



#10032 THE COLOR OF FRIENDSHIP

DISNEY EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTIONS, 1999

Grade Level: 6-12

90 mins.

1 Instructional Graphic Enclosed

DESCRIPTION

The family of African-American congressman Ron Dellums decides to host a South African exchange student, expecting a black girl to arrive at their home. When the student turns out to be white, she, the family, and their daughter confront personal biases and institutional racism. Explores issues of prejudice, race relations, civil rights, and apartheid as the two girls discover they have more in common than they thought. Based on actual events in 1977.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: World History—The 20th Century Since 1945: Promises and Paradoxes

- Standard: Understands the search for community, stability, and peace in an interdependent world
 - ◆ Benchmark: Understands efforts to improve political and social conditions around the world (e.g., the progress of human and civil rights around the globe since the 1948 U.N. Declaration of Human Rights; how the apartheid system was dismantled in South Africa and the black majority won voting rights; the progress made since the 1970s in resolving conflict between Israel and neighboring states) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 2.)
- Standard: Understands how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up
 - ◆ Benchmark: Understands political conditions in Africa after World War II (e.g., the moral, social, political, and economic implications of apartheid; the diverse leadership and governing styles of African regimes through the second half of the 20th century) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1.)

Subject Area: Behavioral Studies

- Standard: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior
 - ◆ Benchmark: Understands that cultural beliefs strongly influence the values and behavior of the people who grow up in the culture, often without their

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being fully aware of it, and that people have different responses to these influences (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1 and 4.)

- ◆ Benchmark: Understands that family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, institutional affiliations, socioeconomic status, and other group and cultural influences contribute to the shaping of a person's identity (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 3 and 4.)
- Standard: Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions
 - ◆ Benchmark: Understands that beliefs and customs held by certain groups can help or hinder people as they strive to use their talents and that sometimes individuals can change those beliefs and customs in ways that will help people to succeed more easily in the future (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 3.)

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To depict the apartheid regime of South Africa and its impact on both white and black South Africans.
2. To show some of those who fought against apartheid both here in the U.S. and in South Africa.
3. To illustrate that although racism may run deep, it can be unlearned.
4. To show that people from different cultures and backgrounds can find common ground if they are open to doing so.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Inspired by actual events, *The Color of Friendship* takes viewers back to the late 1970s America and offers a glimpse of South Africa under apartheid. Part of the film's plot revolves around black activist Steve Biko's murder in a South African prison. The film also refers to important civil rights leaders and writers, such as Alan Paton (*Cry the Beloved Country*) and Alex Haley (*Roots*). Using insight and humor, the moviemakers address serious issues of racial equality.

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. activist | 8. embassy |
| 2. apartheid | 9. exchange student |
| 3. assumptions | 10. foreign |
| 4. banned | 11. human rights |
| 5. bigotry | 12. racism/racist |
| 6. congressman | 13. sensitivity |
| 7. demonstrations | 14. weaverbird |

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Locate South Africa on a world map or globe. Review the type of government South Africa had in the 1970s. Discuss apartheid.
2. Discuss the meaning of the word *racist*. How do people become racists?

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

3. One of the main characters in the movie is Congressman Ronald Dellums from California.
 - a. Locate Oakland, California, where Dellums grew up, and Berkeley California, where he was on the City Council before he ran for Congress.
 - b. Point out that Congressmen and their families live in the Washington, D.C. area rather than their home state.
 - c. Review how people become members of the U.S. House of Representatives and what their responsibilities are.
4. Discuss the topic of foreign exchange students. What do they do? Why do students choose to do that? Why do families choose to host exchange students?
5. Copy and distribute "The Color of Friendship Character Study." Explain the directions. (See INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC.)

DURING SHOWING

1. View the video more than once, with one showing uninterrupted.
2. Pause after the announcement of how Steven Biko really died to be sure students understand. Predict how this will impact Piper and Mahree.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. How are the Dellums family and the Bok families similar? How are they different?
2. Discuss the Bok family attitudes and behavior in the beginning of the movie.
 - a. How does Mahree behave toward Flora, the Bok family's servant?
 - b. How does the Bok family react when a white man viciously kicks a black restaurant worker? Why do you think the Boks react this way?
3. Why does Piper want an exchange student to come and live with her family? Why does Mahree want to be an exchange student in the United States?
4. Before Mahree leaves for the U.S., Flora figures out that the girl will be living with an African-American family. Why do you think Flora doesn't reveal this to the Boks?
5. During the time she spends hiding out in Piper's bedroom, what items does Mahree look at? What do you think she discovers about Piper?
6. Why does Congressman Dellums want Mahree to leave his family's home? How do his feelings change after Mahree asks to stay? Does he trust Mahree right away?
7. How does Mahree seem to feel about her first day of school at Piper's junior high school? Why do you think she felt this way?
8. Two books are mentioned in the movie: *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton and *Roots* by Alex Haley. Why do you think the movie screenwriter mentioned them?
9. Does this movie have any villains? Who are they, and what makes them seem villainous?
10. Why does Mahree lie when Piper asks if she can come to visit Mahree in South Africa?

