



respect

Students look at the subtleties and connotations of language, and the impact words have in describing a person or event and how that influences us. They read *The Right Word* by Imtiaz Dharker, which explores how we see and label other people, before creating their own poem about respect.

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AIMS

- To understand how language can be used to degrade or respect different people and groups
- To explore poems about language, prejudice and the meaning and value of labels
- To write a poem challenging discriminatory language and promoting respect

HUMAN RIGHTS FOCUS

Equality and discrimination

YOU'LL NEED

PowerPoint, speakers and internet access

Post-it notes (two colours)

Whiteboard or visualiser

Notebooks or folders (for students to keep their poetry in)

Poems

Half-caste by John Agard

The Right Word by Imtiaz Dharker

Audio

John Agard reads Half-caste and talks about race (on PowerPoint)

STARTER

Show slide 2 and play the first two minutes and 53 seconds of John Agard reading his poem Half-caste. You may wish to hand out copies of the poem for a closer look.

Give students time to reflect before asking:

- Tell me about this poem
- What do you like/dislike?
- Did you notice any patterns? Pace? Rhythm?
- What experiences is he trying to convey?
- Does it trigger any feelings in you?
- Do you relate to anything in the poem?

The speaker opens the poem by excusing himself for being half-caste, a derogatory term, but it's full of sarcasm. He cites positive examples to being half-caste. Discuss.

Discuss the impact language has on the people written about and how it can influence our judgement of them and how society views them.

Explore how we use language, for good or ill, to enhance or distort meaning. How does Agard's performance bring out new meanings in the text?

You may wish to explore words used in a derogatory way (gay, girl) and discriminatory language linked to identity (race, sex, gender, religion, sexuality, disability, nationality).

ACTIVITY 1

Stress to students that as poets they should think about every single word choice to create impact but also be sensitive about the effect this has on the people they are writing to or about, especially if they have had their rights violated.

Divide the class into groups and give them one of the words from *The Right Word* by Imtiaz Dharker (eg terrorist, lurking).

Ask them to come up with different definitions of that word. Stick them up on the whiteboard. Which ones are synonymous or interchangeable depending on your perspective?

Read out *The Right Word* by Imtiaz Dharker (slide 3). This poem was written after the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. In it, she explores issues of language and identity.

Allow time to reflect before asking:

- Who is being described in the poem? A terrorist? A freedom-fighter? A child?
- Why does the poet keep changing the word or words describing the person outside her door?
- Who has the power over how we (the audience) perceive the character in the poem?
- Should we write about other people's experiences? If so, what should we consider?
- How can our choice of words affect how other people's experiences are understood?

ACTIVITY 2

Distribute post-it notes (several of each colour per student).

Explain that on one colour post-it note you'd like them to write negative words or phrases that they have heard being used to describe a person or group that made them feel angry and disrespected.

On the other coloured post-it note they should write positive words that make them feel proud about that same person or group of people – and hopeful that they will be treated with respect and dignity.

Explain that if words can burn with anger and frustration, they can also burn with hope and longing.

Invite the students to stick their post-it notes on the wall and allow time for everyone to read them.

Ask the students to select eight words from the wall. Now they need to write an eight-stanza poem about respect – each stanza should end with one of those words. Students can decide how long these stanzas are from two lines upwards.

While students are writing, create your own poem on the board or using a visualiser so that they can see you being a poet at the same time, making choices and editing as you change your mind.

Ask students to add their poems to their notebook or folder.

EXTENSION

Ask students to select derogatory words that they have heard in school and ask them to make a poem poster to stick up to encourage more rights respecting behaviour. Take inspiration from the poem Half-caste.

HALF-CASTE

By John Agard

Excuse me
standing on one leg
I'm half-caste

Explain yusef
wha yu mean
when yu say half-caste
yu mean when Picasso
mix red an green
is a half-caste canvas/
explain yusef
wha yu mean
when yu say half-caste
yu mean when light an shadow
mix in de sky
is a half-caste weather

well in dat case
england weather
nearly always half-caste
in fact some o dem cloud
half-caste till dem overcast
so spiteful dem don't want de sun pass
ah rass/
explain yusef
wha yu mean
when yu say half-caste
yu mean tchaikovsky
sit down at dah piano
an mix a black key
wid a white key
is a half-caste symphony

Explain yusef
wha yu mean
Ah listening to yu wid de keen
half of mih ear
Ah looking at yu wid de keen
half of mih eye
an when I'm introduced to yu
I'm sure you'll understand
why I offer yu half-a-hand



POEMS

an when I sleep at night
I close half-a-eye
consequently when I dream
I dream half-a-dream
an when moon begin to glow
I half-caste human being
cast half-a-shadow
but yu must come back tomorrow

wid de whole of yu eye
an de whole of yu ear
an de whole of yu mind

an I will tell yu
de other half
of my story



POEMS

THE RIGHT WORD

By Imtiaz Dharker

Outside the door,
lurking in the shadows,
is a terrorist.

Is that the wrong description?
Outside that door,
taking shelter in the shadows,
is a freedom fighter.

I haven't got this right.
Outside, waiting in the shadows,
is a hostile militant.

Are words no more
than waving, wavering flats?
Outside your door,
watchful in the shadows,
is a guerrilla warrior.

God help me.
Outside, defying every shadow,
stands a martyr.
I saw his face.

No words can help me now.
Just outside the door,
lost in shadows,
is a child who looks like mine.

One word for you.
Outside my door,
his hand too steady,
his eyes too hard
is a boy who looks like your son, too.

I open the door.
Come in, I say.
Come in and eat with us.

The child steps in
and carefully, at my door,
takes off his shoes.



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POEMS

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The Right Word from The Terrorist At My Table by Imtiaz Dharker © Bloodaxe Books 2016.