

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Novelist Robertson Davies has an interesting take on the importance of humour in *Sunshine Sketches*:

Strip the book of humour, and what do we have? A community in which the acknowledged leaders are windbags and self-serving clowns, and where the real leader is an illiterate saloon-keeper; a community that sees financial acuity in a lucky little barber who makes a one-in-a-thousand killing in the stock-market; a community that will not support a church, but will swindle an insurance company with a fraudulent fire; a community in which an election is shamelessly rigged; to say nothing of a community where a school-teacher who takes an occasional glass of beer is “the one who drinks” (and thus an unfit person to receive a raise in pay), where the captain of the lake-boat cannot keep it off a shoal, and where a chance encounter between a nightwatchman and a bank clerk becomes a tale of heroism.¹⁴⁴

Do you agree? Are the people of Mariposa a collection of a town full of incompetents and self-serving clowns? If so, how does the humour of *Sunshine Sketches* mask this?

2. According to *Sunshine Sketches*, “the Mariposa court, when the presiding judge was cold sober, and it had the force of public opinion behind it, was a terrible engine of retributive justice” (9). Retributive justice is the idea that if a wrong is committed, there should be some form of proportional punishment (“an eye for an eye”). However, retribution is only one idea about how to achieve justice. Two other ideas about justice are influential in Canadian law: restitution and restoration:
 - Restitution is the idea that the offender must repay the victim for lost or stolen goods or otherwise make amends for the wrong committed.
 - Restoration is largely an Indigenous concept that recognises that everything is connected. A crime disturbs the harmony of these connections. The remedy to a crime should be determined by the needs of victims, the community, and the offender. Restoration is meant to heal victims and communities while encouraging the offender to confront the consequences of their actions. It is to restore things as much as possible to how they were before the crime.
 - a) Look at the incidents of Judge Pepperleigh and the Mariposa Court in *Sunshine Sketches*. How is the court a tool of retributive justice?
 - b) Which of the above three concepts of justice seem the most fair?
 - c) How can these three ideas about justice be used together?

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Davies, Robertson. *Stephen Leacock*. Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1970, pp. 25-26.

3. Stephen Leacock believes that on their own, laws will do little to shape society. He says:

We have become children of legislation. We reach out for a law. For each and every social ill our misguided democratic system has made us demand a remedy in the form of a statute. We have grown to despair of individual morality. We legislate ourselves into sobriety, into early rising, into Sabbath keeping, into thrift. We no longer realize that the law is only the letter; behind it is the spirit or it fails.

The truth is that effective legislation must follow public opinion and not proceed and coerce it. It is not the burglary laws that keep most of us from theft. It is something out of which the burglary laws arose.¹⁴⁵

- a) Do you agree that effective laws must follow public opinion and not proceed and coerce it?
 - b) Are there times that we need to make laws to regulate people's behaviour?
 - c) Think of the flaws of the people in *Sunshine Sketches*. Would laws be able to correct these flaws?
4. Novelist Timothy Findlay says that *Sunshine Sketches* "is narrated by a character, presumably Leacock himself, who knows all and tells all"¹⁴⁶. What do you think? Is the book's narrator a made-up character? Or is it Stephen Leacock himself? How would this impact your understanding of the book?
5. Novelist Guy Vanderhaeghe says that "a writer defines his fictional universe as much by what he excludes as by what he includes"¹⁴⁷. Consider this statement with respect to Leacock and *Sunshine Sketches*.
6. Many questions have been asked about *Sunshine Sketches* in this learning resource. Stephen Leacock believes that "[to] analyze is often to destroy"¹⁴⁸. Do you agree?

¹⁴⁵ Leacock, Stephen. "The Revision of Democracy." *Papers and Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association*, vol. 6, 1934, p. 15.

¹⁴⁶ Findlay, Timothy. "Riding off in All Directions: A Few Wild Words in Search of Stephen Leacock." In *Stephen Leacock: A Reappraisal*, edited by David Staines, U of Ottawa P, 1986, p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ Vanderhaeghe, Guy. "Leacock and Understanding Canada." In *Stephen Leacock: A Reappraisal*, edited by David Staines, U of Ottawa P, 1986, p. 20.

¹⁴⁸ qtd. in MacMillan, Margaret. *Stephen Leacock*. Penguin Canada, 2009, p. 60.