11. How do Piper and Congressman Dellums seem to feel towards Mahree as she tells them about the weaverbirds?

Applications and Activities

1. Use the completed character study charts to discuss how each of the characters interacts with Mahree Bok. (See BEFORE SHOWING 5.) Additional discussion questions include:
 - a. Describe Piper's personality. Is she quick or slow to forgive Mahree for the white girl's first reaction to the Dellums family? What do you like best about Piper?
 - b. Does Congressman Dellums seem gentle, stern, witty, or all three? Describe how his feelings toward Mahree change over the course of the film.
 - c. What does Roscoe Dellums tell her husband and children when they say harsh things about Mahree?
 - d. How does Flora treat Mahree? Do you think she really likes the girl? Or does she act respectfully because her job requires it?
 - e. How does Mahree treat Flora in the beginning of the movie and at the end?
 - f. How does Mahree's father treat her? How do you think he would feel about his daughter's love and respect for the Dellums family?
2. For each statement below from the film, answer the following questions. Who said it? When was the statement made? What did the speaker mean?
 - a. ". . . we'll forever lose our opportunity to enrich our lives and forge a kinship."
 - b. "I think going to America will be good for you. . . .Sometimes it is good to learn how other people think."
 - c. "But she's . . . white!"
 - d. "Assumptions—they'll get you every time. We assumed 'African' meant black African and she assumed 'congressman' meant white politician."
 - e. "I have been fighting bigotry my whole life. . . .It goes against everything I'm about to have a racist white South African living in my house."
 - f. "That's like being a Jew and inviting the Gestapo over for laughs!"
 - g. "While I have you on the phone, maybe you can get me some information on a Steven Biko you're 'hosting' in one of your jails."
 - h. "Kaffir, Bantu, Colored—they all mean 'black people'?"
 - i. "I don't think you're a bad person, Mahree. I just think you've been taught some bad things."
 - j. "Well, he might be famous here, but not in South Africa. It's probably banned."
 - k. "In all your talking, did she ever get around to inviting you to stay with her?"
 - l. "It's a nasty cycle. It has to be stopped . . . starting, maybe, with you."
3. Work in small groups to research one of the following topics or another topic related to South Africa today. Report to the class with visuals.
 - a. Crime and violence in South Africa today.
 - b. South Africa's economy, focusing on economic growth after economic sanctions were lifted, and unemployment among black people.
 - c. Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.
 - d. The South African parliamentary system of government.

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

- e. South African literature, including poetry, novels, and plays.
4. Make a poster of the South African flag.
 - a. Surround it by text that explains the symbolism of its shapes and colors.
 - b. Compare today's flag to the one that represented South Africa from 1927 until apartheid's demise.
5. In small groups, read either an autobiography or work of fiction that is set in South Africa.
 - a. Conduct a book talk summarizing the story and discussing opinions of the work.
 - b. Read aloud passages from the book that are especially interesting, moving, or dramatic.
6. Interview via e-mail an adult living in South Africa. Try South African college Web sites for students or teachers who might be interested. Display some of the information learned. Possible interview questions are:
 - a. How old were you when apartheid ended? Did you vote in the 1994 election?
 - b. What can you remember about the early 1990s, just before apartheid ended?
 - c. Before apartheid ended, how did you feel about your country's government policies?
 - d. How has day-to-day life in South Africa changed since 1994? In what ways has it improved? Grown worse?
 - e. What are some South African words or expressions that Americans probably do not know?
 - f. Have you seen any movies, such as *Cry Freedom*, that show the antiapartheid struggle? Do you think they accurately depict the events that occurred?
7. Make a time line of South African apartheid. Choose events and illustrate the time line. Use original drawings, collages of magazine photos, or printed images from the Internet.
8. Read biographies related to civil rights struggles.
 - a. Some might read biographies of South African's leaders in the antiapartheid struggle, such as Steve Biko, Nelson Mandela, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.
 - b. Others might read biographies of U.S. civil rights leaders, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, or Cesar Chavez.
 - c. Hold a panel discussion to share information learned.
 - d. Compare and contrast the U.S. civil rights movement to the campaign against South African apartheid.
9. Read writings by people who framed or supported the apartheid system such as A. L. Geyer's speech to the Rotary Club of London on August 19, 1953. (See RELATED RESOURCES—Modern History Web site.)
 - a. Discuss feelings and opinions about this.
 - b. Write letter-to-the-editor type responses expressing reactions.

