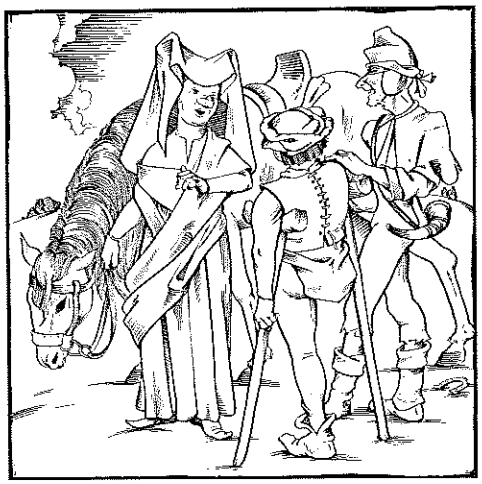
RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

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 on people's intolerance and unkindness are explored.



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A Friend for Farouk

Key ideas

- respecting racial and cultural differences
- concern for others
- freedom from discrimination and prejudice

This short piece is based on a true story and recounts the isolation of Farouk as he tries to settle into a new school in which the children are not very welcoming. In Farouk's case, the barriers are partly cultural and linguistic at first. Eventually, Farouk finds a friend in Lenny, who is a traveller and is equally an outsider. Together, Farouk and Lenny can support each other but when Lenny goes away again, Farouk is faced with the prospect of returning to his former isolation.

The events are seen through the eyes of Farouk in order to increase children's ability to understand how it feels to be isolated and rejected. The story offers the opportunity for children to explore different kinds of prejudice and can be used to challenge children to examine the factual basis of the stereotypes they are familiar with.

Teachers of older juniors might find it interesting to adapt a technique used in a research project on prejudice in the United States. The teacher divided the class into blue-eyed and brown-eyed children and gave one of the groups certain privileges (eg they would always be allowed to speak first). The situation was sustained for some time and was then reversed and the class discussed their feelings about it all. Such a technique can be effective in terms of experiential learning but must be handled with a great deal of caution. It might be worthwhile seeking the backing of the head in case of complaints from parents that their children were unfairly treated.

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

Moral reasoning

- Why do you think Farouk was not made to feel welcome at first? Think of all the reasons you can.
- Was Farouk treated fairly, in your opinion? If not, why not? What should the children in his class have done differently? Why?

- Now think about Lenny. In what ways was Lenny treated like Farouk and in what ways was he treated differently from Farouk? What is the evidence for this? Do you think:

  a) Farouk was treated worse than Lenny;

  b) Lenny was treated worse than Farouk; or

  c) they were treated the same?

- Was there any truth at all in the stories that people told about Lenny? If not, then where did these ideas come from? Why do you think people would believe stories which might not be true?

- What arguments would you use to tell the boys who were unkind to Lenny to leave him alone?

- Think of some rules about how we should treat other people in the class or the school. You could work in pairs first, then share ideas to make a class list. Choose the rules you think are the best.

Thinking things through

- If someone is treated unfairly because of general ideas about the group of people they belong to, this is called stereotyping. Stereotyping happens to a lot of people. It is helpful to be aware of all the ideas which common stereotypes conjure up. They are often spread or kept going by people who do not like particular groups. Match up these common stereotypes. Notice that they are usually (though not always) unkind or designed to put someone down.

  Common stereotypes:

a) blonde women (not blonde men)	1) careful with money, mean
b) gypsies and travellers	2) not very emotional
c) Irish people	3) very athletic
d) African British people	4) not very clever
e) Jewish people	5) not well educated
f) Scottish people	6) careful with money, mean and no sense of humour
g) English people	7) not to be trusted

- There are laws against treating people unfairly because of their race, skin colour or nationality. Do you think the law can change people's attitudes? What else might be done to help people of different communities get along together?
- Why do children pick on others to make them unhappy?

Community building

- How do you think Farouk and Lenny felt when they were left out and teased? Have you ever felt like that? Share experiences. Did things get better for you? Were you able to do anything about it?
- Draw up a charter of rights for pupils in school. It could begin something like this:

  "We believe that all pupils in our school have the right to. . . "

A Friend for Farouk

When I started school, my family had only just arrived in this country. They had come from a part of the world where there had been a lot of fighting and killing. My parents wanted me to grow up somewhere where it was safe.

Life in a new country is very confusing and it was hard going to school at first. I could hardly speak any English and it was very difficult to understand what I was supposed to do and, worst of all, it was hard to make friends.

My teacher took a special interest in me. I was glad because the other children in my class did not seem to notice I was there. When it was time to choose who to work with I found myself alone and when it was time to line up I never had a partner. My teacher would say: "Come and let me hold your hand, Farouk," and I would put my hand into hers. The other children would notice me then and sometimes Andy, Martin or Sally would give me a funny look or even a sly kick without my teacher seeing them. I never knew why they did that. I had done nothing to them.

