

Nadine Gordimer (20 November 1923 – 13 July 2014) was a South African writer, political activist and recipient of the 1991 Nobel Prize in Literature. She was recognized as a woman "who through her magnificent epic writing has – in the words of Alfred Nobel – been of very great benefit to humanity".

Gordimer's writing dealt with moral and racial issues, particularly apartheid in South Africa. She was active in the anti-apartheid movement, joining the African National Congress during the days when the organization was banned, and gave Nelson Mandela advice on his famous 1964 defense speech at the trial which led to his conviction for life.

ONCE UPON A TIME First published in 1989. Nadine Gordimer was born in 1923 in a small town near Johannesburg, South Africa, and graduated from the University of Witwatersrand. She has taught at several American universities, but continues to reside in her native country. A prolific writer, Gordimer has published more than twenty books of fiction (novels and short story collections). In addition to England's prestigious Booker Prize for Fiction, she received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991.

Apartheid law & (Anti-Apartheid movement)

("apartness" in the language of Afrikaans) was a system of legislation that upheld segregationist policies against non-white citizens of South Africa. After the National Party gained power in South Africa in 1948, its all-white government immediately began enforcing existing policies of racial segregation. Under apartheid, nonwhite South Africans (a majority of the population) would be forced to live in separate areas from whites and use separate public facilities.

Resistance to apartheid within South Africa took many forms over the years, from non-violent demonstrations, protests and strikes to political action and eventually to armed resistance.

By 1961, most resistance leaders had been captured and sentenced to long prison terms or executed. Nelson Mandela, a founder of Umkhonto we Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation"), the military wing of the African National Congress

(ANC), was incarcerated from 1963 to 1990; his imprisonment would draw international attention and help garner support for the anti-apartheid cause. On June 10, 1980, his followers smuggled a letter from Mandela in prison and made it public: "UNITE! MOBILISE! FIGHT ON! BETWEEN THE ANVIL OF UNITED MASS ACTION AND THE HAMMER OF THE ARMED STRUGGLE WE SHALL CRUSH APARTHEID!"

The apartheid system in South Africa was ended through a series of negotiations between 1990 and 1993 and through unilateral steps by the de Klerk government. These negotiations took place between the governing National Party, the African National Congress, and a wide variety of other political organizations. Negotiations took place against a backdrop of political violence in the country, including allegations of a state-sponsored third force destabilising the country. The negotiations resulted in South Africa's first non-racial election, which was won by the African National Congress.

Contact between the two groups would be limited. Despite strong and consistent opposition to apartheid within and outside of South Africa, its laws remained in effect for the better part of 50 years. In 1991, the government of President F.W. de Klerk began to repeal most of the legislation that provided the basis for apartheid. President de Klerk and activist Nelson Mandela would later win the Nobel Peace Prize for their work creating a new constitution for South Africa.

A theme is a universal truth about life or mankind that a work of art seeks to convey. A literary work can have many themes. Three themes in Nadine Gordimer's short story are explained below.

1. Living in fear creates a prison of one's own making.

In the story frame and in the bedtime story the narrator tells herself, the characters allow fear to dictate how they act. The narrator, lying in bed, is "a victim already." She feels trapped in her room, unable to rest or sleep but also unable to rise up and put her fears to rest. The family, attempting to protect themselves from rioters, murders, and burglars, enclose themselves behind walls, bars, and finally an ugly Auschwitz-like coil. What they do to their property symbolizes what they are doing to their souls and spirits—cutting themselves off and stunting their lives because of their fears.

2. Avoiding and withdrawing from what we fear, especially if it is fear of "the other," cannot solve the problem.

The more effort the family makes to escape from the racial/ ethnic group they distrust, the more the problems between their community and the other community grows. The wife's instinct to reach out to the other group with compassion is quickly squelched, yet that is the only glimmer of possibly bringing an end to the escalating fear and isolation the family feels.

3. To live "happily ever after" requires more than material possessions.

Looking for root causes of the tragedies that occur in the story, we must follow the money, and we find that love of money is the root of this evil. The family has arrived at their "house in a suburb" where they "had a car and a caravan trailer for holidays, and a swimming-pool." This good life that they have achieved requires protection. They fear losing it, so they insure it and participate in Neighborhood Watch. They can't insure against riot, though, so they go to drastic measures to make sure their property can't be taken from them. In the family's obsessive desire to protect their material wealth, their relationships suffer. The mother-in-law is a "witch," and they are unable to show basic human kindness to outsiders that would enrich their own souls and spirits. Ultimately, they lose their most precious "possession," their son, because of their fixation on protecting their material goods.

These strong themes of fear, prejudice, and materialism make "Once upon a Time" a powerful short story.