



DIVERSE SHORTS

LITERATURE
TO PROMOTE
CRITICAL THINKING



Acknowledgements

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GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS

The stories and activities in this collection are designed to promote critical thinking in secondary school students from 11-16. Suitable for English, Citizenship, PSHE and tutor time, it is arranged in five thematic sections, each of which cover key aspects of critical understanding.

Each section moves from what we consider to be the least to the most challenging text. The texts in each share common themes and ideas, as indicated by the section headings, but often they could fit just as comfortably elsewhere in the book.

There are some weighty and challenging issues explored in the texts, so we recommend that you read in advance any that you intend to share with students. In particular, you might like to make note of the following:

- ‘Brownies’ – contains mild swearing and also racially offensive language (used in the context of exploring racism).
- *Orangeboy* – contains descriptions of drug-taking and one instance of swearing on page 97.
- *The Hate U Give* – one instance of mild swearing, plus violence.

The stories do not have to be read sequentially and it is also possible to compare stories across sections. At the back of the book you will find a series of detailed critical literacy questions that you can use with any or all of the texts – and which you might also like to use elsewhere in the curriculum. You can find copies to print off by searching ‘Diverse Shorts’ at www.englishandmedia.co.uk/publications

The activities for each story are set out in the same way following a three-part structure:

- **Connecting to the topic** – unless stated, this is to be done *before reading* the story. It gives students the opportunity to learn a little about the topic they are about to explore further in the story, as well as to reflect on their own existing knowledge and that of their classmates.
- **Connecting to the story** – this provides students with the opportunity to explore an important aspect of the story *after reading*. Lots of the activities require students to draw on skills of empathy, for example by writing in the voice of a character, or of the writer.
- **Connecting to the real world** – also to be done *after reading*, these activities encourages students to place their reading in the context of the wider world around them and, at times, to reflect on how the story has changed their understanding in some way.



INTRODUCTION FOR READERS

Dear Reader,

Welcome to *Diverse Shorts*, a very exciting publication for two reasons.

First, and foremost, it will introduce you to great writing in the form of short stories and novel extracts. We hope it will encourage you to read the work of the writers further and to seek out others who explore similar themes.

Second, it is designed to make you think critically. This doesn't mean we want you to think negatively; rather, it means we want you to think deeply about what you are reading, asking important questions about why it is written in particular ways, what it is trying to say, and what it might mean to different groups of people. Critical thinking is a key skill as you navigate your way through the modern world. You can apply ways of reading critically that you meet when looking at literature to just about any other text – be it serious or light, online or off, written or visual. So you'll be on your way to becoming an expert in spotting fake news, or working out the real agenda behind material that is not necessarily fake, but which is distinctly biased.

Each piece selected for this anthology deals with an important issue. That's why all of the sub-headings are so weighty. But you can be sure that whether you are reading a piece from 'Identity, Diversity and Community' or 'Power, Freedom and Control', the story comes first. And, as should be the case with a critical thinking approach to literature, your opinions about what you read matter most. The selections are designed to make you think, not to tell you what to think. To help you with this there is a series of 'critical literacy questions' at the back of the book, which carefully take you through the kinds of things you might ask of a piece of writing when exploring it critically.