By the time I moved into my next class I had learnt to say quite a lot and I could understand what the others were saying. But I was still left out of things. I went to school, I sat down, I tried to do my lessons but, when playtime came and we all went

outside, I was alone again unless my big brother came to play with me.

Then the day I was dreading arrived. My brother left the infant school and at playtimes there was no one at all who would play with me. I hated going out to play and I used to try to think of any excuse I could to stay in. I began to think that it would always be like this, but one day I heard an excited buzz in the classroom. A new boy was joining our class. I heard someone say that he had been to lots of schools because his family moved around a lot.

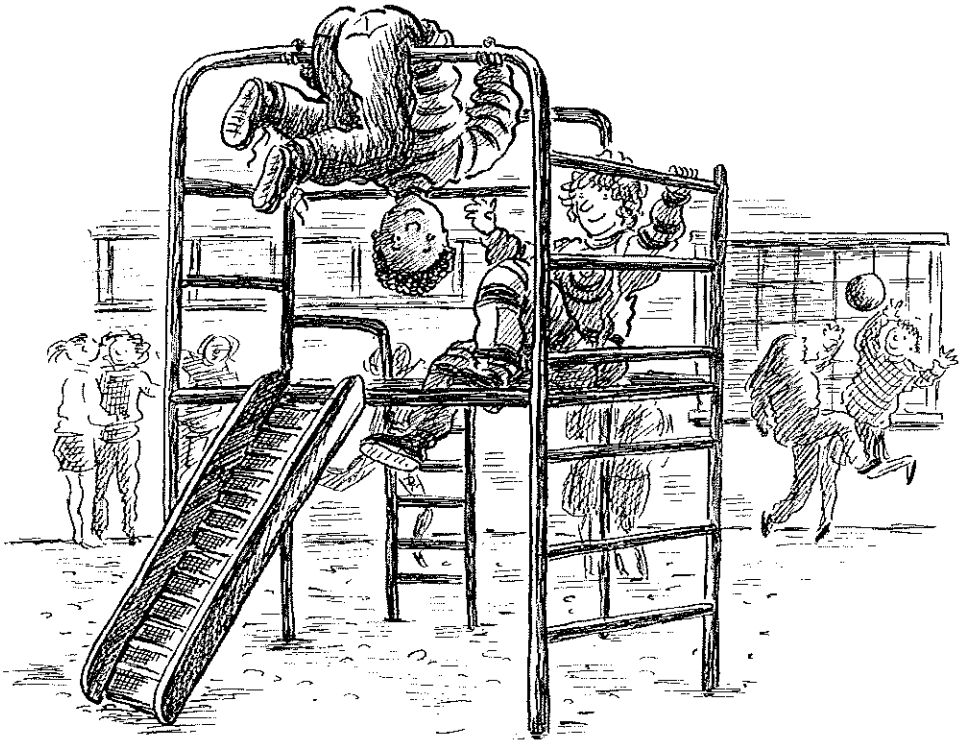
The morning the head teacher brought the new boy into the class was bright and sunny. I remember that the sun shone on his blonde curly hair. Like me, he looked different from the other children. His deep brown eyes sparkled in his rosy face as he gazed around at the class and then his eyes met mine. The teacher put him on my table and I got the surprise of my life when he ignored the other children and turned to me.

"What's your name?" he said to me.

"Farouk," I said, "what's yours?"

"Lenny," he said with a smile. "Do you want to see my lorry?" And he showed me a toy lorry. Lenny said his Dad drove a lorry like that. He let me hold it. I felt warm inside. When it was playtime, I showed Lenny the playground and we played on the climbing frame. He was a brilliant climber. After that we became very good friends.

We helped each other with our work and play. We learnt to read together and when school was over, we often played together. Lenny came to my



house sometimes. I found out that Lenny and his family lived in a huge caravan. It was beautiful. I remember wishing that I could live in one, too. I thought it must be marvellous to be able to move your house around whenever you feel like it.

After one and a half terms, that is just what happened. Lenny suddenly started to be away from school. I missed him a lot and at playtimes I was on my own again. Then after a few weeks, one dinner play, I noticed something happening near the school gates. A group of boys were crowding round somebody and when I caught a glimpse of who it was, I was so excited. It was Lenny – he was back! As I ran towards the boys I knew something was wrong. They had formed a circle around Lenny and were chanting things at him.

"Traveller! Traveller!" they shouted and one of the boys jumped on Lenny and started to hit him while the others cheered.

I wanted to shout "Leave him alone!" but the boys were bigger than I was and I was scared they would turn on me. They were shouting horrible things at Lenny which I knew were not true. They said he had no furniture at home and that he pinched things. I knew that wasn't true but who would listen to me? By this time Lenny was in tears and I wanted to make them stop. As I ran to find my teacher, the bell went and the boys ran away from Lenny still shouting at him over their shoulders. They were patting each other on the back and laughing at how clever they had been.

