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The Lessons of Segregation

Segregation was once the law of the land in American. The idea of “separate but equal” existed across the country. People lived segregated in towns in their homes, schools, buses, and even restrooms. Since segregation is such an important part of our history, many authors look at this topic and examine the effects it has on society. In *The Other Side,* Jacqueline Woodson tells the story of an unlikely friendship in a town separated by a fence. The famous poet Langston Hughes also examines segregation in his poem “Merry-Go-Round.” The speak of the poem, a young black child, asks where he is to sit on the merry-go-round when there is no back to it. Children are especially affected by the messages segregation sends. Segregation and separation of the races teaches children several negative lessons.

One lesson children learn when races are segregated is that there should not be any interaction between races just because of the color of the skin. In *The Other Side,* Annie, a white girl that lives on the opposite side of the fence from Clover and her friends, asks to play jump rope with Clover and her friends. Clover explains, “And my friend Sandra said no without even asking the rest of us” (Woodson). Sandra immediately decides to exclude Annie just because she lives on the other side and is different from the rest of the girls. The town has always lived this way, which is where Sandra learns this behavior. It should be accepted to get to know and play with others even if they are from a different race. Segregation makes children think it is okay that different people do not come together.

The lesson of differences and exclusion can also make one race feel inferior to another. Black children especially learn this lesson through segregation. In the poem “Merry-Go-Round,” the young speaker says, “Down South where I come from/White and colored/cannot sit side by side” (Hughes). Black children growing up in segregation see from an early age that blacks are whites are separated. They see different treatment of races based on skin color. They may end up thinking that they are inferior to whites because they cannot sit with them. Even in simple acts like riding a merry-go-round, a black child expects to be in the back. This is a negative message to send children as it opposes America’s ideal of freedom and justice for all.

Segregation sends negative messages to all people, especially children. We need to be aware of the messages that were sent and the negative consequences so we can learn from our history. While there may not be Jim Crow laws enforced today, many people still segregate themselves based on race. People need to look past race to come together and build a stronger, united country. Children should learn that all people are created equally and deserve the same treatment regardless of race or background. We can overcome the negative effects of segregation.