

# **The Transformative Power of Friendship in *The Mysterious Benedict Society***

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## **Abstract:**

The research paper focuses on the transformative power of friendship, as it is essential in the present world. The children are found to be more influenced by friends than anyone. It is the friendship that shapes the child's activities, but in the present world, most of the friendships could be termed utility friendships, as stated by Aristotle. Therefore, with the help of the novel *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, the framework and qualities of good friendship and its importance in transformation are analysed in this paper. The incidents that led to trust and the development of friendship are revealed by the incidents from the novel. Through the research, it is evident that trust, cooperation, teamwork, and concern are the main qualities of friendship that would transform a person to a greater level for significant achievements.

## **Keywords:**

Transformation, Friendship, Coordination, Bonding,

## **Introduction:**

Aristotle, in his book titled *Ethics*, mentioned that no one can choose to live without friends, and if they choose to, then they are the most unfortunate human in the world. He added that most people find refuge in their friends to get a helping hand or to share a memorable moment; it is with friends that many think and act. He also mentioned that only like people can be friends by quoting 'like to like' and 'birds of a feather flock together' (Ross 128) and outlined the qualities of a good friend. He mentioned that only good is wished for a friend, but if a person acts with a hidden motive for his benefit, then that is utility friendship, which will not spare anyone. Alike in virtue is mentioned by Aristotle as one of the qualities of perfect friendship where only good is wished for a friend because of their character. As to the words of Aristotle here in the novel *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, the four friends exhibit the actual characteristics of a friendship.

## **Literature Review:**

U. C. Knoepfelmacher, in his *Introduction* for Teaching Children's Literature, mentioned that children's literature is being studied from different perspectives concerning adult viewpoints, enlightening the cultural and political implications in the text. However, Jacqueline Rose states that the character in the book shapes the external character as to the framework of the adult in certain essential notions. One such important part of life is friendship, which springs from the time a child gets to know the surroundings and continues until death, as Carolyn Sherman states in *Friendship as Portrayed in Children's Books*. It is also mentioned that a child develops friendships in the place where they are frequent. Eric Carle, in his *Do You Want To Be My Friend?* Expresses the inconveniences encountered by a mouse who tried to make friends.

In Syd Hoff's *Who Will Be My Friends?* Freddy when he tries to join his neighbours to play, they ignore him, but a group of children invites him after they witness his competency with the ball. When a description of friendship emerges, it conceals all the differences between the play. However, it also takes time. Giving is usually involved in the act of friendship. In *A Bargain for Frances* by Russell Hoban, Thelma finds more joy in the act of sharing than eating the candies by herself.

The value of friendship is known to those who have experienced it in their lifetime. C. S. Lewis, in his *The Four Loves*, says friendship is considered the happiest of all loves by the ancients and added that a person needs a few friends beyond his family. In the same work, he quoted from *Amicitia*, a work written by Cicero, where the writer mentioned that friendship is needed to fill the chinks of one's time. For the above point, Lewis answered that it is valued by those who experience it. In this novel, *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, the characters value each other's friendship as to the words of Lamb, "In each of my friends there is something that only some experience can fully bring out." (Lewis 92).

In the article *Factors Influencing Friendship among Preschool Children*, the writer Robert C. Challman mentioned that the determiners for the selection of friends rest on similar tastes and interests, common likes and dislikes, and propinquity. friends

### **Background and context:**

The novel revolves around Mr. Benedict, who faints when he becomes so happy, and the children he recruited for an assignment. The assignment for the children was to spy on Mr. Curtain, who faints when he becomes angry, and reveal the suspicious activities on Nomansan Island. The obstacles faced by the children and their successful triumph unfold the plot.

"ARE YOU A GIFTED CHILD LOOKING FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS? How odd, he thought." (Stewart 3). In the beginning, it was Reynard Muldoon, alas Reynie, who read the above lines that were addressed to special children. When he followed the instructions as directed, he met his friends George Washington, also known as Sticky, Kate Wetherall, and Constance Contraire, who all later became his associates in his mission. Though he headed the team, it was the collaborative effort that led them to

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achieve their successful mission accomplishment. The assistance they provide to each other at times of despair helps the reader understand the necessity of coexistence and coordination.

In this paper, the coordination and the bond that developed among the individuals are explored to highlight its importance in the present world and to demolish the pessimistic environment. Moreover, in Trenton Lee Stewart's novel *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, the profound impact of friendship on the characters not only shapes their individual growth but also drives the central plot, emphasising the significance of human connections in overcoming adversity.

Staying together to move ahead reveals the power of unity. In the story, the characters were introduced in the monk building except Reynie. There, they would undergo a test outside the exam hall to trace their real character, but they all would prove that they were selfless by trying to help a girl who dropped her pencil down in the storm drain, which was covered with a metal grate. The efforts taken proved that they would support each other even in unfavourable circumstances, which became true even after hearing the words of Mr. Milligan: "It does not concern you any more, Kate. The improvement is much too close. Mr. Benedict wants you away from here, where you can be safe." (Stewart 353) did not change the children's decision to move away from the Nomansan Island. It proved their thoughtfulness and commitment towards their accepted project.