I was so pleased to see my friend back again.

"Why were they shouting those things at you?" I asked.

"They always do to travellers," said Lenny. "Because we don't live the same way they do, I suppose. At my last school it was worse."

Not long after that Lenny told me his family was going away for the summer to a different part of the country but Lenny said he hoped to come back in the autumn.

After Lenny went it was like the old days – nobody to talk to or to work with or play pretend games with. I missed him. Every morning as I went to school I hoped this would be the day Lenny would come back. I used to think about all the games we would play when he was there again. I couldn't understand why everyone else was so unkind to him because I knew how kind Lenny really was. How could they know? They had never bothered to find out whether the things they said were true or not. But then, no one had bothered to find out about me, either.

One day when my teacher had finished calling the register, she closed it and looked straight at me.

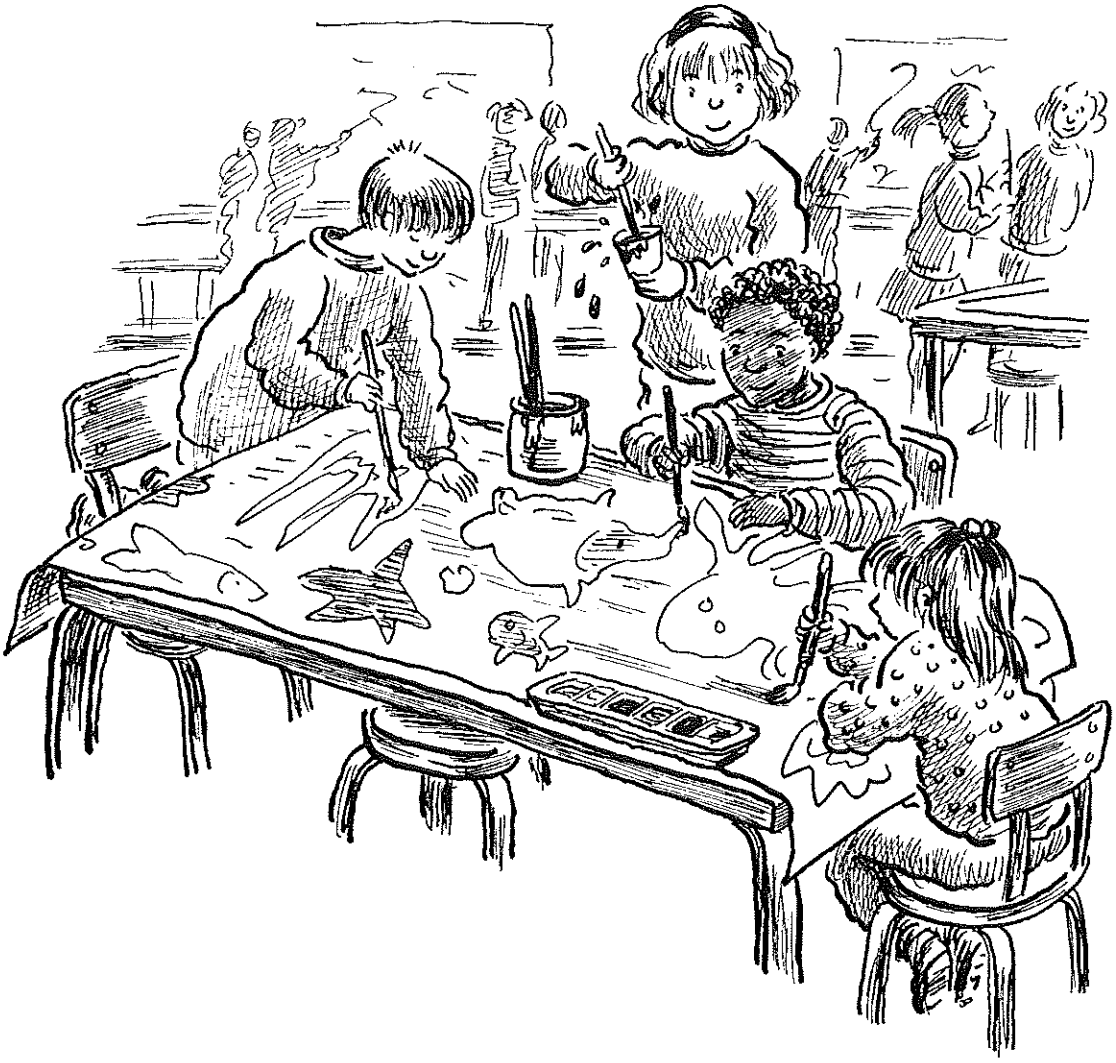
"I'm sorry, Farouk," she said, "Lenny won't be coming back, I'm afraid. I have heard that his family has

moved to a new place to pick fruit for the autumn."

