

In today's pressured world, it's vital young people are given the space to explore issues most affecting them, away from any pre-conceived adult agendas. **Sue Lyle** presents a series of activities to facilitate such a discussion and develop students' questioning and critical thinking skills along the way.

# Violence and prejudice

Giving young people the skills to think independently

In a recent book, Melissa Benn asked the question, 'What should we tell our daughters?'. Drawing on her clear and extensively researched arguments, I decided to develop a set of activities aimed at 11- to 18-year-olds in secondary education.

The activities featured here are intended to help teachers and young people explore pressures on young people today. They are designed to facilitate young people's voices and give them a chance to explore issues that impact on their lives without any pre-conceived adult agendas. They are based on the belief that young people are competent informants on their own worlds and the best arbiters of their own experience, and are therefore designed to help them express their views.

Piloting the activities with a range of teachers from primary and secondary schools, some teachers thought the activities were important for children as young as nine. That decision will be best left to individual teachers and schools.

The key argument is that young people need the opportunity to consider the pressures on them today and discuss them with each other.



## Getting started – what pressures do your students face?

The pilot group of teachers were asked to brainstorm what pressures they thought young people, and in particular young women, faced today. They identified the exact issues that Melissa Benn identified in her book and include:

- 'girlification'
- sexualisation and pornographication of society
- the pressure to achieve highly
- class differences
- search for perfect body
- dieting
- self-harm
- violence against girls and women
- economic realities for women.

These are just some of the issues that can be explored through the activities featured in the following pages. The activities can be used in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) but can also be used in other curriculum areas, for example English, Religious Education or sociology, as well as in non-formal settings like youth forums.

The activities are intended to promote discussion of values and promote principles of respect between young people and active participation. Facilitation of this kind is necessary if young people are going to get the opportunity to talk about the issues that are pertinent to themselves and others who share young people's spaces in our globalised world.



## Finding interesting talking points

To complete the activities, teachers will need to select a topic (or a number of topics) from the list above and source a range of printed images reflecting the issue.

Depending on their social, cultural, economic and historical circumstances, young people experience different 'realities'. They live in different environments, have access to different amounts of wealth, live in different kinds of families, some come from minority ethnic groups and some have disabilities – all of these factors will impact on how they respond to the photographs. Young people will have different sexualities and different religious beliefs that will also impact on their thinking. This diversity is why I have decided to leave it up to teachers to choose the images they think will best facilitate the activities for the young people they work with.

Google Images is generally a good place to start. Key search terms include:

- 'Girls and pink toys' – for use when discussing 'girlification' (even just searching 'girls' toys' brings up a tsunami of pink and sparkles).
- 'Sexualisation' or 'sexualisation of children' – will bring up pictures where young children have been dressed to look like teenagers or posed provocatively.
- 'Lads' mags' – will fill your screen with images of women in various states of undress and all sorts of provocative poses. These will help illustrate current issues surrounding objectification of women in magazines aimed at teenage boys.
- 'Sex sells', 'objectification of women', 'sexist adverts' – will bring up similar images, among which you'll find many legitimate adverts and promotional

### Knowledge trails

#### 1) Developing curious minds

– Steve Williams suggests strategies for developing students' questioning skills.  
[library.teachingtimes.com/articles/developing-curious-minds](http://library.teachingtimes.com/articles/developing-curious-minds)

#### 2) A question of creativity

– Alan Peat describes the kinds of questions that teachers can use to foster creative thinking during class discussion.  
<http://library.teachingtimes.com/articles/creativity-ttc5>

#### 3) Thinking with our emotions

– James Park argues that only classroom dialogue can achieve the aims of PSHE.  
[library.teachingtimes.com/articles/thinkingwithouremotions](http://library.teachingtimes.com/articles/thinkingwithouremotions)

campaigns that take objectification and sexism to the extreme.

