

The Poetry of Broadway Songs

"You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" (South Pacific) By Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein

(Lieutenant Joe Cable, stationed on an island in the South Pacific during World War II, has fallen in love with Liat, a native girl. Everyone disapproves of their romance because Liat is not white. Cable sings this song about prejudice.)

Cable:

You've got to be taught to hate and fear.
You've got to be taught from year to year.
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear.
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade,
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate.
You've got to be carefully taught.

What is the author saying in the first verse about teaching kids to be prejudiced?

Examine the rhyme scheme in the poem. Mark it. How does the simple rhyme scheme act as a mirror for the subject of the poem? How does the rhyme scheme CONTRAST with the subject of the poem?

Although the song uses simple words, the ideas behind it are complicated. What are the reasons people are "carefully taught" to be prejudiced? Explain.

Why is it ironic that the words "carefully taught" are repeated so many times in the song?