My heart sank. Now I knew I would probably never see him again, the only real friend I had had. I had hoped and hoped that Lenny would come back and now all my hopes had suddenly gone. I felt a huge wave of disappointment swell up inside me and I turned my face away from all the children in the class who were looking at me. I didn't want them to see me cry.

But then I heard another voice suddenly say: "Miss, it will be hard for Farouk if Lenny's not coming back."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing but after that many of the children began to be more friendly. At playtimes, I had someone to play with and I was so much happier. But I never forgot Lenny, who had been my first true friend. I couldn't help wondering what the children in his new school were like.



The Unluckiest Woman

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 this 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?

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.

The Unluckiest Woman

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, 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 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?"

"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.

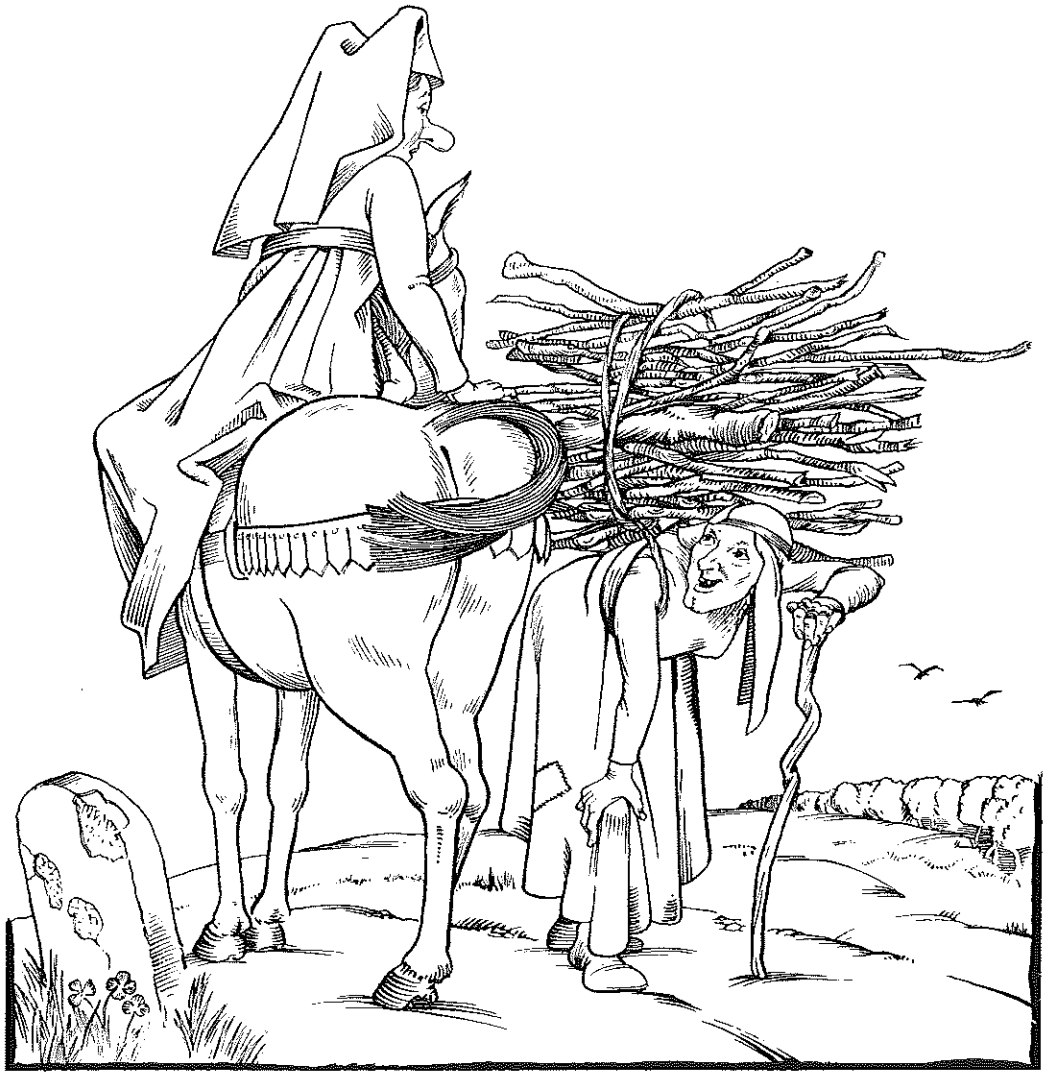
After a while she met an old lady carrying a huge bundle of sticks across her shoulders.

"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."

"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?

Speaking for Ourselves

Key ideas

- similarities and differences
- respect for the rights of people with special needs
- empathy with those in different circumstances

This unit focuses on the experiences of three young people, Kirsty, Suzanne and David, who at the present time attend a Special School. The aim is to raise pupils' awareness of the fact that although physical disability is an obvious and outward sign of difference, it does not alter the way people feel or need to be treated as individuals. Nor does it affect their sensitivity to indifference or lack of consideration.

