collar because that would require them to stand up and go against what the authoritative figure was saying. This video relates to several chapters in our sociology book, the main chapter being chapter ten, race and ethnicity.

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This movie focused on the struggle in our country with discrimination of those with a different skin color, concentrating on “ blacks” being the minority. At the time, people thought of black people are dirty, stupid, and bad people. They didn’t think they were able to do anything as good as white people. Jane Elliot turned her classroom into a small discriminating society in a sense. She had the brown eyed students wear blue collars the first day and they were not able to do any of the same things that the blue eyed students did.

She divided this class that was once a united class who played together, into a class that was split into two groups and mocked and made fun of each other, solely because of the color of their eyes. I also think we could relate this movie to chapter fourteen, where the book talks about education. Like I have stated before, teachers play a major role in their interaction with their students and how they can be molded. Jane talked about going over the phonics card packs with the brown eyed students on the day that they wore the collars around their necks and it took them five and a half minutes to get through the card pack.

On the day that they didn’t wear the collar around their necks, and were treated with respect and felt as though they were sufficient, they only took two and a half minutes to get through the card pack. Jane talked about the time she performed this exercise for the second time with her third grade class. She said that the students score went up on the days where they were “ on top” and went down on the days they were on “ bottom”. After going through the exercise their overall scores would have a significant incline. Mrs.

Elliot sent the results to Stanford University's Psychology Department to have them study and examine why this would be so. We could also relate this video to chapter seventeen, which talks about social change: collective behavior, social movements and technology. Like I said, things that were once socially acceptable in those times are no longer acceptable now. In those days it was ok for people to say the word "nigger" it was a term that people used for black people because that's the term everyone else was using. Now, it is considered a derogatory word and it is not acceptable to say it.

I thought that this documentary was very interesting. I loved what Jane Elliot did with her students. I wish it was something more teachers could do, but now-a-days it probably couldn't be done because of the stink people would put up about it. I feel that some teachers spend too much time talking about topics and not nearly enough actually teaching. Jane taught her students a lesson that they have remembered and will never forget. It is something that they have taught or will teach to their children. The town I grew up in was quite a bit like Riceville, Iowa. It was a small town, primarily Christians who were white.

In fact, there were only two black people in our town and they happened to be two of my cousins who were adopted. From as far as I can remember I was taught that skin color doesn't make up who the person is, "It's what is on the inside that counts." My cousins and I had a great relationship with my cousins and it wasn't because of the color of their skin, or the color of mine that made the difference. I have met black people who I didn't like, and I have met white people who I didn't like. To me color makes no difference. I

am very grateful that I was taught this lesson, and I feel and for those who haven't been taught.

I think it would be incredibly useful for this to be used in school. There are many other forms of discrimination other than people with different skin colors. Just because it is the form that is most widely talked about doesn't mean it is the only one. I hope in some way, maybe not by putting collars around their necks, but I do hope that this is taught in schools through out the years. References Peters, William. (1985). A Class Divided. PBS, Frontline Benokraitis, Nijole. V. (2012). SOC, (Student Edition) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning