

Advantage

by Joan Kendrick

I'll never forget the day I really began to understand that there was an **advantage** to being a **white** person in Texas. It was a hot, humid May morning in 1947. I was a first-grade student in Miss Butler's class at Fanning Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas when I blamed someone else for my own mistake. The disturbance was over in a matter of moments, but the memory of it is imprinted forever in my mind. My selfish, cowardly choice on this day made me aware that the advantage of being white offered dangerous privilege.

Miss Butler was infamous for her stern discipline. Little hands and minds were kept busy, and anything that resembled foolishness was quickly curtailed with a sharp rap on the head or knuckles with the long pointed stick she carried. You can imagine the horror I felt when, while drawing in a deep breath of air, I accidentally whistled. Miss Butler spun around from the blackboard, and seeing my expression, demanded, "Joan, did you do that?" Instead of explaining what happened, I pointed to the boy next to me and said, "No. Leandro did it." In a moment the stick had descended, and Leandro was sobbing into his shirt sleeve.

Somehow, even as a young child, I had known she would believe me. Somehow I thought I had the **advantage** because I was a nicely dressed little white girl, I lived in a pretty house, and my mother was active in the parent association. And Leandro, who was he? A quiet little Mexican-American boy who was unlikely to deny my accusation because he was shy about speaking English. Leandro, how I wish now that I could ask your forgiveness. I knew that my skin was **whiter** than yours and that somehow that had given me an **advantage** over you. My sin went beyond the telling of a lie.

“Advantage” outline notes

WHITE ADVANTAGE

When I used the advantage of being white to avoid punishment, my action was much worse than just my act of lying.

In first grade, I blamed someone for a mistake I made.

My teacher was a strict disciplinarian.

I made a mistake and almost got in trouble.

Because I was white, I realized the teacher would be likely to believe me if I lied.

I lied and blamed a Mexican-American boy who I knew would not defend himself.

I regret what I did.

“Advantage” diagram notes

**White
Advantage**

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