

Satire and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

Humor is often used as a way of discussing taboo or difficult topics. We see this with comedians whose comedic content is often littered with subject matters such as culture, race, gender, politics and religion; all of which are matters that are generally steered clear from outside of the intimacy of one's home. However, these subjects can also be discovered in subtle ways in television commercials, lyrics from a song and written narratives. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl uses humor through many of its characters, particularly Willy Wonka and the Oompa-Loompas, who are able to shed light on topics such as parenting, etiquette and culture.

Within the narrative, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* offers its readers an interesting look at stereotypes as it relates to those who are differently-abled, social economic status, age, culture, race, parenting styles, familial dynamics and child development. The stereotypes that seemed to be getting criticized were those relating to parenting styles and age. However, race, culture and in some ways age were being propagated throughout the book. We see the aforementioned matter of race and culture in the exploration of the people who are a part of the oompa loompa tribe. Willy Wonka discussed how he "imported" the group of people from Loompaland who craved cacao beans to eat. His description of them parallels strongly to the transatlantic slave trade in which some people who were enslaving Africans considered themselves as doing a service and saving them from their "dangerous, beastly country." This similarity draws upon the continual stereotypes of different ethnic and racial groups.

I believe Roald Dahl had the intentions to take the issue of race, culture and age and parody it so it would not be as taboo. However, this is a difficult task to tackle when creating a children's narrative as though his intention may be to make a mockery of these touchy topics it also aids in instilling less than favorable thoughts or ideas about this group of people.

Previously when I thought about the concept of age, I had not considered how young 40 or 50 years old happened to be until I witnessed my loved ones age into these groups. Until that point, I thought of being an older citizen exactly how Charlie's maternal and paternal grandparents are displayed in the book: tired, sleeping most of the day, immobile and afraid to do anything outside of their home (in the case of Charlie, it was their bed). This is a ridiculous assertion as this ideology could not be more erroneous in facts regarding older adults. In considering my own warped beliefs and how I came about these thoughts (e.g. television shows, movies, books), I realized how these false concepts can greatly shape the belief system of an individual. So though Dahl may have had positive aims in his narrative the subtle and sometimes overt interpretation of socially constructed groups may help guide the thinking of a culture.

In lieu of this, as professionals it is important that we consider the different themes, possible interpretations and intended goals for the narratives that are selected as a part of students' curriculums as they definitely influence one's thinking. If the intention of a

teacher is to help students know the difference between different types of narratives and they are introducing a satirical or humorous reading to them, then it is the role of the teacher to thoroughly and accurately explain the meaning and intention of satire and humor. As well, the teacher should include in his/her curriculum a discussion on the different satirical moments and address them in a manner that expresses how those moments were satirized. This will aid students who may not know the difference between factual information and satirical content on any particular group.

Overall, I think this book could be used for children but it would have to be used with a clear objective so certain groups are not further stereotyped in a negative light. I think this book could assist students in critical thinking, research and open discussions regarding subject matters and themes that tend to not be discussed in many academic settings. When implemented properly, this type of book could very well be used as a way of engaging students on difficult topics while affirming others such as positive family dynamics (which we see with Charlie and his family) and aiding students in their vocabulary (as the narrative uses a lot of descriptive adjectives). So while there are sensitive and challenging topics in Dahl's book, they could be used in a manner that would help students challenge their thinking on such topics.