

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, body shapes, learning abilities, colours, styles and cultures, etc.

Commercially published materials that include young people with a visible difference are rare but becoming more common.

Some charities 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.

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.

Changing Faces' A World of Difference resources explore stereotypes and include [classroom lessons and an assembly](#)

3 PSHE

Issues of difference and diversity can be explored using resources, videos, and news items from local and national press and social media, which address both historical and current events, including conflicts. In Victorian times, for example, 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.

The curriculum 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 visible difference.

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, such as

11-16 years. Supporting a young person with a visible difference: a teacher's guide

having a visible difference, having a different appearance, an unusual appearance, a noticeable appearance, a facial difference, etc.

4 FOUR GREAT 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.

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 a problem that 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.

Scars like Wings, by Erin Stewart – this novel is about a teenage girl, Ava, and how she learns to navigate life after being injured in a house fire that killed her family. A year after the fire and lots of surgeries and medical treatments, Ava goes back to school. She chooses to start a new school, rather than face everyone who knew her before the fire. The story takes you through her journey to find out who she is and how she learns to take on the world. This is a story of sadness, trauma, courage and the importance of friendship.