

# Power and privilege in master Harold and the boys



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In "Master Harold"... and the Boys, black Africans are treated as though they are not as important as the white Africans. Fugard represents black Africans as people who have been disenfranchised, segregated, and less privileged in an attempt to show the struggles involved with apartheid. Fugard does this through the symbolism of the bench and the ballroom dancing as well as through the conflicts between characters.

In the beginning of "Master Harold"...and the Boys, Sam is trying to teach Willie how to dance. Ballroom dancing symbolizes a world without conflict. Sam says, "it's beautiful because that is what we want life to be like. But instead like you said Hally, we're bumping into each other all the time" (Fugard 46). Sam believes that apartheid is the result of people bumping into each other, which leads him to say that ballroom dancing, is like a world without collisions; when two people dance, they do not bump into each other, but simply dance. Because Sam is dreaming of a world without the collisions, which in this case refers to apartheid, it suggests that Sam has had a hard time as a result of apartheid.

Sam's dream not only suggests how Sam feels about apartheid, but also causes conflict between Sam and Hally, as Hally doesn't agree with Sam's idea of ballroom dancing. Because of the way Hally delivers his argument, he suggests that Sam is less educated than him, which furthers the idea of black African disenfranchisement within the education system during apartheid. Here, Hally is suggesting that Sam is less educated, stupid, and dumb which may be contributed to what Hally has been taught to believe. Even though the author shows the readers that Sam is educated through Sam's reading of comic books and his conversation on the Men of Letters,

the idea persists within Hally's mind that Sam is uneducated. The educational disenfranchisement of black Africans led to a shift in public opinion about the education levels of non-whites, as demonstrated by Hally's misconstrued perception of Sam's education.

During an argument, Hally demands that Sam call him Master Harold and to refer to his father as his boss: " He's a white man and that's good enough for you" (Fugard 53). Fugard uses Hally's language and tone to convey Hally's superiority over Sam. Although Hally's father is cripple and an alcoholic, Hally views him as better than Sam because he is white. The narrative of whiteness trumping every other personal characteristic further paints the picture of the limited privileges black Africans had during apartheid. Black Africans also recognize the power disparity that is dictated by skin color. Sam tells Hally, " because you think you're safe in your fair skin" (Fugard 56). Here, Sam implies that Hally is protected because of the color of his pale skin and further elucidates Fugard's demonstration of black African disenfranchisement.

The symbolism of the park bench may be one of the most important literary elements used in this play, as it symbolizes apartheid. When Sam and Hally fly a kite together Hally sits down on a ' whites only' bench, forcing Sam to leave the area. Later Sam says, " I couldn't sit down and stay with you. It was a ' Whites Only' bench" (Fugard 58). This shows segregation as well as suggests that blacks are seen as less than whites. Sam's departure also examines the effect of segregation on Sam and Hally's relationship, which represents the larger problems of relationships between blacks and whites.

The existence of segregation put a strain on their relationship, which ultimately led to a major argument and the end of their relationship.

Fugard portrays Black Africans as less than their White counterparts to show the effects that apartheid had on different relationships. The author uses the symbolism of the ballroom dancing to demonstrate that black Africans, such as Sam, dream of a world without conflict because of how they have been treated under apartheid. The bench symbolizes apartheid as well as demonstrates how blacks are less privileged by showing that they cannot share a bench with whites. This too damages the relationship between Hally and Sam. Fugard uses these symbols to demonstrate the ways that apartheid can affect people and their relationships, as well as show his negative viewpoint upon the subject of apartheid.