SUMMARY

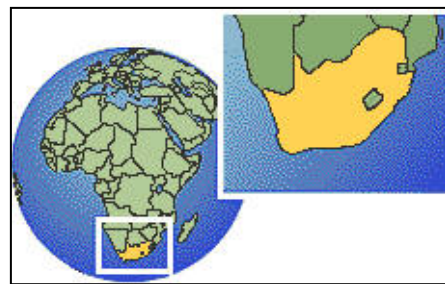
It's 1977 in Washington, D.C. Thirteen-year-old Piper convinces her father, United States Congressman Ron Dellums, to let their family host an African exchange student. The Dellums family is African American, and Piper hopes that by

living with an African teenager, she and her brothers will connect with their roots. But when 14-year-old Mahree Bok arrives, the Dellums family discovers that their guest is white—a privileged daughter of South Africa’s racist apartheid regime. To make matters worse, Mahree’s father is a police officer. He enforces laws that sharply limit the rights of blacks and other nonwhite South Africans. Because congressman Dellums is an outspoken critic of apartheid, Mahree and the Dellums family seem poorly matched indeed.

After a very rocky start, Mahree learns to love the Dellums family—and they learn to love Mahree too. Despite their differences, Piper and Mahree are able to find common ground—often through aspects of Seventies pop culture. For the first time in her life, Mahree learns to treat black people as equals. Congressman Dellums and his family discover that even deeply instilled racist beliefs can be unlearned.

CMP RELATED RESOURCES

- *Cry the Beloved Country* #9087
- *South Africa: A Land Apart* #3297
- *1960: Skin Deep* #9016
- *Roots: Episodes 1 & 2* #10299
- *Roots: Episodes 3 & 4* #10300
- *Roots: Episodes 5 & 6* #10301



World Wide Web



The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and “kid safe” sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

• **TIMELINE: SOUTH AFRICA**

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1069402.stm

This timeline covers not only recent events related to apartheid, but also other facets of South Africa’s history.

• **UNITED STATES DIPLOMATIC MISSION TO SOUTH AFRICA**

<http://pretoria.usembassy.gov/>

At this site of the U.S. embassy in South Africa you can find many current events and happenings. Choose “Reports on SA” on the top menu bar to find a wide range of government reports on South Africa.

- **AMERICAN FIELD SERVICE INTERNATIONAL**

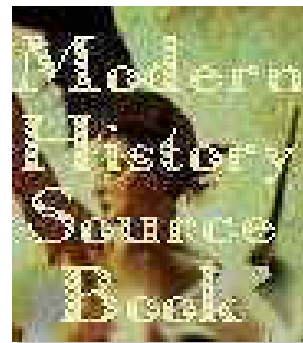
<http://www.afs.org/AFSI/>

Contains information about AFS, which offers student exchange programs in more than 50 countries.

- **MODERN HISTORY SOURCEBOOK: A.L. GEYER: THE CASE FOR APARTHEID, 1953**

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1953geyer.html>

The following speech was given before the Rotary Club of London on August 19, 1953. A supporter of apartheid explains why it is the best policy for all races in South Africa.

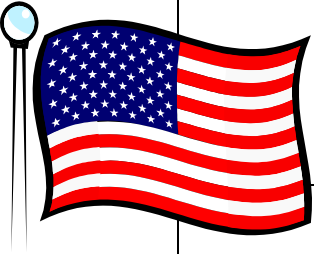


INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC

- **THE COLOR OF FRIENDSHIP CHARACTER STUDY**

The Color of Friendship Character Study

Directions: During the viewing of the video, record how each character feels about Mahree Bok and how Mahree feels about the character. If Mahree's or the character's attitude changes, not that also.

Piper Dellums	Congressman Dellums	Roscoe Dellums
 Flora	Mr. Bok (Mahree's father)	Mrs. Hofmeyer (from the South Africa Embassy)
Daniel (Piper's Nigerian friend)	Piper's brothers	Mahree's brother

