

# The consequences of discrimination in John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids*



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History clearly depicts the dangers of people believing they belong to a superior race or group as it often leads to war. John Wyndham's novel, *The Chrysalids*, reinforces this idea as the novel illustrates the danger of people believing that only one race or group is correct. In the novel, there are three types of communities which divide people up based on their differences. Consequently, *The Chrysalids* is a relevant postmodern text which warns society about the importance of treating others in a non-discriminatory manner by exploring the three divisions of society: Waknuk, Fringes, and Sealand.

Firstly, it is important to know that the people of Waknuk believe they have been created in the "image of God". People in this community are likely to discriminate and physically hurt those who deviate from this expectation. This is because they have all the necessary things in life and much more due to the power they have in society. David was brought up in his community to think that everyone should be created in the "image of God" or be banished to the Fringes to fend for themselves. This is seen when David thinks about the definition of Man in the following manner: "...each leg should have one foot, and each foot five toes and each toe shall end with a flat nail... and any creature that shall seem to be human, but is not formed thus is not human. It is neither man nor woman. It is a blasphemy against the true Image of God, and hateful in the sight of God". It is sad to think that this is what David is taught as it reinforces the idea that anyone who is even slightly different would be considered abnormal. David's father really drills in this idea as he is a community leader. In fact, one day, when David was wrapping a bandage around his hand, he absent-mindedly wishes for a third hand which makes

his father furious. David senses that the atmosphere changes as the narration says, “ silence fell on the whole room like a clap”. Hearing his own son say this causes David’s father to verbally attack him. This illustrates the strong views that the Waknuks have in regards to what a human being should look and be like, thus creating many concerns for those who do not fit the expected image.

In addition to the Waknuk community, it is also important to understand who the Fringes are in the novel as they are the deviations who are hunted and tormented for being “ different”. They are all different because of their genetic mutations. However, they are still people who want the freedom to be themselves. The Fringes are all rejects of Waknuk but feel like there is nothing wrong with them and, thus, have a strong hatred towards the people of Waknuk as they are physically abused by them. David also thinks this as he thinks back to Sophie, “ yet there was nothing wrong with Sophie. She was an ordinary little girl — if a great deal more sensible and braver than most”. As David was growing up, he is taught that Fringes are scary people and look like monsters. He soon realizes that this is not true, because when he meets Sophie, she looks just like him, but with an extra toe. The people of Fringes are forced to steal from Waknuk as they do not have the necessary items to live. This leads to many conflicts including a few battles. In the story, there is a battle and David waits for information to make sure everyone is safe: “ ... two of the captured Fringes leaders in the middle of them... the tales about the had let to expect creatures with two heads, or fur all over, or half a dozen arms and legs. Instead, they seemed at first glance to be ordinary men...”. This shows that even though they look like ordinary

men, they were still known as deviants because they were not in the “ image of God”. One of the leaders of the Fringes is David’s uncle which shows that David’s father would turn on his own blood; his brother simply because of his rigid discriminatory beliefs. Since the Fringes have less access to food and various resources, they feel anger towards Waknuk people as a result of the injustice, ultimately causing a major conflict.

Finally, the Sealander, who are also a community of deviants, embraced their differences leading them to create all types of technology which illustrates the importance of embracing differences. The Sealander is only discovered near the end of the book when Petra lets a cry to the Sealand lady. They believe that only the telepaths should live and, so, they are the only ones set free from the sticky threads which was dropped. The narration reveals: “ David, Rosalind, Petra, and Micheal are amazed as they saw the white machine that rested in the middle of the clearing. The device on top of it had ceased to revolve... there were glazed windows in the side of the fish-shaped body, and a door stood open”. Even though the telepaths have special powers and abilities, they have no technology and are fascinated by what they see. The people of Sealand are known as the New people which makes the reader wonder if the others also look like the Sealand lady and if they also have similar technology. The Sealand lady decides to wipe out all of Waknuk and Fringes to make another historical moment and says, “ the old people brought down tribulation, and were broken into fragments. They are determined still that there is a final form to defend: soon they will attain the stability they strive for, in the only form granted - a place among the fossils”. This shows the theme of discrimination from a religious point of

view. Joseph had the same mindset from the beginning to the end of the book, he thought that God had one true image and anyone else who did not fit this should not be considered human. The Sealander, on the other hand, think that they and the telepaths should be the only one who survives and ends up killing everyone else which causes mass destruction, as a whole community is wiped out due to perceived differences and discriminatory thought patterns.

To conclude, by looking at the three communities, Waknuk, Fringes, and Sealand, it is easy to understand that the destruction and discrimination between them is narrated to reinforce the idea that discrimination is dangerous. John Wyndham creates the book the Chrysalids to prove to people that everyone should be treated the same. Waknuk contains more value as they have more power and discriminate against deviants. The Fringes are poor and struggle to survive until Sealand takes over both communities as the kills everyone except for the telepaths. Therefore, people who believe they belong to a superior race or group often are the cause of various wars and conflicts which makes this novel a cautionary tale for humanity.