

Learning About Justice Through Injustice

Audrey Willems Van Dijk

Address: 1440 Steuben St.
Wausau WI, 54403

Phone: (715) 848-1251

E-mail: Weatherwoman571@charter.net

Learning About Justice Through Injustice

Justice is defined as, “the maintenance or administration of what is just especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments” or, “the administration of law; *especially*: made the establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity” (“Justice”). Adjectives such as “impartial” and “equity” are contradictory to the conditions observed in *Enrique’s Journey*, by author Sonia Nazario. The obvious injustices can be viewed within the novel, such as the apparent corruption Enrique faced through Mexico. However, as I reflected on the story I considered different injustices, not necessarily found in the book. I began to contemplate the differences in the lifestyle of Enrique and myself, and found them to be exceptionally unfair. Unfortunately, this novel does not epitomize Justice, yet it still has the power to convey why this particular core value is so important.

Weather, the danger of trains, hunger, gangs and addictions are only a modicum of the antagonists present on the treacherous journey to step foot on American soil; a journey that an increasing number of Central American immigrants are making each year. Above the natural threats, Enrique and other immigrants overcame *La Migra*, corrupt Mexican immigration agents. These agents epitomize injustice, as they steal, threaten, beat, rob, rape and even kill the immigrants. Immigrants found Chiapas to be an area teeming with *La Migra* agents and gangs, and consequently an area where many surrendered and turned around and retreated home. It was within Chiapas that Enrique experienced the worst beating on his seven attempts: “Enrique’s left eye socket has a severe concussion. The eyelid is injured and might droop forever. His back is covered in bruises. He has several lesions on his right leg and an open wound hidden under his hair. Two of his top teeth are broken. So is one on the bottom” (Nazario 57). The description of

Enrique's injuries heightened the hostile portrayal of Chiapas and emphasized the cruelty present there. In addition to the previously listed dangers, women confronted additional risks. They are perceived to be easy targets and commonly become rape victims. Girls attempted to avoid these situations through extreme strategies such as, "[they] cut off their hair, strap their breasts, and try to pass for boys. Others scrawl on the chests, TENGO SIDA. 'I have AIDS'" (Nazario 78). The examples illustrated the effort the girls make in order to not be easily targeted, again accentuating the unsafe environment. These immigrants, usually children, journeyed on the tops of trains, frequently to reunite with a family member, an innocent hope, and due to the additional injustice they must surmount, many ended up on *El Bus de Lagrimas*, the Bus of Tears. The immigrants were constantly assaulted, yet continued in their pursuit, demonstrating their powerful determination through the worst injustices. Their determination inspires one to be grateful for the fairness and equity present in his/her fortunate life.

On a more personal level, after reflecting on the severe injustice in Nazario's text, I attempted to relate to Enrique by thinking of my own trials, and failed. Horribly. I realized no obstacles no matter how big in my life could compare to riding on the tops of trains, battling the heat, cold, criminals and hunger, across more than 1,500 miles. I also reflected on Enrique's life in Honduras, as well as in North Carolina, and realized just how privileged I am. I have never had to live off a couple dollars a day, or moved around depending on who would take me in. Never have either of my parents been forced to make a decision of whether to leave and fill my belly or stay, love me and watch me go hungry. As I sat on my plush, comfortable couch reading about this young boy who barely ate, did not have adequate clothing and slept on a cardboard mattress, I constantly perceived this colossal variation in lifestyles to be unjust. We live in a prosperous country that people are literally dying to enter. I struggle to comprehend how the

United States is called, “The Melting Pot,” yet immigrants are still denied the right to live here, stay with their family, and earn money for children they left behind. These immigrants have sacrificed and battled through so many injustices, that my challenges such as finishing a paper for school seems diminutive. Education is another aspect of my life I now realize I have not appreciated enough. Like all kids I complained about early morning wake ups and the homework assignments, but to think children in Honduras long for a high school diploma makes me grateful for what I have. I cherish the fairness and impartiality present in my life, a thought that a small Honduran boy helped me to realize through his incredible odyssey.

This novel also possesses the ability to educate readers about topics beyond the United States, aiding in developing students international knowledge as well as concern. The repercussions of this book might influence people to help in stopping these injustices. Through this novel I learned injustice is a serious and prevalent problem observed throughout Enrique’s story, but I now understand that these injustices are also close to home. I come from a community with a large Southeast Asian population and have witnessed discrimination, an obvious injustice, first-hand. In order to prevent further prejudice, we, as a school or community, need to confront the inequity and begin change. Poverty is not just a problem in Honduras, as it is also common in the U.S. In the future I hope to aid in bringing justice to those who are less fortunate. For example, I plan on becoming a nurse-midwife. I aspire to work in intercity clinics and provide excellent prenatal health care for those who have less. As for immigration, I believe people have a right to reside in this country. If an individual will risk their life, go hungry, lose body parts in order to enter this country they have more pride and respect for this country than many people living in the U.S. today. We are the land of the free

and the home of the brave. “Brave” is an adjective I would use to describe Enrique and the other immigrants making the journey. Our national anthem proves that these individuals belong here.

The Gustavus Adolphus mission statement affirms, “The College strives to be a just community in all of its actions and to educate its students for morally responsible lives. Relations within the College community are guided by high moral principles.” *Enrique’s Journey* has provided the readers with a personal story of victimization due to injustice and therefore emphasizes the importance of the core value. Now, Gustavus students have the opportunity to use these high morals, create change and solve these injustices, with new motivation to do it, based on a story about a boy with a lot of courage, a lot of heart, and the determination to succeed.

Works Cited

“Justice.” Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary. 1979.

Nazario, Sonia. Enrique’s Journey. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006.