

Class act

Stabbing



This class act is part of the British Red Cross humanitarian education programme. It is a straightforward lesson plan for use in any educational setting with young people, particularly informally or as part of citizenship education. It will help students think about and discuss what it is like to be someone else, and understand and reflect on other people's situations and feelings.

Summary

Like other materials in the class act series, this class act aims to help students think about and discuss what it is like to be someone else. Such reflection is a significant element of the citizenship agenda.

The class act is based on a real-life stabbing in London recounted by an eye witness in an article in the Guardian newspaper. Extracts have been taken with kind permission and the material is Copyright Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005.

The lesson consists of three phases which can all be used in one lesson, or spread over a week or more, including homework. As you progress through each phase, you will reveal more information to students. You only reveal in phase 2, for example, that the situation described in phase 1 actually happened.

Age group

11–16 year olds and adults.

Timings

The material is flexible so the activities can be extended, shortened or set as homework as best suits your class. These timings, provided by practising teachers, give you a guide.

Phase 1	15 minutes
Phase 2	25 minutes
Phase 3	20 minutes

Learning outcomes

- > Students will imagine themselves in a situation and explore their own feelings and those of characters involved.
- > Students will think about and express their feelings, both orally and in writing, about the situation.

Curriculum links

For links with the curricula of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, please see page 5 of this resource.

Phase 1

This is the initial situation to describe to students.

Around 10 o'clock one evening you are on the top deck of a bus going home. Among the usual mix of people there is one man in his twenties who is acting strangely. He is shouting and throwing take-away food around. He has a rather wild appearance. It doesn't look as if he is easy to communicate with. One by one, some of the passengers start to leave the top deck of the bus and move downstairs to be away from him.

At this point, invite thought and reflection. This can be as discussion with the whole class, in small groups, or as a written exercise.

What would you do? The main choices are to move downstairs, to sit quietly and not respond, or to challenge the young man's behaviour in some way.

Invite students to think about the reasons behind what you might do. What goes through your mind in a situation like that? Is keeping yourself to yourself a good policy for personal comfort and safety? What obligations do any of us have to challenge 'anti-social behaviour'? Would our public spaces be better places to be if more people were prepared to insist on standards?

If students do challenge the man, what words would they use? What would be their tone? Might humour work better than confrontation? What are the disadvantages of waiting until you are angry before saying something?

Phase 2

At this point, either as part of the same lesson or at a later date, tell students that the situation described in Phase 1 is not fictional but is based on press reports of an incident on a London bus one Friday night in late July 2005. Explain to the students what seems to have happened that evening.

Most passengers left the top deck of the bus. But at least one couple and one man stayed. The young man started throwing chips directly at the young woman. Her boyfriend protested. There was a scuffle, and the man pulled out a knife. He stabbed the woman's boyfriend several times.

Talk about the choices discussed in phase 1 in the light of the new information.

Now move on and tell students what then happened, which brings forward another set of decisions about how to behave in a sudden emergency.

An unnamed woman, who uses a pseudonym Tara McCartney, was on the lower deck of the bus on the Holloway Road when she heard a woman shouting, sort of screaming, saying, "Oh my God, what's he doing? Make him stop, make him stop."

The bus stopped and the man who had been behaving strangely got off. Later, the woman who had been screaming – who was the stabbed man's girlfriend – came down the stairs. She too got off the bus, looking as if she was in shock.

A couple of moments later the victim came down. He had blood on his shirt and was saying, "Look, he stabbed me, he stabbed me."

Freeze frame – ask students ‘What would you do?’ before carrying on with the story.

Tara McCartney says she hesitated, not wanting to be the first person to do something, when there were so many other people around.

“And then, suddenly, I had a very quick realisation that no one else was going to do anything. I put my bag down and went to get my phone. Then I went to the man and said, ‘Sit down,’ because he was sort of wheeling about, taking his shirt off and saying, ‘Look, look’.”

She kept looking round expecting other people to try to help as well, but no one did. He sat down and started to breathe a bit heavily. She wanted him to lie down because he was wounded. “I was calling 999 and trying to get him lying down at the same time. He was quite a big guy, not huge but an adult man, much bigger than me, and at that point I couldn’t physically do both things at once, so I called out, ‘Can someone help me? Can someone help me?’ Nothing happened. No one made eye contact. I couldn’t quite believe it.”

When the man was lying down he very quickly started to go into shock. He was very pale and sweating. Tara says: “I don’t have any real first-aid training, I’ve just absorbed things, mostly from the Girl Guides. But I do know you have to get a patient to stay with you and not fall into unresponsiveness, which they will do if they are in shock. Reassure them, stay with them.

So I said: ‘Can you tell me how old you are, where you live?’ but he wasn’t answering, he was just kind of rocking back and forth. The only other thing he said was, ‘I want to go to sleep.’ I kept saying: ‘No, no, you’ve got to stay with us.’ He was shaking by this point, sweat all over him. I kept saying to him: ‘It’s fine, they’ll be here any minute, it’s just superficial, there’s not much blood, you’re going to be fine’.” One man on the bus was wearing a proper jacket, so Tara asked if she could have it to put over the injured man.” He just said ‘No’. That was it.”

