

## The Wall in the Middle of the Book

Use this picture book by John Agee to explore article 2 of the UNCRC the right to live without discrimination.

### Aims

- Use a picture book to learn about, through and for rights
- Explore **UNCRC Article 2**

### What you need

Picture book **The Wall in the Middle of the Book** by John Agee

### What to do

A wall runs down the middle of this book, supposedly protecting a knight from dangers on the other side of the wall: angry animals and evil ogres. However, water rises dangerously and a perilous crocodile looms on the knight's side of the wall, and he finds himself in need of help. Who will come to his rescue? This picture book highlights the dangers in holding preconceived ideas and ways in which these can be wrong and harmful.

This book looks at stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. For clarity here's the difference between the three terms:

- **Stereotypes** – an oversimplification or opinion about a person.
- **Prejudice** – Judging someone unfavourably and incorrectly without knowing them on the basis of their appearance or if they belong to a particular group or community.
- **Discrimination** – treating an individual or group unfairly as the result of a prejudicial attitude.

### Teaching about rights

Create an artificial division using a display board or curtain. If using cardboard, children can paint, print or draw on bricks to create a wall. Ask for four volunteers and tell them to form a group on one side of the wall. Give each a piece of paper with one of the following written on: a grandmother, a footballer, a nurse and a farmer. Ask the remaining children to sit on the other side of the wall and give them four pieces of scrap paper and a pencil, working as individuals or in pairs. Explain that on the other side of the wall, one of their peers will read out a person that they are pretending to be. The individuals or pairs should draw a quick sketch of what they think the person might look and behave like, and/or write words that they would associate with that person.

Once the activity is complete, lay the four pieces of paper with the different people written on in different areas of the room and ask children to put their drawings and words next to the correct person. Visit each person as a class and discuss the images and words:

- Were there commonalities?
- Were all of the footballers and farmers men?
- Were the nurses women?

Explain that when we have fixed, simplified ideas about what a person looks, acts, behaves and feels like, this is called a **stereotype**. Show images of female footballers and farmers, a male nurse or a grandmother from another country.

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Sometimes, parts of stereotypes can apply to someone. For example, a stereotype of Scottish people could be wearing kilts and haggis – sometimes this is true, but not all the time, and it doesn't give a complete picture about a person or group and doesn't apply to every Scottish person. Sometimes, stereotypes can be harmful and hurtful.

### Discuss:

- What does the knight in the story expect the ogre to be like?
- In what way does the ogre break down this stereotype? Can children think of other picture books where the character breaks down a stereotype?
- Where do we get stereotypes from?
- Stereotypes can lead to prejudice. Prejudice is when we have bad thoughts about others based on stereotypes. What sorts of things do people sometimes form prejudiced ideas about?
- Why can stereotypes be hurtful and harmful?

## Teaching through rights

After reading the story, **discuss**:

- Why do people build walls?
- Have you ever built a wall? Why?
- Can you name some famous walls? (Great Wall of China, The Berlin Wall, Hadrian's Wall). What was the purpose of them? (To keep people out/separate people)
- From what does the character in the book think the wall protects him? Is his side safe?
- Why do you think there is a mouse on the ogre's side? What does this tell us about the ogre?

Jon Agee has designed this book so that it is both about a wall and shows a wall running down the centre of each double page. **Discuss**:

- The wall symbolises other things, too. What could it stand for?
- There are very few words in the book. Why do you think this might be?
- The ogre says very little in the book. Why do you think the author has chosen to do this?
- Look at the illustrations of the ogre's expressions and body language throughout the text. How do they show the reader what he might be feeling and thinking?

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**Create thought bubbles** which could go beside the ogre on different pages, giving his perspective on the knight and showing his feelings. Write these thought bubbles onto the board for the class to see.

**Divide the class into groups of six** and allocate each a character from the story. Explain that they are going to act out the story, but from the point of view of the ogre's side of the wall. Using the ideas shared on the board, encourage groups to act out the story from the other perspective. Encourage them to think about what the duck, mouse, gorilla and rhino might also think and say. Ask willing groups to show their dramatizations to the class.

**Ask children** what they have learnt about the importance of seeing issues from other people's point of view.

## Teaching for rights

Often, as in this story, fears and prejudices are based on lack of understanding. As a class, create a display, entitled, If You Don't Know, Don't Be Afraid to Find Out! It could contain a 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' list. For example:

- **Do:** ask questions, research, talk to others, learn, question ideas (etc.)
- **Don't:** be afraid of the unknown, be scared of new, use stereotypes to decide, believe everything you hear and read (etc.)

This could be displayed to teach and encourage others to stop and think, too.

This is taken from **Taking a Rights Based approach to Fiction** published by the Scottish Book Trust. Find activities and book suggestions for teaching at Early, First and Second level [here](#)