

TEACHERS' INTRODUCTION

There are books which claim to talk direct to your class, without you having to do anything. This is not one of them. You remain in charge of the lesson, choosing the material and activities, and deciding how long they should last. What this book offers is material to help with one element of a lesson – working in small groups.

This is a collection of twelve short plays, with talking points. The aim is to involve small groups in play-reading and then discussion, so that together they can explore ideas and opinions about the business of living together with other people.

Citizenship should be studied in groups, because it's partly about seeing beyond yourself, recognising the rights and insights of other people. But some of the work may also be shared with the whole class, and some of it may be individual. Over five or six lessons you might tackle a group of issues, and then return to them, with the option of sustained work on one topic – a story, or comic strip, or poster campaign.

You might want to run plenary sessions, in which groups who have tackled the talking assignments report back their findings and compare notes with other groups. Or you may wish groups to move on from play-reading and discussion to further research, or to group creations of their own – improvised plays, or television documentaries making use of supplementary material.

All these possibilities are there, and it must be you as the teacher who decides which of them you are going to adopt this time. This book will not "Teach Citizenship", but it should help to support those parts of your programme where groupwork is involved.

Pupils might read a play and answer the questions on it very quickly. That may be the right thing to do, or it may be helpful to probe the answers, and encourage the group to explore further. It would not be the best use of this material to read through it at breakneck pace, disposing of three themes per lesson.

Each of the plays is short, and has four parts. With two exceptions, the parts are divided into 2M and 2F, but your class may not be divided like that, let alone each group. I would advise aiming for the best possible balance by arranging your own groups of 4 or 5 pupils, so that most of them are reading parts of their own gender, but not all. If you regularly insist on that pattern, then it shouldn't be a problem for girls to read male parts, or (somehow more of a challenge) boys to read female parts. But even if it's difficult, the creation of such a pattern is in itself a useful lesson in participation – "Here are these plays. We can't adjust the plays to fit the boy/girl breakdown, so we need to adapt to what's there."

There's a further, valuable lesson in random groups imposed by the teacher, apart from the strain and pressure it takes off pupils, in deciding who to work with. The allocation says "We need to work with the people around this table, whether or not we would choose to be with them at lunchtime. And once we find we can do that, working with them again will be less of a problem, and it will be easier to focus on the work, rather than on the politics of friendship." That's a gain for emotional stability, as well as a boost to good work habits.

Two of the plays are exceptions to this pattern. "Looking Good" features four girls, and "Anyone Would Do" four boys. But that doesn't mean that only girls are affected by appearance, and only boys are affected by bullying. The writing of "Anyone Would Do" was sparked off by the real-life suicide of a girl, bullied by female classmates. So I would also tackle these plays in the same mixed groups, with a deliberate view to exploring gender issues, which are raised in these as in other plays.

There are serious ideas here, which reverberate way beyond citizenship, and beyond Key Stage 3. But the material has been written in the belief that work should be as interesting as possible. Sharing jokes and enjoying working together are as much a part of being a citizen as gathering data and asking questions.