People are often discomforted by physical disability because they have no direct experience of it themselves and they feel unsure how to react. Many schools have children with disabilities already attending or have regular contact with children in local special schools. In such cases this unit may be redundant. For other children, with little or no direct contact with disabled children, the unit will provide an opportunity to consider the rights, needs and aspirations of a group of people who are often misunderstood or overlooked.

It is suggested that before reading what Kirsty, Suzanne and David say about themselves, you ask the children to consider a number of questions based solely on what they can deduce from the evidence of the pictures. This may bring out a number of preconceptions about what disabled children are capable of.

Let the children work in twos or threes to consider the following questions.

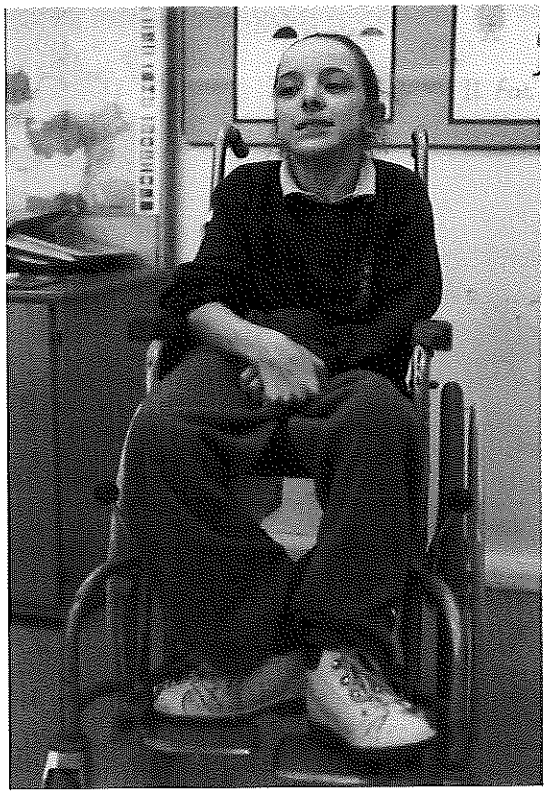
- What kind of school do you think Kirsty, Suzanne and David go to?
- Who do you think they live with?
- What do you think the children learn at school?
- What do you think they might enjoy doing in their spare time?

Now read the words of Kirsty, Suzanne and David.

- What did you find most surprising about what each of the children said about themselves?
- What are the similarities and differences between the children in what they say about their likes and dislikes?
- Why do you think Kirsty says the worst thing is when people take pity on her? How does she want to be treated?
- Why is Suzanne

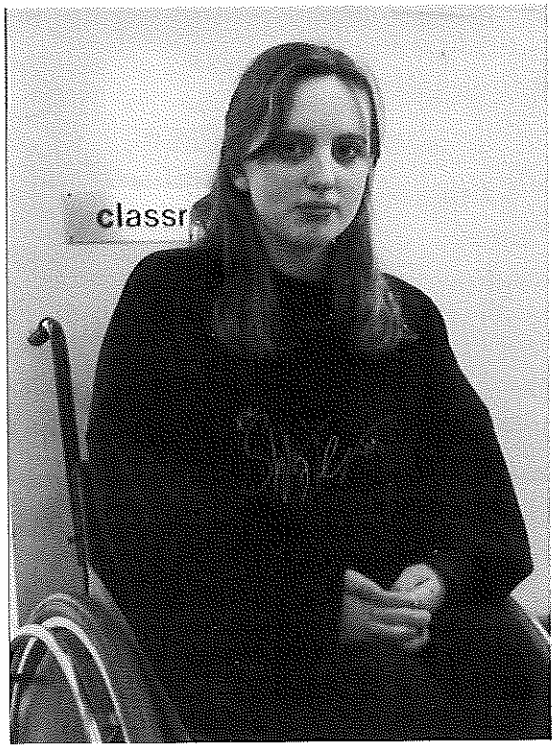
  a) looking forward to going to an ordinary school; and

  b) nervous about it?
- Look at what all three children say about how ordinary people react to them. What are the similarities in what the children say? Why do you think people behave in this way?
- If you were in the position Kirsty, Suzanne and David are in, what do you think you would miss most or find most difficult?
- What other kinds of disability do people suffer from? What special problems do you think these bring?
- Imagine that a party of children with different disabilities are going to visit your school. What would you say to children in other classes about what to expect and about how they should treat the visiting children?



Kirsty

David



Suzanne

Speaking for ourselves

Kirsty (12), David (12) and Suzanne (13) all go to the same school.

There are about 80 other children at their school, and all have some parts of their body which do not work in the usual way. This means that many of the girls and boys move around in wheelchairs or on special frames.

Kirsty

Kirsty has cerebral palsy. Something went wrong when she was born, causing her not to get as much oxygen as she needed. As a result, parts of the brain controlling her muscles were damaged so that Kirsty cannot use her legs and arms very well.

