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ENGL 116B

October 3rd, 2012

The Logan's Educational Stages

Throughout the novel there is clear evidence that the Logan children are gradually educated depending on their age and maturity. It seems as if the Logan family follows an educational plan with a set of three progressive stages; first the household stage, second the black community stage, and finally the real world stage.

In the first stage, at home, the children are taught the basic disciplines: hard work, obedience, responsibility, good judgment, etc...Throughout the novel the Logan children are encouraged to work hard from an early age. Little Man, although he is only a first grader, and Cassie, although she is a girl, are both working in the fields picking cotton just like every one else. Cassie is also expected to help in the kitchen with preparing the family dinner. The children were expected to study for school, and to be diligent about it. When Cassie and her brothers were too distracted with their bus victory, "More than once Mama scolded us, telling us to get down to business" (pg. 57). Foolish giggling and messing around was not appreciated or tolerated and if scolding didn't work than Mama would start using stricter measures. Obedience to parents was strictly enforced. Papa David told the kids about visiting the Wallace's, "If I ever find out y'all been up there, for any reason, I'm gonna wear y'all out. Y'all hear me?" (pg. 41). When the

children wandered up to the Wallace's place and Papa David found out about it, he gave them all a good whipping.

All these events point to how the Logan family taught the basics to their children starting from the home. It was at home where they learned to work hard, to listen and obey, to make wise decisions, to be honest and honorable. It was at home where they would first gain valuable life lessons which could only help them as they gradually gained more life experience.

The second stage, in the black community, the children learn important social values. On the first day of school Cassie tugs at "The high collar of the Sunday dress Mama had made we wear for the first day of school - as if it were something special" (pg. 4). Although Cassie herself doesn't understand why her mother is making her wear a dress, she is being taught to be tidy and publicly presentable. Little Man is evidence of this as he really tries hard to be nice and clean all the time. In school the children learn to get along with others. Of course, there are arguments and fights, but even that teaches the children valuable lessons. Stacey, having learned that snitching is socially hated, would not tell on TJ about the cheating notes; he would rather get an embarrassing whipping from his mother.

As the children grow older, go to school, go to church and start meeting up with others, the parents carefully advise them what to do. When Mama takes the children to see Mr. Berry she tells them "I don't want you to be afraid or uncomfortable when you see him. Just be yourselves" (pg. 96). The children end up trying not to stare at him as they sit in the house. Uncle Hammer teaches Stacey a strong lesson about not letting himself get intimidated by others. "Well, ain't Stacey got a brain? What the devil should he care what T.J. thinks or T.J. says?" (pg. 142). The children learn not to be intimidated or tricked by others.

Finally in the last and most difficult of the stages, the real world stage, the children learn to face the trials of life. However, this stage happens gradually for the children depending on their age. When Mr. Avery comes and tells Mama that “They’s ridin’ t’night” (pg. 60). All the kids are immediately sent to bed. The parents don’t want to expose the children to the harshness of the world before they are ready. Of course, the children make their own conclusions about it, but they still don’t know the real details.

When Big Ma would go to Strawberry to sell some milk and eggs, she would never take the children even though they begged to go. Stacey was the first one allowed to go, and he was the first of the children to learn about segregation between blacks and whites. Cassie was allowed to go next, but Christopher-John and Little-Man were still kept at home. This points out how carefully the parents protected the children from the real world until they were ready to face it.

In the real world stage, the children learn some of the most difficult lessons in life. Since all of them have a strong sense of justice, having gone through the home stage, it is not easy to deal with the injustice found in the world. When encountering the injustice of the bus system Little Man exclaims, “But Big Ma, it ain’t fair.”, “ It just ain’t fair” (pg. 44). Big Ma knows the real reason as to why the bus system is like that, but understands that Little Man is not ready to be exposed to the real world stage just yet. When Cassie goes to Strawberry she finally learns the real reasons as to why the bus system is like that; because the white people think they are better than the black people. However hard it might have been to grasp the lesson, Cassie is forced to learn it both at the hands of Mr. Barnett and Mr. Simms.

Depending on their age, each of the Logan children react differently to the real world stage. When Stacey leads them to dig a ditch in the road and consequences threaten, Christopher-John says that “All I wanted to do was eat my lunch” (pg. 63). While Stacey is learning to fight against the world’s injustice, the younger children are concerned with more childly things. Cassie’s initial reaction to Mr. Barnett was to tell him her opinion of him, but Stacey, being more experienced, quickly stops her and drags her out of the store. Cassie didn’t understand what she was doing. She only understood the basic principles of justice and honor that she had been taught at home. As the book progresses we see how Cassie is fully emerged into the real world stage and how she learns to deal with the troubles she encounters.

Although all three stages of education are present at all times during the children’s life, the importance of these stages is gradual. The Logan’s straighten out their kids from a young age in the home environment. T.J., as an example of someone who was not properly educated in the home environment but was instead educated by the real world, was not well prepared to deal with all the troubles that came with time. As the Logan children grow, they learn to deal with all the troubles of the final world stage using everything they learned from the previous stages.