

Male Interviewer: We know that your classes were part of Narnian Virtues, and we were just wondering what it was like for your class?

Male Teacher 1: I wasn't here last year so I didn't get to see what it was like in Year 7, but the reaction when we said, "We're doing Narnia again", wasn't the most enthusiastic, and it didn't exactly pick up throughout the rest of the term, so I think whilst the discussions about the virtues, particularly the one about self-control, they enjoyed the discussions about that and then veering off from Narnia, having discussions about those virtues, but whenever I've tried to link it then back to what was happening in the text, say, "When does this character demonstrate that?", that's when they lost interest in it.

They were interested more in the virtues than they were in the text.

MI: What do you think created that initial reluctance from students?

MT1: I'm not sure, it was just, like I said, I wasn't here last year, so it's not like anything negative would have gotten in, I think just halfway through the text we were just oversaturated by Narnia, every time I brought the book out it was, "Oh, okay."

MT1: The book itself wasn't engaging.

MI: There's nothing wrong with the text itself, I just think it's because they did a Narnia text the previous year, so many of them had done it in primary school too, looked at Narnia, because it's kind of that level text that they do in primary school, that when they got to Year 8 they thought, "Maybe we'd be done with this."

MT1: That's really helpful feedback, thank you.

Do you think if we'd done a similar curriculum with a different novel, because you were saying they enjoyed the discussion about some of the virtues?

MI: I think that would have been different, it was really the fact, I got it out at day one, pulled out the book and it was, "We did Narnia last year sir", and, "I did that in Year 5 and Year 6 as well", if it was different text, I'm not speaking for everybody, I think maybe the engagement with that section of the study would have been a little bit better.

MT1: That's great, thank you.

Female Interviewer: I saw people nodding, is that agreement?

Male Teacher 2: I've got a low ability group, and whilst they didn't say, "Oh, it's Narnia", there was a level of, they were more interested in what was, trying to work out what was happening, so any discussions around virtues

were really stymied by the fact they didn't quite always understand what was going on.

FI: In the text?

MT2: Yes, because they were trying to relate it back to the first book, and because we'd skipped a book within that, they couldn't quite get their heads around it.

MI: So you think the text itself was not accessible to lower?

MT2: Yes, I'm with you on that in terms of maybe changing the novel would, because last year when they first started the Narnia thing, they were so hit with both things at the same time, that they took both things on at the same time, and this time, because they 'knew' the virtues, I'll say that in inverted commas, mentally I think they thought, "I don't need to worry about that because I've already got that, I'm going to try and focus on the book", and then further into the book we got, the more confused they got, and the less easy it was to layer the virtues back on top, whereas I think if it was a new hit both times, then you might have had, "I'm really interested in the virtues, how could they be layered on the book?" as opposed to the other way round. Does that make sense?

Int: Yes definitely.

Female Teacher 1: I had a middle ability group and we looked at it two times a week, so I did find sometimes getting through the novel and making sure that they understood the storyline was quite tricky as well as looking at some of the tasks in it, I did show some of the film, but the film's a bit different, we had some conversations about that, that didn't really work as well.

Again, similar to [MT1], the initial, "Oh, it's Narnia", wasn't great at the beginning; however, there were a few girls in my class that really enjoyed it, so there were some that really got into it, but the majority of the class in general, so I think again, if it was a different book, it just would have repackaged it I think.

MI: Do you have any sense of those that did enjoy it, what was the hook that drew them in, or what it was about them that might have been different?

FT1: I think they're the type of pupils that would do a lot further learning, get quite engaged into text anyway, and I think because I tried my best to show some of the visuals as well, I think they did get engaged into it, but they are those types of learners, but it was interesting, because I didn't want to say, "How are you finding it?", too much, because it was something that we wanted to work through, but they did make some comments, "No, I really enjoy it."



Female Teacher 2: I had the opposite experience in that I had the top set class who were really engaged last year, and I think the familiarity of Narnia helped, because they started in Year 7, and as you said, they were starting this new project, so they didn't mind so much reading it, but this year they're a bit like, "We're older and wiser", and a bit more settled in, so they weren't so keen on it.

