



Respecting Differences

The Unluckiest Woman

Key stages 1 and 2

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This unit looks at the need to respect differences between people, whether these are based on gender, race, disability, appearance, or something else. The effects of people's intolerance and unkindness are explored.

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Key ideas

- **Respect for self**
- **Concern for others**
- **Similarities and differences between people**

This story is intended to look at how children feel about themselves and how this may affect their relationships with others. Many people experience feelings of inadequacy or wish they were someone else. Not infrequently, these feelings emerge as a dislike of certain personal characteristics, such as skin colour or size.

These feelings may be exacerbated by other children indulging in name calling or using other devices to label or exclude. Children are painfully aware of how it feels when they are subject to such unkind behaviour,

but are often unable to make an empathetic leap to imagine how their own behaviour can hurt others. The story may help children share with each other how it feels to be hurt or labelled and thus encourage greater empathy and respect for others. It may also help them focus on the real similarities between people rather than on superficial differences.

Towards the end of the story there is a hint that only when Isabella, the central character, stops feeling so wrapped up in herself does she begin to feel better. This is a further area for the children to explore.

Note that this story is written rather in the style of a folk tale, drawing on the “tall story” tradition common in many English folk tales. If possible, the teacher should adopt an “oral tradition” style of storytelling. Ideally, the text should be used only as a reference point or reminder, with the teacher working from memory and acting out the tale as much as possible.

Below are some of the issues you could explore arising from the story. Remember to ask the children if they would like to raise any issues of their own for discussion.

Moral reasoning

- Was Isabella wrong to feel sorry for herself, in your opinion?
- Why was it wrong of the children to taunt Isabella in the way they did? Think of all the reasons you can. Make a class list about why name calling is unfair.
- To do this you might draw a diagram on the board of an individual surrounded by a circle of people. Ask the children to think of why name calling is wrong or unkind from the point of view of:
 - a) The person being taunted?
 - b) The people doing the taunting?
 - c) The quality of community life?
- What things most easily hurt other people’s feelings, in your opinion?

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Thinking things through

- In the story, some of the characters were content with their situation in life and others were not. Consider each character in turn and try to say why each was content or not content and whether their feelings were justified or reasonable?
- Why did Isabella begin to feel better at the end of the story do you think?
- Why is it that people often do things to other people when they would not want the same thing done to them? Do you think it is:
 - a) deliberate cruelty;
 - b) thoughtlessness; or
 - c) something to do with people who themselves have been hurt?
- How do you think the way people look affects the way we treat them? Is this right or fair, in your opinion? Why or why not?
- Do people have any kind of right not to be teased or taunted for something they have no control over? If so, do other people have an obligation to respect that right? Would it be all right (or acceptable) to taunt someone for something they had actually done and therefore deserved?
- In your opinion, was Isabella right to be so upset at the size of her nose or had she got it all “out of proportion”. Talk about what getting things “out of proportion” means to you and how or why it happens.
- People can be divided into all sorts of different physical categories. What are some of these categories? Do you think people are basically similar or basically different? What is your evidence for this?

Community building

- Would you prefer to live in a community where everyone was very independent of each other and looked after their own interests first or were very kind and supportive of each other? What would be the difference between the two sorts of community? How would this apply in school or at home?
- Do you think that people often wish they were different? Have you ever felt this? Share your own thoughts on this with each other.
- The old woman in the story wanted to be “different”. In what sense do you think she meant this? Do you feel it is important to be “different” from others and why do you feel this? At the same time how important is it to feel a sense of being part of a group or community? Why do you think this is?

Story writing

- Write a story about a person who is treated as different in some way. Write it, as if you were the person who was being treated badly.

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There was once a woman whose name was Isabella. Isabella thought she was the unluckiest woman in the world.

“Why did she think this?” you may ask. Well, it wasn’t because she was poor. In fact, she lived in a very large house and had so many servants to work for her, she never had to lift a finger. For example, if she wanted to go for a walk, she would just tell one of her servants and they would go for a walk for her. (And she could always go herself if she really wanted to,

though she rarely did.) So that wasn’t why she felt unlucky.

And it wasn’t because she couldn’t do anything. She could do lots of things well. She could sew beautifully and she was very musical. In fact, she could play the harp so well that people passing by would stop in the street at the sound of her music.

“What is that heavenly sound?” they would ask, as the music floated in the air like angel dust falling from the sky. Yes, believe me,

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she could play the harp better than anyone. So that wasn't why she felt unlucky.

And it wasn't because she was not a nice person. The people who knew her all said how kind and helpful she was.

But Isabella had a problem. Each morning she would get up and go straight to the mirror. There she would stare at her reflection. Then she would burst into tears and cry for an hour and all because of the size of her nose. In truth it was a big nose. Her friends said it was a majestic nose, a noble nose, the queen of noses - but they had to admit it was a VERY LARGE NOSE.

