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The Other Side of Truth

by Beverley Naidoo

Synopsis

"I believe in the power of stories we tell. If we keep quiet about injustice, then injustice wins. We must dare to tell. Across the oceans of time words are mightier than swords." (p.183)

Sade watches her mother die. Her father is a Nigerian journalist who believes in speaking his mind, but now the death threats to silence him have become bitter reality. Will a plane ticket to England offer safe haven for his children?

Abandoned to the streets of London, Sade and Femi suffer new dangers as refugees. However, robbery, bullying and bureaucracy fade into insignificance as Sade fights to save her newly reunited father from deportation.

This topical text parallels the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and explores the issues raised by asylum seekers in Britain.

Prior learning

It would be useful to explore the references to Ken Saro-Wiwa to contextualise the political situation and human rights issues in Nigeria.

Websites: See <http://www.mg.co/za.mg/news/nov17/kenletter.html>,
http://www.rightlivelikelihood.se/recipe1994_4.html,
<http://www.walrus.com/~jklotz.ken.htm> (ballad).

Study areas

The subject matter lends itself easily to media approaches and there is a wealth of material available for independent research. The text itself offers a rich source of different styles of writing, which students could use as models for their own work.

Possible themes include:

- Overall structure: Trace the links between dreams, letters, fables and narrative (**R10** 'Analyse the overall structure of the text').
- Bias and objectivity: Recognise bias and objectivity in modelled version of Folayeh's political newspaper article (p.6) – analyse similar propagandist article with biased viewpoint (**Wr7, R6** 'Language to establish tone').
- Sentence choices: Analyse dream sequences (in italics) which move from past to present to create the vividness of Sade's inner torment. Close reading could lead to modelled writing of a recurring nightmare (**SL4** 'Sentence choices').
- Language: Consider the description of the detention centre (p.143) and the way in which the author creates a hostile environment – leads to the writer's treatment of issues and her implied opinion. See also the asylum procedure (p.139). The description of Sade's bullying and blackmail (pp.103/124) creates a powerful sense of threat and vulnerability which could be used for reading to writing (**S2, W8** 'Analysis of the writer's language').

- Reading to writing: Change Mariam's very simple account of her flight (p.133) by using elements from Naidoo's style to improve use of complex sentences (**S2 'Exploring a variety of sentence structures'**).
- Independent research: Use the text and the Internet to explore the theme of refugees and asylum seekers. Groups could produce an information chart on one aspect (**R2 'Undertake independent research', R1 'Making notes'**).
- Character, relationships and issues: Evaluate in a documentary or news interview of Sade's experiences (**S&L16 'Evaluate character, relationship and issues', Wr10, S9 'Stylistic conventions of non-fiction text types'**).
- Writing to persuade: Write a discursive essay on the rights of refugees using ideas from the text including Sade's letter to her father where she argues why she should stay (**W10 'Write to persuade', Wr16 'Weigh different viewpoints'**).

(Based on the National Literacy Strategy Framework objectives for Year 8:

W = Word Level; S = Sentence Level; R = Reading; Wr = Writing; S&L = Speaking & Listening)

Teacher guidance

Support Sheet 1

This support sheet enables students to structure an effective presentation by closely examining interview techniques. It is also intended to develop their questioning skills in a wider context. (See also **S&L5, S&L16 'Ask questions to clarify understanding', S&L2 'Recount an experience, choosing and changing the mood, tone and pace of delivery for particular effect'**.)

Support Sheet 2

The first part of this support sheet enables students to structure an effective presentation by closely examining interview techniques using an actual example. The teacher should provide a time limit for each presentation and the criteria for assessment. Pupils can complete the evaluation grid. After the presentation students should be encouraged to evaluate their performance through oral or written feedback. (See also **S&L5, S&L16 'Ask questions to clarify understanding', S&L2 'Recount an experience'**.)

The group work section requires students to use active reading strategies to find, note and interpret appropriate information (**R4 R3**). They will also need to change the information into a media text. (**S&L16 'Evaluate character, relationship and issues', S&L2**).

Support Sheet 3

This support sheet involves active reading techniques which can be modelled by the teacher (**R5, R7**). The initial drafting of the speech offers opportunities for shared writing on OHT (**W13**).

1

Improving your questioning skills

Imagine how boring a chat show would be if the guests were tongue-tied. Documentaries or news reports rely on interviewees or “talking heads” to tell us interesting details about their situation. The human interest angle brings the issues to life.

Questioning style

This is very important. There are three main types of questioning:

- Closed questions only need short answers, e.g. *How old are you?*
- Open questions allow for longer answers, e.g. *How do you feel about being thirteen?*
- Probing questions require more detail from an earlier answer, e.g. *Why?*

Try them out!

