

Feeling isolated

Exploring a poem at KS3, written by a teenager exploring the feeling of being isolated and excluded because of who he is – in this case a boy from a Gypsy Traveller community.

KS3 | 60 Mins | Teacher led

KEY QUESTION: How might it feel to be isolated because of who you are?

Background

This activity uses a poem (below) written by a 12 year old boy from a gypsy traveller community, and explores some of his feelings about how he has been treated, and discriminated against, because of his identity. It may raise some sensitive issues about teacher-learner relationships, but this will hopefully be useful and powerful in discussion around Who are we?, and what groups do we belong to?

Exploring this poem using literacy and literature activities that you might use to approach any poem, will allow the messages of the writer to emerge, and subsequent discussions to happen. Below is the SMILE strategy to explore the language of the poem, supporting learners' understanding, and after follows an idea for discussion, when the themes have come out.

Note: The poem is a powerful stimulus in its own right, and allowing the poet's voice to speak is more effective than leading a class towards conclusions about the themes. Be brave and allow them to discover the ideas themselves!

Activity

1. Read through the poem twice, aloud, either to the class, or by nominating learners to read individual stanzas beforehand, ensuring that the mood is set for a moving, poignant performance.
2. Then, explain that in order to explore the language and perspectives in the poem learners will use an easy formula for analysing poetry: SMILE.
3. Give each student a copy of the poem printed vertically, in the centre of an A3 piece of paper, so that there is plenty of room for writing around. You can download an A4 version here which can then be enlarged for this purpose.

4. Ask learners to divide the surrounding background into five sections, and to write these titles, one in each section:

STRUCTURE

MOOD

IMAGERY

LANGUAGE

EFFECT

5. Then use questions, such as those on the downloadable question sheet ([click here](#)), to explore each element of the poem.

6. Lead a short class discussion on each of the five aspects, leaving more time for the last, in which the issue of social exclusion, prejudice and experiences of learners from minority ethnic groups can be discussed. This is where the 'message' of the poem would also be discussed. Once the poem has been explored, a huge amount should come out about the boy's situation. This can then lead in to exploring prejudice and exclusion of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller individuals and communities more widely. The web tab to the right could be used as a starting point for this and links to Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month.

CREDIT and PERMISSIONS

The boy and his family have given permission for the use of this poem. It is taken from a forthcoming (as at Oct 2010) secondary resource 'Global and Anti-Racist Perspectives'



Related Link

<http://www.grthm.co.uk/>

Being Me

For a gypsy boy like me
I know it's hard for
all to see
I live not in a trailer
nor travel around
I live in a house
and not on a ground
I go to school
I try and follow their rule
I do my best in all that I do
I sit so quiet when asked to
I open my mouth to talk
when everyone's told to
but all that I get is the teachers
having a chew

Get out of this class
away from the mass
I don't want to see your face
and that's not said in haste
Sent to isolation
for trying my best
go away and shoo
you're not like the rest

Please don't judge me
just use your eyes
and you will see
that school life
doesn't have to be different for me
I have the right to come to school
I don't want to have to stand and fight

So put your prejudice aside
and keep me in mind
my culture I will not hide
my education is precious
so accept
me for me
stop your preconceptions
and allow me to be me

I just want an education
as good as the rest
I want a chance to do my best

So please don't judge me for all that I am
I am just a boy
my emotions are real
I am not a toy
I have a heart
and it's not made of stone
Just like you
I am skin and bone

So please accept me for all that I am
I am just a gypsy boy
who's not yet a man.