Unfortunately, the children in the village were less kind. If they ever saw Isabella walking or riding, they would follow her and chant unkind rhymes as children do.

*“Isabella, Isabella,
What do we all want to tell her?
That she's got a whopping smeller.
Isabella, Isabella.”*

For this reason Isabella only left her house when she knew the children would be in bed.

Isabella had tried all sorts of ways to make her nose smaller.

She had tried vanishing cream but that didn't work. She had bought all sorts of potions and medicines which people had sold to her at a great price. But none of these had worked. Once she even tried blowing her nose all the time, hoping that some of it would be blown away. But her nose just became sore and swollen. Then she tried special kinds of make-up which, it was said, would make her nose look smaller. But she found that the make-up has not yet been invented that could do this.

Now one morning as soon as she woke up, she went as usual to look in the mirror. Even though she was



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sleepy she knew something was different but she was not prepared for the sight which met her. There, on the very end of her nose, was a boil. A huge, bright red boil, shining in the morning sun. It was enormous and, of course, sitting on the end of her nose it reached far out in front of her as she stood and stared. She could not believe her bad luck.

“I am truly the unluckiest woman in the world,” she wailed.

She decided she could not face her friends or servants. Quickly packing some things she quietly left her house without letting anyone see her. Mounting her favourite horse, she rode away, taking a large bag

of money and a few clothes. With a cloak around her and a large hood pulled over her face, she hoped no one would recognise her.

After a few days, Isabella came to a town which she had never visited before and where no one knew her. By the side of the road were two men – a blind man and a man with one leg. The sight of these poor men made her think.

“Good day to you,” she said to the men.

“I thought until now that I must be the most unlucky person in the world because of the size of my nose. But now I can see that you are much more unlucky than I am.”

“Me? Unlucky?”, said the blind man. “I’m not unlucky. I’ve had a good life. My family look after me well. I have a loving wife, five children and ten grandchildren who visit me often. And every day I come here to sit with my friend to talk about the old days.”

“You, then,” said the woman to the man with one leg, “you are unlucky to have lost a leg. Aren’t you more unlucky than I am?”

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“I can’t complain”, said the man. “I can get about on my crutches to enjoy the sunshine and the open air. And every day I spend time laughing and talking with my friend here. No, I can’t really complain.”

“Well I can,” said Isabella. “It’s true I have my health and strength and I have lots of money and many friends but my nose is so huge, I believe I shall never be happy.”

“Well, if I had a nose like yours, I should be proud of it,” said the one-legged man. “I would grow a moustache underneath it and show it off to the world. I would invite people to come and see it and charge them money. Then I would be rich.”

“And if I had a big nose,” said the blind man, “I should sit here and enjoy the smells of the world – the scent of the flowers, and of the pollen on the legs of the bees as they fly to the hive. With a big nose I should smell the wind and know what the weather was bringing. Imagine that! To be able to forecast the weather! Farmers would give a lot for such knowledge and I too would be rich.”

“I cannot give you my nose,” said the woman, “but if it’s money you want I can give you my money. You can see that it has not made me happy.” And with that she gave them all the money she had left. Then, bidding them goodbye, she got on her horse and travelled on.

After a while she met an old lady carrying a huge bundle of sticks across her shoulders.

“Good day to you, ma’am,” said Isabella.

“And good day to you,” said the old lady, “what a fine horse you have. If only I had such a beast it could carry my sticks for me and I would be happy.”



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“And if only I had a nose as small as yours, I too should be happy,” said Isabella.

“Well if I had a nose as big as yours,” said the old lady, “I could be a great cook. I would be able to smell exactly what was in any dish you put in front of me and in this way I could become the best cook in the world. No chef’s secret would be safe any more. Besides, with such a nose I would really be someone. People would look at me as I passed them in the street. They would say ‘Look there goes the old lady with the big nose.’ At least I would be different from everyone else.”

“But you are different from everyone else,” said Isabella. “No one is the same. And believe me, if I could give you my nose, and the boil on the end of it, I would.”

“Boil?, what boil?” said the old lady. “You have no boil on the end of your nose. It is in good health, for all its size.”

“For this news, my dear lady,” said Isabella, “I shall indeed give you my horse. It is a fine animal but you can see it has not made me happy.”



The old lady thanked Isabella many times for the horse and, putting her sticks on the animal’s back, she carried on homewards with a lighter step.

By now Isabella was tired and hungry and she sat down by the side of the road. She had no money and no horse and she had not got rid of her nose, but strangely she began to feel better inside than she had for a long time. So she got to her feet, pointed her nose homeward and followed it.

Did she ever get home again? Yes, of course she did, though it took her many days. How she did it I am not sure and she kept it a secret until the day she died. But I think her nose must have come in useful after all, don’t you?