Before telling the class what happened next, invite them to give their views on the way Tara was responding to the situation. You can focus on the first aid aspects of her actions. What were they impressed with? Is there anything they might do that she did not apparently do? From their own knowledge, did what she was doing fit the recommended actions from their first aid training? You can let students know that overall the principles of first aid were followed. However, Tara could have taken some action to stem the blood flow.

In general, talk about how hard it is to respond instantly to an unexpected situation. Is what we think we would do, what we actually end up doing? Invite students to talk about incidents from their own experience. Do they know people who are good in a crisis, and people who are not so good? This could be set as a writing task.

Phase 3

Complete the account of what happened for students.

The police and paramedics arrived, and the stabbed man was taken to hospital. Around five of the passengers and the driver stayed giving witness statements to the police until 2am.

The stabbed man, whose name was Richard, died in hospital that same night. A 20-year-old man was arrested some days later and has appeared in court charged with murder.

Ask students to imagine that they were among the passengers on the bus and think about these questions. You might set these as written activities.

Imagine they stayed to give statements to the police. What might they have been thinking and feeling if they were still there in the early hours of the morning? Imagine that, when they got home, they wrote how they were feeling in a diary. What would they say?

Imagine they had left the parked bus and simply gone home, perhaps without realising how serious the incident was. What would they have felt like later when they realised from news reports what had happened? Would they have contacted the police to tell them what they knew?

When later that night, the witnesses were told by the police that Richard had died, Tara McCartney says she was in floods of tears. Think of adjectives to describe how she might have been feeling.

Invite students to revise what they said they would have done in phase 1 of this discussion? Does anyone think challenging the man is more or less a good idea, now they know what happened to Richard?

Optional extension

Writing activity

Set a piece of creative writing inviting students to develop their own imaginative scenario of a late-night argument in a public place. Ask them to concentrate on the feelings and behaviour of one of the characters. This need not be the central characters. Even bystanders, the bus driver and the police who arrive on the scene can be deeply moved by what they experience.

Notes

- > There is no suggestion that if any passenger had acted differently Richard's life could have been saved. It is important to give the best possible first aid. But sometimes it cannot help a severely injured person. This is very distressing but true.
- > The account of Tara McCartney was published in the Guardian newspaper on Thursday August 4, 2005. The following day the paper published a correction saying that the coverline to the story stated wrongly that the author of the piece "was the only one" of the passengers who tried to help the fatally wounded man. "As was made clear in the story itself, although the author recalled appealing for help without receiving assistance, a number of others also assisted at different points." Another witness who had helped wrote later to the Times newspaper suggesting that there were faults in the account. Different people will always recall the same events differently. It is important never to think that one eye-witness account always tells the full story.

Curriculum links

England

Key Stages 3 and 4 Citizenship

- > 2b Express, justify and defend orally and in writing a personal opinion
- > 2c Contribute to group and exploratory class discussions and take part in formal debates
- > 3a Use their imagination to consider other people's experiences and be able to think about, express, explain and critically evaluate views that are not their own

Northern Ireland

Key Stages 3 and 4 Local and Global Citizenship

- > Investigate how and why conflict, including prejudice, stereotyping, sectarianism and racism may arise in the community. Investigate ways of managing conflict and promoting community relations, reconciliation.
- > Investigate the principles of social responsibility and the role of individuals, society and government in promoting these.
- > Investigate citizenship issues, explore problems, undertake action projects and make informed decisions.
- > Communicate effectively in visual, oral, written, mathematical and ICT formats, showing clear awareness of audience and purpose, for example, in role play scenarios, presentations and other tasks.

Scotland

Education for citizenship

- > Understand the causes of conflict and possible approaches to resolving it.
- > Question and respond constructively to the ideas and actions of others in debate and/or in writing.

- > Contribute to discussions and debate in ways that are assertive and, at the same time, attentive to and respectful of others' contributions.
- > Negotiate, compromise, or assist others to understand and respect difference, when conflict occurs, recognising the difference between consensus and compliance.
- > Identify and frame their own questions and problems and suggest possible solutions.
- > Respond in imaginative ways to social, moral and political dilemmas and challenges.

Wales

Key Stage 3 PSE

- > Moral aspect - Recognise moral issues and dilemmas in life situations.
- > Listen attentively in different situations and respond appropriately.
- > Communicate confidently one's feelings and views and maintain with conviction a personal standpoint.
- > Empathise with others' experiences and feelings.
- > Make moral judgements and resolve moral issues and dilemmas.
- > Make reasoned judgements.
- > Take part in debates and vote on issues.

Key Stage 4 PSE

- > Listen attentively in different situations and respond appropriately.
- > Communicate effectively their feelings and views in a wide range of situations.
- > Appreciate, reflect on and critically evaluate another person's point of view.
- > Make moral judgements and resolve moral issues and dilemmas.

This class act is part of the humanitarian education programme produced by the British Red Cross. Teachers and other educators are free to use it, copy it and circulate it for their work. Please always include this notice and the contact details below.

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