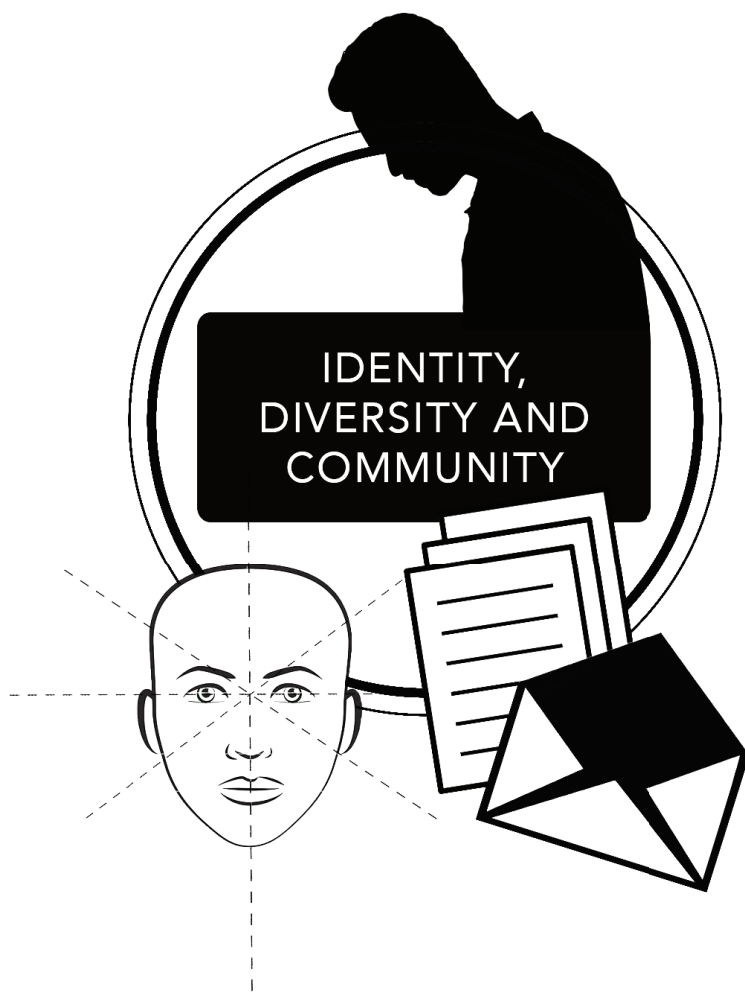
The stories should appeal to you whatever your age. Some are more challenging than others, though, so the most straightforward appear at the start of each section. Several also deal with issues that your teacher might like to talk to you about carefully before you start your reading.

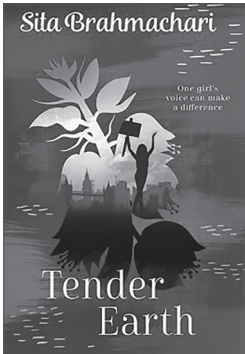
The questions have been chosen with secondary school students in mind, though, so they should be just up your street. And whether they are, or aren't, you should still be asking an important critical question: why do teachers think it is important for young people to read writing like this? If you can answer that question well, then the book has done its job!

Happy reading!

The English and Media Centre and the Hackney Learning Trust







Tender Earth, by Sita Brahmachari

This extract from a novel focuses on tutor time for Laila during her first day at secondary school.

Connecting to the topic

- For each concept below, write a sentence or two to summarise what you think it means:
 - Identity
 - Diversity
 - Community.
- Why might a teacher think it's important for young people to learn about these concepts? Can you think of a reason for each?
- Listen to some of your ideas around the class.

Connecting to the story

- How realistic a picture does this chapter paint of a first day at school? Write down your own thoughts, focusing on the activities the pupils are doing, the way they behave, the teacher, and so on. You might like to think about what is really good about this lesson, or what you might like to change.
- Compare your thoughts round the class.

Connecting to the real world

- Individually complete a list like the one Laila and her classmates filled in. (So details of Name, Beliefs, Hobbies, Religion, Connected Lands, Favourite Subjects and Languages.)
- Share your lists around the class and discuss what it feels like to give out this information and to hear it from other people.
- What conclusions can you draw about the different backgrounds, identities and interests represented in your class?





TENDER EARTH

SITA BRAHMACHARI

I check down the list of names in my tutor group. Kez is definitely not on it. After what they said in our transition meeting, I still don't understand why we're not together. Unless... I just can't get the idea out of my head that Kez has somehow made this happen.

You could ask for two people you especially wanted to be with, but the only person I really cared about being with was Kez, so I didn't write down any other names. The only other person I know is a boy called Carlos. He only came to our primary in Year Six and he didn't speak much English then. It's incredible how good he is now though. I think he's Spanish, but I'm not sure. I don't know him that well.

Our tutor's called Mrs Latif. She tells us that she teaches Philosophy and Ethics and a subject called Citizenship, which I've heard Krish talking about. It was his best subject and he was really gutted they didn't do it as an exam. Mrs Latif is explaining why she chose 'Seven Dials' as our tutor-group name:

'Always so many different pathways to explore from the same starting point, or roundabout to be precise! Anyone know where Seven Dials is?'