Reflection on oneself in others fosters bonding as it acts as a foundation for friendship. When a person has character similarities, then the bond flourishes instantly. Even here in the plot, when the children discussed the incidents that happened in the monk building, they understood that they all reacted in the same way towards the girl who lost her pencil. The understanding made them feel delighted in each other's company, as many walked away by ignoring her. When similar characteristics were found anywhere, it would create a bond and make them take each other's side if they were destined to travel together.

Enlightening others with what you were aware of will strengthen the bond. When it was decided to communicate through Morse code from Nomansan Island, the children expressed their dismay except Sticky, as they were illiterate about it, but he expressed his wish to teach them all. The incident reveals his selfless act and insists that in a team, there should not be any flaws. In a team, bridging each other's vacuum is essential to building a vibrant group.

The trust would foster strength to compete against a pessimistic environment. The children are taken aback when they find Mr Benedict on Nomansan Island, but through their collective effort and observation, they get to know that the person is Mr Curtain. They send a message that "We see Mr. B when we see Mr. C. How can this be?" (Stewart 182) for which they receive a reply,

When looking in my looking-glass  
 I spied a trusted face. Alas,  
 Not to be taken for him, am I?  
 Beware, therefore, the Gemini. (Stewart 182)

Through continuous pondering, they understood that Gemini was a sign of the zodiac by Constance. When Sticky offhandedly announced it was a sign of a twin, Reynie developed it by Constance – the possibility of Mr. Curtain as the long-lost brother of Mr. Benedict.

Later, when Reynie asked Sticky to prolong the time with the Whisperer, he did it perfectly beyond his endurance.

Moreover, when they decided to break into the computer room, which was below the Whispering Gallery, Kate decided to go, "I will go by myself – if I get caught, you three might still have a chance to work something out." (Stewart 359). The above line reveals the sacrifice and trust that prevail within the energetic group.

Traumas are grounded when a group becomes associates. The children in the story long for real love as they were orphans. When everyone is informed that each other was left adrift in some way, they find completeness in each other, which they expected from their family. This led them to face Mr. Curtain without fear, as they were aware of their interconnectedness. Their concern and connectedness were described by the other in the second book, where the first chapter describes each other longing to meet after a long separation. When the car broke down, Rhynie walked to reach Kate's house, as he could not control his eagerness to meet his friends. The incidents reveal the association they had with each other.

When the children were asked to make a choice, all stayed unanimous. The decisions a person makes at times will decide the future. In the same way, the children were given a choice twice: one was before assigning the task, and the other was nearly at the end of the novel, to leave the place, but the children decided to stay and proceed with the assignment. The incidents reveal the understanding and their firm vision. The children protected each other when required. The children were all scared except Kate because she was brought up in a circus. She instils hope in all the other children through her actions, and among the most resilient choices she made was to carry Constance piggyback everywhere. When Kate runs with her to save her friends from Mr Curtain, Constance gets on to the chair of Whisperer, a machine, and resists it by answering its questions in an irrelevant manner, which would turn Mr Curtain purple. Thus, the choice made by them helped them in need of their progress towards their accomplishment of tasks and strengthened their bond.

### **Challenges and Obstacles:**

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The stranger becomes a close associate as they decide to trust each other. In the beginning, all four would start their journey as competitors in the Monk Building. However, when Mr. Benedict informed them that they were going to work together as associates to get along with each other, "... although he had known the other boy only for a day, it seemed as if they'd been friends for ages. And Kate, too, he reflected. He was already quite fond of her. And Constance... well, with Constance he would have to wait and see." (Stewart 87). The above lines reveal the thoughts of Reynie about his associates. A person feels good when another feels the same. However, it was Constance who would help them to resist the Whisperer another. The curtain is more miserable than ever. She made Mr. Curtain focus more on her and drain more energy, which would make him faint again. Thus, as a team, they were able to restrain Mr. Curtain from demolishing society through his Whisperer.

**Conclusion:**

The novel *The Mysterious Benedict Society* portrays friendship as a powerful force that fosters along with challenges. It also reinstates that trust among individuals is mandatory for the development of friendship. They also supported each other during hard times and ensured the sustainability of everyone. The friendship blossoms among similar characteristics, and it is also nurtured by time, though the characters remain in contrast to Constance in the story. It strengthens its string when it shares the skeleton in the closet. Even here, the children reveal their past lives to others, which helps them know each other better and understand. This eventually led them to consider the team as their family and act unanimously in life-threatening situations. Moreover, the children never failed to enlighten others with what they were aware of, and an act of such magnanimity made them build layers to elaborate the bond. The development led them to tackle a wise man named Mr. Curtain, who had developed Whisperer to communicate secret messages. It was their friendship that made them overcome their fear and withstand the obstacles that were put forth by Mr. Curtain.

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