



Book review: The Colour Blind Boy

Anti-racist religious education



RE TODAY AND NATRE WORKING WITH THE FREE CHURCHES GROUP
AND METHODIST SCHOOLS





The Colour Blind Boy by Mohammed Yaseen

Review by: Imran Mogra

What is this book about?

In the context of racism, this book is about unconscious bias and self-introspection. It is concerned with encouraging children to be courageous and to speak out. It is also concerned with promoting dispositions such as being honest with oneself and the importance of friendships.

What did you love about it?

I love the way the author works with perceptions, especially with those of Abdullah, the main character in the story. First, Abdullah's assumption that all Muslims are brown and white people can't be Muslims is deconstructed. Second, his father is shown with an opposing response to what Abdullah was expecting. Abdullah thought that his father would be unwelcoming of his new 'gora' (white) friend, but that was not the case.

I love the way the author brings to the fore the strong personal characteristics of self-control through Abdullah's and Adam responses in dealing with and being firm against naming calling, provocations and racist insults by some bullies in their school.

How did this book have an impact on you as a teacher of RE? Does it imply new ways of doing your job?

As a teacher of RE, this book has reinforced the importance of some key concepts including social justice, character and values education and the need to use the many teachings from religious traditions to talk about racism.

It has revealed to me that my approach to racism should look beyond the black and white spectrum and not to forget that racism within both of these categories exists, which also needs to be equally challenged. This has alerted me to racism operating at horizontal and vertical axis including intra-Muslim racism.

I would recommend this book to other teachers of RE because...

I would recommend this book to other teachers of RE because this juvenile fictional text is set in a school. This is where some children experience bullying and, simultaneously, learn how to confront prejudice. The story aptly illustrates how two boys deal with overt and 'innocent' racism.

Could the book be used for teacher development and / or for and with pupils themselves? How?

For teacher development, this book can help explore the complex realities of race, racial identity, racism, ethnicity, prejudice reduction, unconscious bias and dangerous conversation.



Teachers can problematize the phrase ‘colour blind’ in the title, although it is well-intentioned, some would criticise this ideology and argue that it may do more harm. Some fear that it might lead to ignoring the public manifestation of racism. Others think that it may avert people’s attention from patterns of racial inequality and persistent racial bias.

Often, it is the case that our reluctance to address racism stems from our tendency, including among some teachers, to want to avoid difficult conversations. Therefore, in classrooms, in addition to real stories, this one can be shared as a useful resource for such discussions. Conversations should not be shut down. This book can be used to ask questions and uncover why pupil are thinking what they are thinking, and how their ideas have developed and can change.

Can you give an example of a key quote from the book (keep to about 50 words), and why you chose it?

“We’re talking to you coloured boy!” one of the boys shouted. Abdullah started to walk away slowly from the group. He did not know what to say to them. It wasn’t that he was scared of them, no not at all. He wasn’t a chicken. No, in fact Abdullah remember his dad, clearly saying to him “Abdullah, one lion is better than thousand sheep. Abdullah had always believed that he was a lion but he did not want to make a trouble. He knew that fighting would not solve the problem. (p.13)

I chose this because it reminds me that many Messengers of God began their mission of truth and justice as individuals. We, therefore, need every individual to confront racism within their own circles and beyond.