

11-16 years. Supporting a child with a disfigurement: a teacher's guide

## 11. Choosing and using resources

Young people are constantly exposed to images in the media about appearance and style. They need to develop ways of challenging these influences and questioning the link which is so often made between 'looking good' and achieving success and happiness.

### 1 SHAPING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- What resources you are using? What sort of message do they convey?
- Look at your books and IT resources. How inclusive are they?
- How wide a range of different people do the pictures on show around your school depict? Check for diversity of ages, facial features, impairments, body shapes, learning abilities, colours, styles and cultures...

Commercially published materials that include children with a facial difference are rare. You may find that your local authority produces some materials as part of their Equal Opportunities Programme.

Some charities (including *Changing Faces*) publish posters with positive images of many different people. But avoid creating a special display to emphasis or 'promote' diversity in some way. Instead, make sure that a display about mathematics, for example, includes a wide range of mathematicians. (For biographies and pictures of mathematicians visit [http://www.gap.dcs.st\\_and.ac.uk/~history?BiogIndex.html](http://www.gap.dcs.st_and.ac.uk/~history?BiogIndex.html))

### 2 CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES

History, mythology and contemporary culture abound with stories and beliefs linking outward appearance to deeper character. Mythological heroes are invariably exceptionally handsome, brave, quick-thinking and strong. Contemporary stereotypes link red hair with fiery temper, high foreheads with intelligence, and scarred or irregular faces with criminality and evil.

- Look for materials that portray appearance differently.
- Use conventional materials but develop the work in a more questioning way.

For instance, in Harry Potter, use the Dursely family's experiences around bullying and ostracism to explore ideas about difference, judgement and inclusion.

### 3 CITIZENSHIP

Issues of difference and diversity can be explored using resources, videos, and news items from local and national press, which address both historical and current events, including conflicts, e.g. in Victorian times, travelling circuses often included a 'freak show' where people with disabilities were exhibited to a fee-paying public. One such man was Joseph Merrick, born in 1862 in Leicester and known as 'The Elephant Man' when he was a 'fairground freak'. Joseph was given a life of dignity at the London Hospital as a result of the intervention of Dr Frederick Treaves.

Within the curriculum, citizenship provides a forum to explore how young people envisage engaging with each other as adults with their neighbourhood and community.

Learning about national and local government needs to include understanding of equal rights under the law. Issues of direct and indirect discrimination should include social discrimination that is too often the experience of people who have a disfigurement.

Don't forget to explore how language affects our perceptions of difference? Consider the difference between referring to 'The Disabled', 'People with Disabilities' and more specific terms such as sensory impaired, mobility impaired etc. Similarly, look at the impact of various terms, e.g. having a disfigurement, having a different appearance, an unusual appearance, a noticeable appearance, a facial difference...

## 4 FOUR MUST-READ BOOKS FOR OPENING MINDS

***Face* by Benjamin Zephaniah** – a fast-talking, fast-action story in which life deals Martin an unexpected blow. How will his friends and his girlfriend react to him now that his face has changed forever? Sharply described classroom scenes show the effect of both deliberate and unintentional remarks about appearance. (Bloomsbury ISBN 074754154X)

***Bad Alice* by Jean Ure** – our unlikely hero is stuck with his kindly Gran for the summer while his mum takes his little sister to the USA for major surgery. Things look up when he meets Alice over the wall at the bottom of his Gran's garden and gradually forms his own views about her bad reputation and her wonderful father's popularity. (The main issue is Alice's difficulties with her adoptive family, but the additional themes of the main character's unusual speech, his sensitivity to what's really going on, and his sister's far-away hospitalisation are very well handled.) (Hodder Children's Books ISBN 0340817607)

***Two Weeks with the Queen* by Morris Gleitzman** – an entirely different book about a boy who first works out that his little brother has cancer, and then decides that this is problem which can and must be solved. Sadness and laughter are only two of the many emotions touched on.

***Mortal Engines* by Philip Reeve** – a fantastic futuristic story in which two ill-matched teenagers, one of them badly scarred, team up to solve a crime, settle an old score, and survive. Their adventures take them into civilisations which have moved on in every way. What's really useful here is that looking different is incidental to the characters' adventures and the development of their awkward relationship. (Scholastic Children's Books ISBN 0439979439)