



## Poem Activity

### Resources you will need:

- large piece of black fabric
- drum
- red paper or fabric flags
- bread
- triangle or gong
- menorah candles or a single candle if you don't have a Menorah
- tags the students have made – see tag instructions below

### Introduction

This poem is presented as a sequence of meditative movements and sensory experiences enabling students to experience it in a variety of ways. The PowerPoint will lead you through how to deliver these experiences. The movement starts with a line of students at one side of a room, who gradually retreat by moving backwards at the turn of each page, symbolising the way people retreat from things that frighten them.

The poem can be experienced individually or in groups or even performed as a whole school – it is up to you!

As a preparation for studying this poem students can make tags (labels) to represent the different groups persecuted by the Nazis, this can be your opportunity to introduce learning about each of these groups at a level which is appropriate to your students (If you would rather you can prepare these labels for the students).

Be prepared to react to spontaneous insight from your students as they experience the poem. For example you may find that someone reaches out to stop a friend being taken away, this is your opportunity to say what would have happened to people who tried to do that in Nazi

Germany. You may be able to 'show' rather than 'say' this if you feel that it is too complex to be understood in language. You could for instance, wave the blanket in such a way that the child trying to rescue the other is scared back, or you could swallow them up in the blanket as well. There are lots of ways something like this can happen within this poem, you know your students best and can react as you see the learning opportunities arise - encourage other staff to do the same.

We have kindly been given permission to use an excerpt from [The Terrible Things: An allegory of the Holocaust, by Eve Bunting](#). If you feel it is age appropriate you might like to look at this as well with your students to add further insight to this work.

If you want to study this poem over the course of a lesson, a possible teaching sequence has been set out for you below. However it is likely that you will want to return to this poem little and often as you study related subjects if you are doing this you may want to borrow aspects of the lesson plan to support your student's learning. If you want to use this poem for a school performance a possible way of doing this has also been set out below.

We hope you enjoy sharing this with your students and find it meaningful for all.

You may choose to cue students into this lesson by lighting a candle.

**Niemoller's First They Came**

**Learning objectives:** - to gain insight into the meaning behind Niemoller's poem,  
- to speak up and speak out in our own ways.

Introduction	Participation	Task	Plenary
<p>Share the poem and sensory experiences with your students.</p> <p>Allow students time to react to the experiences.</p>	<p>Take part in performing the poem as a movement.</p> <p>Allow students time to react to their experiences of the movement.</p>	<p>Make tags (See tag making instructions below) to represent the different groups mentioned in Niemoller's poem. Find out information about the different groups.</p> <p>Review reactions to the poem and build on that learning. You may like to use symbols representing emotions to help students communicate about how they felt during the poem.</p> <p>Extension – Hear Eve Bunting's The Terrible Things and identify similarities with Niemoller's poem. Can you think of times in your life when people didn't help?</p> <p>Can you think of times when you had an opportunity to speak up and speak out? Did you do it?</p>	<p>This poem is sad, it speaks about alienation; make sure to draw a contrast between the message of the poem and the message of your setting.</p> <p>No one in the poem speaks out. Support students in speaking out and speaking up in their own way. Celebrate the diverse range of ways we have for doing this.</p> <p>'If something bad was happening what would you do?' Students can respond by saying/signing/communicating 'Stop' or 'No' or similar sentiments in their own words.</p> <p>Share the poem together.</p>
<p><b>Safety:</b> When taking students away covered in the blanket be sure that their breathing is not inhibited.</p>			

Examples	P1-3	P4-6	P7-8
<p>of what learning might look like:</p>	<p>Pupils encounter experiences related to Niemoller's poem.</p> <p>Pupils cooperate in shared exploration, eg accepting help to bang a drum.</p> <p>Pupils observe the result of blowing out the candle with interest, eg by continuing to focus on the wick once the flame has gone.</p>	<p>Pupils show they understand 'No'.</p> <p>Pupils respond to new experiences presented to them through the poem.</p> <p>Pupils show concern for others, eg by reacting when other pupils are taken away in the blanket.</p>	<p>Pupils communicate about their life experiences in simple phrases, e.g. talking about a time when they have spoken up and spoken out.</p> <p>Pupils are able to repeat the poem in their own way, through actions or words, they are able to reflect on how they feel in response to the poem.</p>

## Suggested structure for an assembly

Choose a student, or a group of students to be the narrators.

