

How our Values Shape our Perspectives

By Maggie Whitmore

Do you believe that your personal values impact the literature you read? I do. I believe that our perspectives are dependent on values affected by both age and relationships. These values can both help and harm our experience as readers, and affect the way that we see characters in contrast to ourselves. Our values affect and are affected by our perspectives and position of the world. We are almost completely dependent on our values.

Values shape our world, whether we notice or not. As a teenager, many of my values come from my upbringing and the values of my parents. For example, I grew up being taught to treat people equally and to respect the world around me. Looking at the novel *The Jade Peony* by Wayson Choy, many of the values that I have are not the same of these characters. A big concept in this book is the role of gender in the family. I have always been raised to believe that gender shouldn't constrain what an individual can do within their lifetime, but these values aren't necessarily shared in this book. Gender roles and gender expectations are mentioned in almost every chapter of the book, affecting most of the main characters. In my opinion, the character most affected by these roles is Jook-Liang. As the singular daughter in the family, she grows up with fairly strong gender roles. Poh-Poh often tells her to act more like a girl, or explains that girls are useless and it would have been much better if Liang had been born a boy. These values are not something that I grew up with, and so it isn't a concept that I am quite used to being normal for this family.

A large factor of our values is our generation. As a teenager born in the 21st century, many of our cultural and technological advancements in the last couple of

decades have been accessible to me from a young age. Almost all important events that I have learned about have happened before I was born. Although the children in *The Jade Peony* are around my age or younger, there was still a lot happening in the world. As this book is set in the 1930s and 1940s, World War II was happening around the world. The children grew up with a different understanding of war than I have. As it was happening all around them, they grew up believing that it was a normal way of life and not something wrong. This value is shown in the book mostly through Sekky's fascination with war and bombing games that he plays with his friends. As he was living in Canada at the time, he had also grown up with the belief that Japanese people were enemies and that none of them were good people. This mindset can be very harmful to a young child, who still doesn't fully understand the difference between right or wrong.

Values can be both taught and learned and sometimes happen automatically across relationships. Growing up, most of my friends had similar values to me, since we were raised in the same area and our families had similar beliefs. When my family moved to Vancouver, however, some of the values of the people I was around shifted. Many of my new friends had slightly higher incomes than people I had known before, or parents that worked longer or shorter hours than mine. Since I spent so much time with these friends, my values started to shift. Since I was too young to fully comprehend what the difference was, I didn't understand why other people's families might have valued possessions more than mine or had different religious beliefs from mine. I noticed how apparent values within relationships were when Sekky was cared for by Meiying over the summer. Both of them has grown up with the value that the Japanese were all bad people, and they knew not to talk to them. However, when Meiying introduced Sekky to Kaz, he started to become confused. The values that he had grown up believing as fact were now altered by something that didn't quite fit his

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values. Values change based on our experiences of relationships, and can be fluid over time.

Our values shape most of our world and our perception of literature. Our own principles are affected by our ability to relate or contrast our values to those of novels or other pieces of text. These values cause us to perceive the world differently from any other individual. We each treat the world differently based on our own unique experiences.