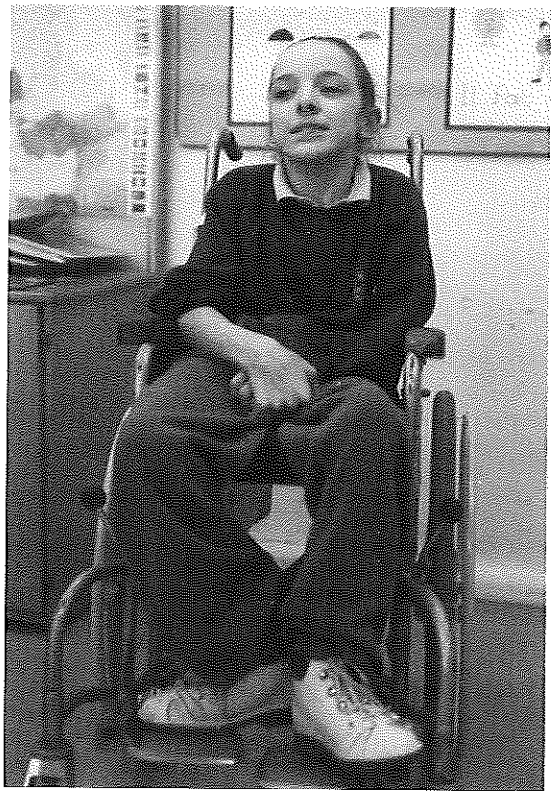
"On Tuesday nights after school, I go along to Girl Guides. I really enjoy it and I do the same things as everyone else.

On Thursdays I sing in a choir and sometimes, especially around Christmas, we go out and give concerts.

My favourite subject at school is French, and I'd like to be as good at this as I could. This year we went to France on holiday and I had a chance to practise what I had learnt.

The trouble with being in a wheelchair is that people take pity on me. I don't like that. I know I have had lots of operations, and have bits of metal inside me, but I'm really no different from anyone else. I think and talk and feel just like any other person. There's nothing different about me, except that parts of my body don't work as well as they should.

When I'm in the shops people sometimes don't even see me. It's as if I am invisible. They just rush past without giving me any chance to get out of the way. The worst is when it's crowded. Down in a wheelchair, all you see is people's bottoms."



David

David has an illness which has seriously damaged many of the muscles in his body. As a result it is very difficult for David to move his legs and arms.

"When I'm at home, I like playing on my computer. At the moment I'm saving up for some new games.

I have also learnt to type properly, so I use my computer for my school work as well. I'll write out a story on the computer and then use it to correct any mistakes I have made.

I also really like sport – but I don't think we get enough of it at school. At break time six or seven of us play football. You can use your head, legs, your wheelchair or any part of your body, except your hands. Boys and girls play. Kirsty is usually a defender.

This year I represented my school and also my county in athletics. In the finals I got a bronze medal for throwing the club where you have to get it inside a target, and a silver in the electric slalom course. I've got this really good wheelchair which is one of the fastest you can get. In the competition I had to drive around a course as quickly as possible, without knocking over any of the cones.

Sometimes people ask me stupid questions about my disability. Little children often stare and point at me. I don't usually get annoyed. They can't help it. They don't understand.

Being in a wheelchair can have its advantages. When my dad took me to the Motor Show this year, the people on the Rolls Royce and Ferrari stands gave me a special tour of the cars. I saw much more this way. Everyone else had to stay behind the barriers."

Suzanne

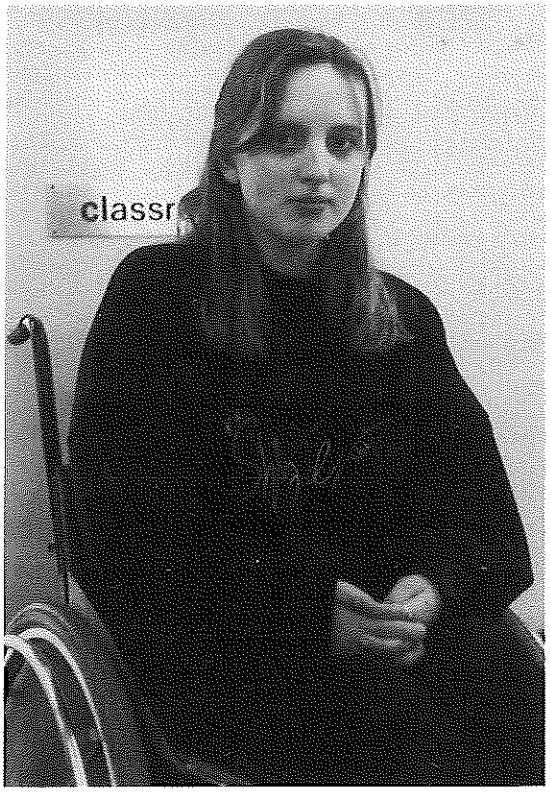
The doctors don't really know what is wrong with Suzanne. When she was a small child it was discovered that her legs were not working as well as they should. Now it is very difficult for her to walk.