I've been thinking that at secondary I should speak up more than I used to in primary, especially when I know the answer.

'Well, it's in Covent Garden,' Mrs Latif answers as no one puts their hand up.

Mrs Latif is tall and has a long, slim face with high cheekbones, dark eyes with thick lashes, perfectly sculpted eyebrows and a tiny diamond nose stud. Her lips are painted plum colour and her silvery headscarf is decorated at the side with diamond jewels. She wears a plain black dress and heavy silver jewellery. Her nails are painted the same plum colour as her lips. I love her shoes... they're like brogues but silver. It doesn't seem fair really. If students have to wear a uniform, why don't teachers?

Mrs Latif says she's just started teaching here, and at her old school she taught Religious Education.

'So you will be my philosophy ambassadors here!' she says.

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Above the whiteboard she has a sign mounted on bright blue card,

**This school welcomes
believers of all religions and none**

I read it over a few times. I think it's a good thing she's written it up there on the wall so everyone knows, because when I watch the news lots of the things in the world where people fight with each other seem to have something to do with what religion they do or don't belong to; what they believe or don't. Mrs Latif takes her black marker pen and makes columns on the board under the headings:

Name	Hobbies	Connected Lands	Languages
Beliefs	Religion	Favourite Subjects	

I didn't think tutor time would be about stuff like this. Mrs Latif goes around the class taking the electronic register. She does it as fast as she can.

'Now. I thought we could start by getting to know a few things about each other! In a minute I'd like you to walk around the class with your notebooks, asking each other questions. I've put a few suggested headings up here to get you started -' she taps the board - 'but you can add whatever categories you like. We're just making a start at getting to know each other. Try to fill in as much as possible for as many people as possible in the time that we've got. In the next few weeks everyone will have met everyone else. Any questions?'

A girl sitting behind me puts her hand up.

'Is belief the same as religion?' she asks.

'This is exactly the sort of question I was hoping for... what's your name?'

'Pari.'

'Hi, Pari.' Mrs Latif thinks carefully before she answers. 'No, actually - I don't think they're the same. They're connected though. It's complicated, but that's the kind of thing we can debate in tutor time. You can also keep an eye out for any news that can feed into our discussions.'

'Excuse me? What does Connected Lands mean?' Carlos asks.

'Make a guess!'

'I'm from Spain, but my family live all over the world...'





THE COLOUR OF HUMANITY

BALI RAI

If I could speak to you again, I would remind you about the park that we played in. Those multi-coloured rubber tiles in the kids' play area, surrounded by bark chips that would get stuck in our shoes. The fence around the perimeter that kept danger away, and us feeling safe. I loved the swings but you were a roundabout fan. We still enjoyed it the same, though, didn't we? I can see your mum sharing gossip with mine, the two of them watching over us, proud and happy.

Remember the other kids from the neighbourhood? My cousins Michael and Joseph, Ruby Khan and Mia McCullough – and so many others whose names I've forgotten. The laughter and the fun, and the sun shining over the holidays. Going home tired and sweaty, our fingers sticky from melted ice lollies. It's like a different world now, isn't it? Just a dream that we once shared. Maybe you saw something else in those images, something that didn't include me. Or was it later that we stopped being the same? I guess I'll never know.

I'd offer you my food, if I could see you again, like I did every time you came for tea. Fish fingers and chips, and those tinned peas that my mum always kept in the cupboard. You loved putting tomato ketchup on yours – smothering everything in it until your food was floating in a bloody lake. You'd get your fork and smear a chip around the plate, making patterns in the sauce. Call it painting. Mum used to say you'd become one of them modern artists, like that man who cut the shark in half, or that Banksy fella. Something avant-garde, she said, and we didn't know what she meant – looked it up on my laptop.

You never took my food though, did you? I didn't like ketchup. I used to dollop mayonnaise on my plate, and you'd pull that face, like there was a really bad smell in the room. Mayo, you'd say, sounding just like your nan. *Ma-yo? How can you eat that muck?* you'd ask. *It looks like sick.* And I'd just grin, spear a chip and wave it at you. Ketchup and mayo – that's who we were. Only, underneath the sauce, our food was the same. *We were different, too – came out of different bottles, your mum said – but it didn't mean anything at all. We were always the same. Always.*