You may find the poem more powerful if it is narrated in a variety of communication methods.

Narrators read the poem slowly.

You may wish to project the PowerPoint for people to read as the poem is read out.

Choose students (or staff) to be in charge of the sensory experiences accompanying the poem. There are prompts for when to deliver these experiences within the PowerPoint.

Choose a member of staff, or a student, or small group of students, to control the black fabric. These people could dress in black.

Begin with a group of students at the front of the stage, wearing clearly visible tags.

It might be possible to perform this as a whole school, with each class choosing a tag, and instead of being moved away they could hold up a piece of black card in front of their faces to show that they had been swallowed by the darkness.

As the narrators read, the sensory experiences are delivered and the black fabric takes away each group of students one by one, until only one remains. This sole remaining student will communicate the final line of the poem on their own, before being swept away.

Students can then return to the stage, for a bow and a pause for applause.

Contrast the poem with our experience of life today. Show how we are friends with people who are different to us. Show how we can speak up and speak out when we see things that are wrong happening. Celebrate!

Celebrate by sharing each classes work on the Paralympics.

Explain that the students have made a pledge to make sure that something so bad never happens again. Share the pledge with everyone. If you have done the pledge lesson and taken photos you can tell everyone where they can see these pictures, or you could share them on a PowerPoint and then invite the audience to make the pledge for themselves.

Give your students a big 'well done' for speaking up and speaking out, they have done something truly valuable and taken a step to ensuring a safer better future for everyone. Thank you!

## Tag making instructions

The tags will be equilateral triangles pointing downwards like so, to echo the badges used by the Nazis to label prisoners in the concentration camps.



Create badges to wear when performing the poem. You could make small ones to use in class, or large A4 sized ones which could hang as pendants around the student's necks for performance in front of a wider audience.

We have outlined two options for making these badges, it is intended that these be thought of as either end of a scale, you and your students may choose to tend to one end or the other, or blend the two versions as appropriate.

### **Sensory Badges**

Provide materials that can be sorted by colour and texture. Collage badges according to themes, e.g. red for communist, yellow for Jew. You may want to add in other sensory stimuli as you see fit, you could add scent references to badges by using a dab of essential oils, or add an auditory cue by having materials that rustle or jangle.

The end product that you are aiming for is five distinct badges that students can discern as different. They can then select which badge they want based on the sensory cues the badges provide.

Each student could make their own 'me' badge with all their favourite sensory materials on.

### **Studied Badges**

Learn a little bit about each of the groups of people. Have students select colours according to what they have found out, eg by looking at pictures of communist rallies selecting the colour red for the badge representing communists.

You may also choose to have associated smells or sounds, perhaps a drum beat for the Trade Unionists to symbolise marching in protest.

The end product you are aiming for is five distinct badges that each inform the viewer about a different group of people. The students can then select the badge they want to wear based on which group they think they'd be in, or can just wear the badge selected for them knowing who they are representing by wearing it.

Students can each make their own 'me' badge adding to it things of significance to them, these could be words that describe them or drawings or small swatches of things related to them – eg a little bit of school uniform fabric, or a lock of a loved ones hair.

If you perform the poem several times then students can take it in turns playing the role of 'me' and experiencing what it is like to be the only one left.

As an extension task you could ask students to make badges to distinguish them from each other according to groups they currently belong to, you might have badges for students who attend a particular respite centre, or badges for students who go to a particular after school club, or for students with particular physical features – eg blonde hair. You could talk about when it is good to label people and when it is bad. We like it when we get a label we are proud of: like a sticker at sports day, but we dislike it when we are not seen as individuals but are called by a group name in an unkind way – students may have had personal experience of this.