"At school my favourite subject is maths, but I'd also like to learn more about the law. It looks interesting.

I do the usual sorts of things in my spare time. I watch television, see my friends, and at the weekend, go shopping. I also belong to a youth club where there's a disco, snooker, pool and table tennis.

Later this term I'm going to spend two days a week in another school where there aren't any disabled children. I'm really looking forward to it, because I'll make some new friends – but I'm also a bit worried. I hope it won't be too difficult to get from one part of the school to another.

When I'm out in a wheelchair, people sometimes stare at me. If they ask



what's wrong with me, I say that I haven't got enough muscles in my legs to hold me up properly.

What annoys me most is when people talk to the person pushing my wheelchair and not to me. 'I can answer for myself', I say. 'You don't have to ask him, ask me'."

The Bridesmaid and the Dragon

Key ideas

- gender roles

This story raises the question of gender roles from the point of view of personal expectations and the expectations of others. It describes how Jo, who does not think of herself as a "typical" girl, is confused when her best friend, Paul, suddenly wants to put her into a girl's "slot". They fall out when they both want to play the part of the dragon in the school play. Paul sees it as a boy's part but Jo has no such perception.

At the same time, Jo is asked to be a bridesmaid and her anxiety about getting dressed up for this makes her worry that she is different from the other girls she knows. The issue is resolved when the teacher gives the part to someone else (as it happens, another girl). The teacher is seen as helping Jo realise there is nothing wrong in doing something viewed as traditionally feminine but at the same time, she is not shown as having fixed views about what girls and boys can or should do. There are some additional examples in the story which highlight or challenge the traditional view of gender roles.

Despite many advances in recent years in the concept of equality between the sexes, stereotyping is still prevalent – perhaps most strongly in the minds of boys and girls about their own roles. There is also a particular set of issues, surrounding the roles of men and women amongst the ethnic minority communities, which need to be handled with understanding and sensitivity.

You may find it helpful to consider some of these issues first, before reading the story. One way to raise the issue of stereotyping might be as follows.

- Tell the class that you want to do some work about a number of characters who have different jobs. Ask them to work in pairs to think of some good names for the people who do the following jobs:

  builder, farmer, shop assistant, headteacher, doctor, vet, bus driver, street cleaner, nurse, school cleaner, pop singer, athlete.

  Begin collecting the suggestions, but then break off as soon as it seems to be obvious that the jobs have not been distributed evenly amongst the sexes by the children. For each occupation, then write down how many people had male names and how many had female names. Discuss the implications of this with the children.

- Ask them to think about three jobs they might like to do when they grow up. Compare the answers and discuss to what extent these seem to be related to being a boy or a girl? Are there any surprises?
- Where do our ideas about what the different sexes do come from? Do they have to be as fixed as they are?

To consider after the story

- Why was Jo fed up when Paul treated her like a girl?
- What was it about being a girl that Jo did not like very much? Why do you think this was? Is Jo unusual?
- Is this problem of gender expectation worse for boys than girls, in your opinion?
- What are common expectations of how boys behave when they get together with friends? Is this different from girls?
- Talk about the role played by Steve, Jo's brother, in the story.
- What do you think it would be like to swop sexes. Complete the sentence: "If I were a boy/girl, I think I would look forward to..."
- Look at the list below. Against each activity, put a B or a G to show whether you think more boys than girls do this. If about the same, write B/G.
  - play video games
  - play ball games
  - play a musical instrument
  - talk about their feelings
  - talk about people behind their backs
  - talk about a problem with their friends
  - bully someone
  - own a cuddly toy

  Discuss your findings.

The Bridesmaid and the Dragon

It was one of those days when Jo half woke up and remembered straight away that she was worried about something. Her cousin Bridget had come round last night to ask her to be a bridesmaid at her wedding in two months' time. She, Jo, who hated wearing anything except jeans!

Bottle-green velvet and long, Bridget had said the dress would be. Jo really liked Bridget and didn't want to say no, but she just couldn't see herself dressed up and on her best behaviour for hours on end.

Jo opened her eyes to think about it all more clearly and then she remembered the main reason for the strange feeling she had somewhere in the middle of her stomach. How could she have forgotten that she and Paul, one of her best friends, had hardly spoken for nearly a week? Living next door to each other, Jo and Paul had been friends since playschool and Jo couldn't remember the last time they had fallen out. She felt almost guilty to think that they had rowed over a part in the school play but she couldn't help feeling strongly about the way Paul had treated her. Trying to avoid Paul all week had been a strain but today was Friday when it would all be settled. It was the day Mrs Tucker had said she would decide on the parts for the play.

She heard her brother Steve shouting up to her, "Are you coming down? You'll be late for school." Jo got dressed quickly and went downstairs feeling grumpy and unfriendly.