They'd read it before, so they liked it, they liked the story, and there was a lot of enjoyment there, but a few of them did say things like, "Can we do something a bit more modern or contemporary?", they read a lot of contemporary young adult fiction, and they were quite able, and they were able to see the links themselves between the virtues and what they were reading, and getting examples from their own reading, which is really nice.

I think probably the most successful lessons that we had were in the booklet when there was separate stories, so the one about the Amish community and the justice and forgiveness, and they really engaged with those types of, just little short stories that were a bit more modern and a bit different, and things that we hadn't heard before that were challenging them a little bit more.

Int: That's great, thank you.

The first question was just, "How did people find it had gone in their class?"

Male Teacher 3: I thought it was a mixed bag, I thought some of the exercises in the workbook were brilliant, writing about a time when you had to show, I think it was forgiveness, or writing about a time when they saw that, they were really nice tasks, and some of the material there, I think the one on Louis Armstrong, really stood out to us, that was ever so nice, and there was, I think there was a little passage I really liked on Joe Lewis, I liked that, and the students seemed to take to that, but that was pretty far removed from the actual, the material of the text.

And I think that the reading book, the children I had, I think because of their age and their backgrounds, I think that kind of material, they've probably read that kind of thing in primary school, and so what [FT2] said about the more contemporary fiction, I think relates to my class as well, so I think what would have suited them at that age would be something like maybe Horowitz or Alan Gibbons, and I think some of them found the story just going on a bit too much now.

They did follow it and we did read it, and I think they enjoyed it to some degree, we especially liked the scary parts, I think the one about the darkness at sea and the stranger, and the stuff about slavery was very interesting for them, but overall the interest petered out a little bit towards the end.



FI: What was your ability?

MT3: F2, so fairly middle ability, although those tasks about a time when you forgive somebody, they really went for that, I got some wonderful transactional work out of it.

I think we're under so much pressure here to strengthen the children's ability with punctuation, spelling and grammar, and a great deal of the time around virtues means that it's almost, it's difficult to get it into the lesson, and we really need the children to do that, so maybe something to do with subject material, as in the text, and a bit more on spelling, punctuation and grammar.

It's a paramount importance to us because we're under such immense pressure with measuring their progress, and the virtues, I think as [Head of English] says, it's the kind of school, we run it around restorative practice, and they're good at those conversations.

MI: Because this study is unique amongst those that we are most involved with, the Narnian Virtues, in terms of restorative practice and the circles, I came and watched when you first joined, so I know a little bit about what happens, so how has this curriculum fit or not fit into the wider ethos of the school? How does it relate to the wider ethos of the school?

MT1: I think it fit in pretty well because all those virtues, I know we're always saying they're kind of embedded in the school anyway, so talking about justice and self-control, a lot of these kids are trained in restorative practice where they're taught about those things, so in terms of getting discussions kick started, that was really, really helpful, so if you started off, when it said, "What is justice?", one of my style activities would be, "Where is a time this has happened at [this school] to you?", and almost all the kids had examples for it, I think that's why that was a really strong point of the course, because the kids were so experienced.

MT2: What he said.

MT3: I didn't like the Malala stuff.

FI: Okay.

MT3: I think for me personally, it turned up too much in schools, and the children at that age, they've seen her in RE, and they've seen her in history, they've seen her in geography, they've seen her in coaching, they've seen her in English already earlier in the year.

I took in Malala stuff, and I threw it out, and what I did was, I replaced it with stories of other children who also took a bullet for education and didn't live, so instead of Malala, I took some of your wording, but I did it around Hector Pieteron, and we had a couple of, I think it was a week



we spent researching Hector Pieterse, and I said to the children, "It's wonderful to learn about Malala, and it's lovely that you've done that, but there are other children to learn about too."