Questions

The following questions are based on Chapters 5–10.

- 1 Imagine you are interviewing either Sade or Femi. Practise your questioning technique with the following five questions. How long were the answers? Decide whether the questions were Closed/ Open/ Probing.
 - a How did you arrive in England?
 - b Could you tell me more about that?
 - c Were you frightened?
 - d What were the worst aspects of your journey?
 - e Could you explain why?

- 2 Now swap roles and answer the following five questions.
 - a What happened when you could not find your uncle?
 - b Did you ever feel threatened?
 - c Were you robbed?
 - d What happened next?
 - e What was your reaction to being caught in the raid?

- 3 Highlight any words or phrases that help you to understand Sade’s reaction to the detention centre in the passage below (from p.143). Now make up three more closed and open questions of your own based on the passage.

The name Heathlands did not sound like a prison. But when Sade and Femi clambered out into the country lane where Mama Appiah parked, they stared up at a six-metre high wire fence topped with great loops of barbed wire. Behind the thick poles and the wire, a cluster of large brown brick buildings loomed above a tarmac yard. Every window was barred. Was Papa behind one of them? Waiting, watching. Impatiently they both searched the rows of windows, but the bars were too dense and the glass too dark to see anyone or anything.

As they approached a metal gate in the fence, there was a curious buzzing. Slowly the gate swung open as if pulled by some invisible force. A small square office overlooked the gate and, through the large plate-glass window, Sade glimpsed three figures in black and white uniforms. Once again they were entering the territory of The Eyes.

Write your questions in the boxes below.

Closed questions	Open questions

- 4 Practise the interview using some of the above questions in 1, 2 and 3, remembering to capture Sade's feelings and emotions in the answers. You could tape this and listen to your acting skills. Did it sound realistic? Could you improve it?

2

Writing a TV interview and planning a Media Presentation

Sade receives a letter from her teacher on page 197.

‘After lessons on Friday, I received a telephone call from a producer of the Schools’ programme *Making News*. Apparently he was so impressed by you that he has suggested the topic of refugees for a future *Making News*. They would like you (and your brother if he would like that) to take part. Class 8M has also been invited to present an investigation for the same programme.’

You are going to act out the programme referred to in the letter. You need Sade, Femi and two presenters.

Ideas to help you

- There is a Seven O’clock News interview on page 174. Use this to help you make your presentation sound realistic. Put the sentences from the interview in the right order. One has already been matched for you.

Interview sequence	Text	Order
A Introduction	What events actually led him to seek asylum here?	
B Who is he?	I gather there is a warrant out for Mr Solaja’s arrest in Nigeria.	
C What happened?	Is there anything stopping the Home Office from deporting him?	D
D What is the current situation?	A Nigerian journalist, Mr Folarin Solaja, is at the centre of a growing dispute.	
E What could happen to him?	Well, I imagine we shall hear more of this case.	
F Close	First of all, what do you know of Folarin Solaja?	

- Can you make a list of any other key words or phrases which you could use in your interview?

Preliminary work

- 3 A good presenter researches beforehand and structures the interview very carefully. This is very important as there will only be a limited time slot on television.

How long are you allowed for your interview? ___ minutes

Watch a television interview and use the checklist below.

Introduction	___ minutes
Question & Answer session	___ minutes
Conclusion	___ minutes
Number of questions	___ questions

Group work television presentation

- 4 You can find a quick outline of Sade's story on page 170 and Femi's on page 171. Which parts will be most interesting for the viewer? (From page 171:)

'It was horrible,' he announced. He spoke bluntly about Mrs Bankole. How she had taken Uncle Tunde's money to pretend that they were her children, then deserted them as soon as they arrived in England. How they had been left all alone because they could not find their Uncle Dele. How a man in a dark alley
5 robbed them and how a man in a video shop had accused them of being thieves! And Femi told Mr Seven O'Clock how they had themselves been fingerprinted in the Asylum Screening Unit – just as if they were thieves.

Before you start fill out this grid:

What do we want to include in our programme?	What do we want to know?	Where can we find this information?

- 5 Use the chapter headings to find the sections you need to skim read for information.

Use the chart below to structure your presentation:

Introduction	___ minutes
Question & Answer session Questions:	___ minutes
Conclusion	___ minutes
Total running time	___ minutes

- 6 Now practise your presentation.

While you watch each other's work use the evaluation sheet on page 9 to record your observations. How could you improve your work next time? You could write an evaluation of your presentation.

Presentation Skills – Television Interview Evaluation Grid

Name: _____ Form: _____

Objectives:

Reflect and evaluate your own presentations and those of others (S&L 19); Write to analyse, review, comment (W18)

Watch the presentations and fill out the grid below. Remember to give constructive feedback to the groups.