"Where's Mum?" she grunted crossly as she opened the fridge door.

"She decided to go to the shops on her way to work because she wanted to get home a bit earlier tonight," her brother replied. He was concentrating on something on the cooker.

"We certainly need someone to go shopping, there's nothing to eat in here."

"I'm happy to cook you some breakfast before I go to work." Steve tried to keep the irritation out of his voice.

If anything, that made Jo feel worse because she knew she was being difficult. "Anyway, no one has to get my breakfast for me – I'm eleven – that's half as old as you."

"Pity you don't act it more often," muttered Steve. "I was trying to be nice because Mum said she thought you were a bit fed up. Are you worried about being a bridesmaid? I think you'll look terrific – especially if you brush your hair on the day!"

"That's not very funny, " snapped Jo, thinking how horrible older brothers could be.

"I'm sorry. You really will look very pretty and I know Bridget wants you to help keep the little bridesmaids out of mischief."

Jo decided it would be better not to say anything else. She knew that her voice would sound all funny, the way it does when you're trying very hard to sound cool instead of being about to burst into tears. That was one thing she and her friend Paul agreed about, girls could be so boring when they cried about the least little thing that upset them. Thinking about Paul reminded her about the day ahead.

"I've got to go," Jo said suddenly, rushing from the room. "I've got to be early to see Mrs Tucker before school. Don't tell Mum I didn't have any breakfast."

As Jo walked to school, she thought again about her disagreement with Paul. When Mrs Tucker had first told the class about the Christmas play, it seemed a bit boring. *St George and the Dragon* – it sounded like the kind of story your granny would like or you sort of remembered from infant school. But, when they had read it, it turned out to be really funny. Jo thought the dragon definitely had the best part. It was a sad character but still somehow managed to get a few laughs. Jo thought that Paul would probably get to be St George. There was also a princess who was very important but did not have a single joke to crack.

Jo had practised her dragon voice for a couple of days before she had tried it out on Paul at the beginning of that week.

"Knock Knock! Who's there?" she had suddenly boomed as they were walking home. "What do I sound like?" she added, before he had time to say anything.

"Like my Mum calling the dog in from the garden when she tries to sound fierce."

"Paul, I'm supposed to sound like a dragon. Fierce and funny at the same time. Do you think Mrs Tucker will give me the part?"

Jo could see that Paul felt uncomfortable.

"Why do you want to be the dragon?" he asked, looking at her sideways. "That's not a girl's part. I already told Mrs Tucker that I wanted to try for it."

Jo looked as amazed as she felt.

"But you'll be a brilliant St George and I'm the one who makes people laugh. And, in any case, who says the dragon has to be a boy? Dragons are not real animals so they're not boys or girls...." Her voice tailed off because she could not think of any more arguments.

"It's just not a girl's part," Paul repeated. After that they had hardly spoken all the way home.

That was Monday. Today was Friday and they had hardly talked to each other since. Jo had worked out that it wasn't so much that she was angry with him for wanting the same part but for treating her differently from usual – like a girl, as if, just because she was a girl, she couldn't do things she wanted to do.

This morning she desperately wished they were friends so that she could tell Paul about the long, bottle-green velvet bridesmaid's dress. He would understand, whereas her girl friends at school would probably think she was crazy not to want one. She decided the only other person she could possibly tell her worries to was Mrs Tucker. Mrs Tucker was Jo's favourite teacher. Jo had been in her class last year and always went to her drama club.

Because Jo was so early, Mrs Tucker was in her classroom all by herself. Jo did not give herself time to hesitate, "Miss, do you think I would look silly in a long velvet dress?"

Mrs Tucker smiled. "If that is all that is worrying you," she said, "we don't have to put the princess in long velvet. But actually I think you'd look absolutely lovely. It's a good idea."

Jo was completely unable to speak. Just then Paul came in to the classroom with Anna Jones, another mainstay of the drama club. Before they could say anything, Mrs Tucker spoke. "Now all three of you are here I'll tell you about your parts in the play before I announce it to the others. Paul, I want you to be St George, Anna, the dragon, and Jo, as you have already guessed, the princess."

Anna tried to look pleased but said quietly: "I thought I would make a good princess and I didn't think the dragon was really a girl's part."

"I had the same feeling at first about the dragon," Mrs Tucker added. "But my husband reminded me that as dragons are legendary animals, they don't have to be boys or girls, and your voice is perfect for the part. Besides I want the princess to be a strong character in her own right and Jo will do that brilliantly."

Jo and Paul looked at each other for a second or two and broke into laughter. Now that neither of them had got the part they wanted they could be friends again. Mrs Tucker gave them a look which said she didn't understand what was going on. Then Jo said: "At least my Mum won't have to worry about making my costume and I'll get two chances to wear my bottle-green velvet bridesmaid's dress." Now it was Paul's turn to look puzzled.

"I'll tell you all about it later," Jo said.