And I met Hector Pieterse's, some of his family when I was in South Africa, so I had a lot of inside knowledge there, and I really wanted to bring his voice, and then they found that far more compelling, because that child, the lad who's carrying the child, Amit, his mum, she passed away, I think six months later after I met her, but that was really important to me to bring to the table, because it's the same principle as Malala, it's just that the children, they died, they didn't live to tell, and they were fighting, they were marching for an education, and the children found that really, really compelling.

FI: It's such an iconic picture as well isn't it?

MT3: Exactly, and they didn't know that, so then they realised, "It's great that we've got this Malala knowledge, there's other kids as well", that felt really important to me, personally.

I did use your angle, but I wanted to change.

MI: A different story?

MT3: Yes.

MI: Excellent, that sounds great.

We have it recorded, I think we'll definitely follow that up.

FI: Just to float a quick idea, one thing we were thinking of doing when making legacy materials was to differentiate them a bit for ability, would be useful?

MT2: Massively, I think in a school like ours, the difference between say [FT2]'s top set and my almost bottom set, is huge.

FT1: And I teach the lowest band, so they would definitely, in Year 7 I ended up using differentiated down text really, just to some of them, I just simplified them, and completed some of the tasks. That was with Year 7.

This one would have been trickier though to do that with.

MI: One of the things that we're doing is taking to teachers some of the things that students have said in other schools, and vice versa as well, saying, "They experienced it like this", we don't have time to go through those, but one of them that has been particularly important and come up is that some of the students said that they felt quite vulnerable.



MT2: Our students?

FI: No.

MT2: In general?

MI: Just in general.

FI: In some of the other schools.

MI: They said in their focus group that they felt quite vulnerable having to talk about some of the issues around virtues and character in class, is that something that resonates here do you think?

FT1: It did pop up last year with my group, also with a parent discussion on parent's evening where they'd been looking at the passport, and she said that it brought up a lot of very personal issues with her family and they'd been going to counselling, and she just wanted to pass that on as something that, for their family it became a bit of an issue, so they stopped doing the passport because they were having.

FI: That was a parent who said that?

FT1: Yes, I think she asked the child to leave actually, and she just wanted to pass it on to me, she didn't want to make a big deal of it, and she said she really enjoyed the project, she saw the merits in it and the value in it, but just at that point in the time, for whatever was happening with her family, it did feel a little bit, some of the discussions that they were having were maybe difficult for them, so I can see how that can happen.

But I think my group are quite, I think they were a lot more open last year in Year 7, they had that wide-eyed innocence and they were really eager to share stories about primary school, they shared really personal things about bullying in primary, and it really helped as a class for them to get to know each other, and I was really surprised at how open they were.

I think as they progress into Year 8, they do become a little bit more guarded, as they grow up it's a bit less, there was a bit less sharing this year I would say.

FI: Did anyone else have any experience with that?

MT2: I don't think to start, I think there were certain conversations around fairness and justice, where some of my children became really defensive, which tends to be a signature that actually this is touching a little bit.

I think the notion of vulnerability, I think it's potentially a good thing, because I think that's the point at which we learn things, where we feel that we kind of need to, but it's doing it in a way where you're not, where the children aren't feeling like they're being pushed into a corner, because

the thing I find a lot with, especially with children here, especially in the lower abilities, they realise that if they're in trouble or if they don't like something or they don't want something to change, if they said that phrase, it's done, regardless of whether or not they mean it, "If I say sorry in this way, then it stops", "If I asked to do this, then it stops", it's almost mechanical.

And I wonder sometimes in terms of that vulnerability, whether or not, some of that mechanisation of language kind of feeds into this, especially with the lower groups, I don't think it would be the same with the higher ability groups, I don't know.

FT1: Do you mean in terms of them using the language to?

MT2: Abdicate themselves from.

FR2: Not so much, I think we have a lot of RP reps in the group, and they are quite well adverse in the language.

FI: Is that restorative practice?

All: Yes.

FR2: They might be able to tell you when you see them.

MI: Thank you.

[CLOSE]

