The Sneetches and Me

My favorite Dr. Seuss story from my childhood is one called The Sneetches, about strange creatures called Sneetches who overcome differences between themselves. In the story, there are Star-Belly Sneetches and Plain-Belly Sneetches, who ignore and act superior to the other sort. I could never understand as a child why the two types of Sneetches, who were the same except for one tiny star on the stomach, grouped themselves separately and treated each other so poorly.

I was born in Hong Kong, China, because my dad was working there at the time. I am purely American, but China fascinates me because of my connection to it. In the spring of 2008, my family visited China. It was on this trip that I realized why people group themselves together by race or culture. Staying in a small inn in Yangshuo, one day my family and I decided to go on a lengthy bike ride to moon hill, a forested cliff with a hole through its center.

On the way home, we got lost, and instead of ending up on the main road that went to our inn, we found ourselves in a tangle of skinny dirt roads flanked by fields and run down houses. I was unnerved; nothing around me was American or familiar at all. There were no signs with English translations like in the Hong Kong airport, no tourism vehicles to hail, or people who spoke English nearby. Each time we approached a figure to ask for directions, they would nod and offer an apologetic smile. We passed a woman standing in the doorframe of her small home, calling out in foreign tongue to her son playing in the street. We saw a man slowly pulling an old cart laden with vegetables.

And when the sky darkened, we saw the glowing windows of homes with voices and laughter drifting outside. I forgot I was scared. In fact, I forgot I was in China at all. It was so similar to riding at night in my own neighborhood and seeing bright windows, watching silhouettes of families eating dinner, and hearing squeals of children running inside for bed. These sights made me realize how similar Americans, Chinese, and any other groups of people are, despite varying cultures.

We all possess the same human capacity to rejoice at the birth of a baby, to despair at the death of a loved one, and to reach out to one another with empathy. By finding these similarities that tie us all together and make us human, we come closer together. The German Nazis of the early 1900’s, who were culturally different from their Jewish neighbors, advertised differences between their races. They claimed that they, the Aryans, were the superior race.

Brainwashing hundreds of people to accept subordination of the Jews, the Nazis started the devastating holocaust movement where human beings were treated like animals on a tremendous scale. It is our duty to prevent horrifying events in human history such as the Holocaust. We need to dissolve lines dividing groups of people and shun theories of racial superiority.

Since my trip, I’ve been trying to overcome racial and cultural differences that keep me from talking to someone at school or inviting someone to a social event. Even if there’s a star on my belly and not on someone else’s, we’re both Sneetches, and that’s all that counts.

Student's Name: Lucy Rummler
Grade: 11th Grade
School: Charleston County School of the Arts
Instructor's Name: Susanne Drennan
Principal's Name: James Reinhart