



Speak Up, Speak Out

Cross curricular

Aim:

To use poetry to explore what people should do to help those who are discriminated against or persecuted.

Outcomes:

- pupils should understand how poetry can highlight social issues
- pupils should recognise how persecution can escalate
- pupils reflect on what they can do to highlight persecution.

Resources:

- [the Pastor Niemoller poem 'First they came for...'](#)

Stage 1

Show the poem on the board at the front of the class.

Ask some of the pupils to read out the poem. Do they understand what it means?

Next to the original poem put up the following:

First they came for the children with black hair

But I did not speak out as I did not have black hair

Then they came for the children with blue eyes

But I did not speak out because I did not have blue eyes

Then they came for the children who are left handed

But I did not speak out because I am not left handed



Then they came for me

And there was no-one left to speak out for me.

Ask them what they think that poem means. How does it make them feel?

Create a word board of the feelings that the poem gives them. For example, sad, lonely, angry.

Stage 2

Explain to them the origin of the first poem and who it refers to.

This is the information that you might need:

It was written by a man called Pastor Martin Niemoller a German religious leader. He lived in Germany when the Nazis first came to power in the 1930s.

Have you heard of the Nazis?

The Nazis were a group of people who were elected to government in 1933 in Germany. Their leader was Adolf Hitler. He made strict laws about the way people were allowed to live..

Germany had suffered very badly in the economic crisis that had affected many countries in the 1920s. Many people were out of work and did not have a lot of money. When the Nazis first came to power they promised to make the economy better and to make more jobs.

The Nazis chose to blame a few groups of people in German society for the economic problems and then it began to restrict those groups rights. The Nazis picked on political groups, banning their right to exist and arresting and imprisoning people who belonged to those groups – even if they hadn't done anything wrong. They also began to blame religious groups – German Jews had their rights taken away and so did other groups categorised as 'unGerman' even if they and their families had lived in Germany all their lives. The Nazis also picked on people with disabilities, or who were ill for other reasons.

Niemoller like many thought at first that the arrival of the Nazis and Adolf Hitler would benefit Germany. By 1936 with all the restrictions they introduced he began to oppose them. He disagreed with the Nazis aims to Nazify the Protestant Church (make it obedient to the Nazi Party rather than be an independent voice) and wrote a letter, publically saying so.

In 1938 Niemoller was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He lived in terrible conditions there and witnessed the terrible treatment of others. The other people in the concentration camp had done nothing wrong, but had different views, lifestyles or religions. Some of the people were even put in the

camp for speaking out against the Nazis, and what they were doing to people. The people living in the concentration camps were imprisoned, beaten, tortured and executed or worked to death. He remained in Nazi concentration camps until he was liberated in 1945 by the American army.

When he was released he spoke publically about how he had been wrong to support the Nazis when they first came to power. He also spoke about how he was wrong to have allowed groups to have their rights taken away and to be persecuted in his own country whilst he did nothing. The Holocaust and the Nazi persecution of others led to millions being killed across Europe between 1933 and 1945.

Now that they know what the poem means and its origins do they have any other feelings for the word board?

Explain that the poem is valuable, because it teaches us two important lessons. One of the important lessons is that it's not fair for people to have their rights taken away. But it's mainly important that if this happens, you shouldn't wait to speak out until the victim is yourself.

Either in groups or as a whole class ask the pupils who the people could be that are being discriminated against today – who should they speak out for today?

Stage3

Using the format of the poem ask the pupils to write their own poem or short paragraph outlining why people should speak out for others when they are being persecuted or threatened. They can use the words from the word board to help.