

3.3 SCHWARZFAHRER: A CASE STUDY IN HUMAN RIGHTS

? FOCUS QUESTION:

- Why do some people choose to stand up for victims of discrimination, whereas others do not?

STANDARD #4 INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY.

STANDARD #5 INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS.

LESSON OVERVIEW:

This lesson focuses on human rights using the Academy Award-winning short film *Schwarzfahrer* as the basis of the study. Germany's increasingly pluralistic society has resulted in the need for greater sensitivity in accepting cultural and racial differences. This film allows for open discussion and should serve as a vehicle for the examination of biases and their outcomes in our own society.

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Schwarzfahrer (1993) is a thought-provoking short film about xenophobia by German director Pepe Danquart. It won several awards at film festivals along with the Academy Award for Best Short Film (Live Action) in 1994. Through a simple everyday scene—a group of people riding a tram in Berlin—we are introduced to the complex themes of diversity and racism. The major exponent of racial prejudice is an elderly woman who complains out loud and at length about a black passenger who has taken the seat beside her. The silence of the other passengers leaves her opinions uncontested. When a conductor boards the tram to check passengers' tickets, the black man grabs his neighbor's ticket and eats it. The woman must then get off the tram with the conductor, who issues her a fine.



In German, the word '*Schwarzfahrer*' refers to a fare-dodger, or someone who travels by public transportation without a ticket. Literally, '*Schwarz-fahrer*' also means 'black rider,' and hence the title forms a pun that deepens the film's theme.

🕒 TIME:

(1-2) 45 minute class periods

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:



- *Schwarzfahrer* is available for viewing with English subtitles at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFQXcv1k9OM>
- Viewing Activity Worksheet (**Handout 3.3.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Transcript of the film (**Handout 3.3.2 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Post-Viewing Questions (**Handout 3.3.3 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- *An Imaginary Foreigner Strike in Berlin*, a poem by Aras Ören (**Handout 3.3.4 on Instructional Resource Disc**)



PROCEDURE:

DAYS 1-2:

- **Anticipatory Set:** The teacher should direct the students, either in small groups, with a partner, or as an entire class, to discuss the following questions:
 1. What is meant by a “diverse” or “multicultural” society?
 2. Do students from different countries attend your school?
 3. What religions and ethnic groups are represented in your school and/or community?
 4. What countries did your ancestors live in? When did they come to the United States?
- Before showing the film *Schwarzfahrer*, the teacher should distribute these questions for the students to reflect upon while watching the film:
 1. Who is riding the tram? What different age, ethnic and socioeconomic groups are represented?
 2. What is the effect of a black-and-white (rather than color) film? How does this format add to the theme?
 3. How does the filmmaker use sound (music, human sounds, silence) to underline the theme?
- Immediately after the film, the teacher should instruct the students to make a list of the stereotypes and clichés used by the elderly woman. The teacher may want to distribute the Transcript of the film (**Handout 3.3.2 on Instructional Resource Disc**) to the students, especially if the students have had difficulty reading the subtitles. The teacher may want to stress to students that the woman’s monologue is offensive and explain the connotations of certain words and phrases, i.e., that “*Hottentotten*” is not interchangeable with “*Afrodeutsche*” or “*schwarze Deutsche*.” In addition, the teacher may want to use the Viewing Activity Worksheet (**Handout 3.3.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**), which lists the major passengers on the tram.

DAY 2:

- The teacher should facilitate a discussion of students’ observations and reactions to the film *Schwarzfahrer*. The teacher may want to use the Post-Viewing Questions (**Handout 3.3.3 on Instructional Resource Disc**) to elicit student responses.

WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:

- Have you or a friend or relative ever been the victim of discrimination? How did you react? If other people saw what happened, what did they do and say? Have you or a friend or relative ever prejudged another person based on that person’s race, religion or ethnic group? Are the themes of this German film applicable to people living in the United States?

MODIFICATIONS:

- Students act out a new scene in which the tram passengers do or say something in response to the elderly woman’s comments about the black rider.
- Students rewrite the ending of the movie, starting at the point where the conductor boards the tram.

EXTENSIONS:

- Discuss the poem *An Imaginary Foreigner Strike in Berlin* (*Ein imaginärer Ausländer-Generalstreik in Berlin*) by Turkish–German poet Aras Ören (**Handout 3.3.4 on Instructional Resource Disc**).
 - Before students read the poem, the teacher should ask the following questions:
 1. Does your community have foreign workers? In what occupations?
 2. What are these workers’ country of origin?
 3. Are these foreign workers welcomed? Unwelcomed? Necessary? Unwanted? Why?

- Read the poem.
- Ask students to look back at the poem and compile a list of the tasks that were left undone during the foreign worker strike. Using this list, students should then create a second list of the jobs performed by foreign workers. This assignment can be completed in groups, pairs, or individually.
- Post reading discussion questions may include:
 1. Do you know someone who has been on strike? What were his or her reasons for taking this action?
 2. Has there even been a strike in your community? If so, how did it affect the community?
 3. Why might foreign workers go on strike—in your community and/or in Germany?
 4. Read the last two lines of the poem again. Why would people fear or dislike foreigners even when foreigners' labor is essential?

Sources:

Kitzler, A. (Producer), & Danquart, P. (Director). (1993). *Schwarzfahrer* [Short film]. Germany: Trans-Film. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFQXcv1k9OM>

Mills, M., & Loentz, E. (1998). *Advocacy for a multicultural curriculum in German: Model lesson plans for upper middle, secondary, post-secondary German classrooms*. Retrieved from <http://www.aatg.org/files/ald/Schwarzfahrer.pdf>

Ören, A. (n.d.). *An Imaginary Foreigner Strike in Berlin (Ein imaginärer Ausländer-Generalstreik in Berlin)*. Retrieved from <http://cies.einaudi.cornell.edu/system/files/An%20Imaginary%20Foreigner%20Strike%20in%20Berlin.pdf>

PineTreePictures. (2007, February 21). *Schwarzfahrer (with English Subtitles)*. [Video file with English subtitles]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFQXcv1k9OM>