Criteria	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Were all types of questions included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open • Closed • Probing? 				
Did it look/sound like a television interview?				
How would you rate the quality of information used from the text?				
Were voices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear • Expressive? 				
How good was the organisation?				
Were the needs of the audience considered?				

3 Writing an Appeal

- 1 Alem, a refugee from Ethiopia, faces deportation. This is the appeal speech prepared by his lawyer to persuade the judge to let him stay. Look carefully at the language used and think about how it makes you feel.

Clear signposting introduction

Polite address to judge

Political situation

‘The fact is, Sir that there has been a **massive** escalation of the fighting between both sides, and although the United Nations has appointed Algeria as mediator, both sides are refusing to come to the negotiating table. It may be true to say that most of the population of both countries will never see any fighting, but the people who live along the border and those that are living in cities within **easy range** of the **opposing** forces are being **subjected** to war every day:

Use of connectives to add to the argument

5

10

Formal reference

15

Use of emotive adjective

20

Human involvement

25

Invite sympathy

Graphic description – the danger

Considering an opposing viewpoint

Specific

Repetition for cumulative effect

Clear outline of warring parties

Specific

Reference to the appeal process

Worsening situation

Furthermore, sir – and this is **crucial** to this case – my clients are not being **persecuted** because they are on one side or the other, they are being **persecuted** because they are on both sides. At this point in time there is no place for what is a mixed-race family in this conflict. When **young Alem Kelo** is in Ethiopia, he is persecuted because he is Eritrean, and when he is in Eritrea, he is **persecuted** because he is Ethiopian. This young man is in an impossible position and it is clear that the only way he could return to either country and live **safely** is when there is a **genuine** peace throughout the region.

For this **small** family the matter of war is not academic. Since the last time Alem appeared in this court, his mother has been **brutally murdered**. Imagine how difficult it must have been for Mr Kelo to let his son know that his mother was found **hacked to death**.’

Adapted from *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah

- 2 Working with a partner, imagine you are the lawyer writing the appeal speech for the character of Mariam. Go through her account and highlight the key issues which could feature in your appeal. Why would these points be useful? Write notes beside them.

Mariam's Story

Four soldiers came to Mariam's house on her birthday. She was just five. One soldier asked, 'Is Father in?' She was frightened and wanted to scream, but her voice was dead. Then her mama came to the door and cried, 'What do you want?' But they pushed her away. There was no time for her father to
5 hide. The soldiers pulled him from the house. Her mother was crying. 'No, no. Where are you taking him?' They said, 'You will see later.' That was the last time Mariam saw her father.

It was President Barre who sent the soldiers. Then the President sent his aeroplanes. They dropped bombs all over Hargeisa, the town where Mariam
10 lived. A bomb fell on their house and the roof and one wall broke down. Mariam's neighbour took them in. They went to sleep on the floor underneath the beds. They kept their clothes on so they could run if they had to. Later the soldiers came back. This time they were setting fire to houses and shooting. Bullets were flying around like bees. The soldiers were killing men and boys
15 right in front of their families. They said they were looking for rebels. The bodies were left in the street because people were too frightened to bury them. The soldiers said ten-year-old boys were helping the rebels. Mariam's mama said they must leave immediately because if the soldiers found Hassan, he would be killed. Hassan was Mariam's brother and he was ten.

20 People were leaving the town like water from a tap that cannot be turned off. After two days they started walking at night because the soldiers made roadblocks in the day. At night they heard lions roaring, but they were more frightened of the soldiers. Sometimes they passed bodies piled up at the side of the road. The smell was horrible and their mother told them, 'Don't look!'
25 But Mariam peeped through her fingers. She wished she had listened to her mama.

Websites: You can find the latest update on the political status of Somalia by looking on this web site <http://www.asylumlaw.org>.

- 3 Next, use the lawyer's speech as a model and draft out your paragraphs using the framework below.

Sentence starter	Notes
<i>The fact is</i>	(Introduction to current situation)
<i>It may be true to say</i>	(Reason why Mariam could return)
<i>But</i>	(Why Mariam might be in danger)
<i>Furthermore</i>	(Another reason)
<i>At this point in time</i>	(Summing up the danger)
<i>It is clear that</i>	(The solution and conclusion)

Style points

- Remember to keep the style formal but use powerful emotive words for effect. You could use your thesaurus to find similar words to those in bold in the speech.
- You could also experiment with different connectives, e.g. finally, furthermore.
- You might use some passive verbs, e.g. They are being subjected to war.
- You could try to create a picture of the horror of war, e.g. Imagine.....

- 4 Listen to each other's speeches and discuss the ways the case has been presented. Who would you pick to represent you?