- 'Sexting' – lots of screenshots of text conversations show up with this search term.
- 'Slutting' or 'slut' – will display images of women (often famous women) society deems 'slutty'.
- 'Slut shaming' and 'victim blaming' – will bring up images of women's protests and marches surrounding the issue, plus some memes and screenshots of tweets/status updates perpetrating the problem.
- 'Violence against girls' or 'violence against women' – shows campaign posters and photos taken to highlight the issue. ('Violence against men' might also bring up some interesting images).
- 'Women should' – typing this into Google Images brings up an interesting photo campaign depicting popular searches beginning with 'Women should...', 'Women shouldn't...', 'Women cannot...' etc. Most are derogatory.
- 'High achieving girls' or 'high achieving women' – the former shows girls receiving good grades, girls in graduating robes and caps, girls taking part in projects and so on, while the latter generally brings up images of professional women.
- 'Gender' – lots of cartoons here, most commenting on sexist stereotypes and transgender issues.
- 'Anorexia', 'self-harm', 'dieting', 'body dysmorphia', 'perfect body shape', 'insecurity' etc. – all bring up many images to choose from relating to these topics.
- 'Sexism against men/women', 'misandry', 'misogyny', 'male/female stereotypes' – will display interesting images, cartoons and memes to do with sexism towards men and women.
- 'Young people/teens/children' in conjunction with 'poor', 'disadvantaged', 'homeless', 'no jobs', 'streets' etc. – brings up images of teenagers out on the streets, drinking, vandalism, teen mothers, young people queuing at job centres, poor living conditions etc.

I suggest a minimum of 15 pictures for a class of 30.

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## Activity 1: Making connections

**Purpose:** To introduce the photographs to the group. To encourage them to listen to each other's ideas and make connections between them.

**Resources:** A set of photographs downloaded and printed from the internet, each one mounted in the centre of A3 paper to allow mark making on the sheet around it in response to the pictures.

#### Procedure:

Put mounted pictures on display. Ask the young people to look at the pictures and pick one that they find interesting or puzzling. They can indicate their interest by making a mark on the mounting sheet.

Ask the young people to stand together around the picture they have chosen and share their reasons for choosing it.

Afterwards, ask them to give an overview of their discussions to the rest of the class. What similarities and differences did they identify in their thinking?

## Activity 2: Asking questions

**Purpose:** To get the young people used to asking questions about the photographs. To help them see that some question stems are more fruitful than others in generating discussion of ideas and concepts.

**Resources:** Enough photographs to have one per group of three in the class. A set of question words, e.g. what, where, when, why, how, who, could, should, would, is, can, does, if.

**Procedure:**

Give out one photograph at random to each group of three. Give each group three of the question words (these can be printed out to give them). Ask each group to come up with at least one question about their photograph for each of the question stems they have been given.

Ask each group to show their picture to the group and read out one of their questions. Ask the class to identify what type of question it is. Closed? Open? Thinking?

- A closed question will have one right answer that may be answered from the picture or might need some research.
- An open question is speculative or hypothetical – it requires imagination to try and answer it. Such questions reveal the students' assumptions about the images.
- Thinking questions invite the exploration of concepts, in particular with the use of 'should', which indicate a moral concept. These are particularly important when looking at issues depicted in the photographs.

Ask them which question stems have produced the most interesting questions? Discuss.

Back in their groups, ask them to try and formulate a 'should' question for their picture. Ask them to read them aloud. Point out that most 'should' questions imply a moral question – emphasise that the issues raised by the photographs have ethical implications.

## Activity 3: Most like/least like a child

**Purpose:** To explore young people's ideas of what it means to be a child using the photographs.

**Resources:** Set of images depicting children and young people.

**Procedure:**

Stage 1: Young people work in pairs to consider the following questions as a warm-up for the main activity:

1. How old are you?
2. How old will you be when you are an adult?
3. What does it mean to be an adult?

Ask children to feedback their answers to the last two, to see the variety of opinions.

Stage 2: Make sure there are enough photographs to allow children to work in pairs.

Allocate each pair a random picture.

Set up a concept line using a skipping rope – one end represents 'Most like a child', the other end, 'Least like a child'.

Ask each pair to decide where to place their picture on the rope. Children then work as a whole class to negotiate a rank order for all the pictures according to where they are between 'Most like a child' and 'Least like a child'. Ask them to justify the position in which they place their picture and be prepared to change their minds as they listen to the reasons given by their peers. Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers, but they must be able to support their views with reasons.

## Activity 4: Matching

**Purpose:** To consider some current research on the position of young people today.

**Resources:** Set of cards with research findings printed on (see below). Use one bullet point for each card.

**Procedure:**

Young people work in groups of two or three. Give each group a set of research information and ask them to decide on which pictures to place the information. Do they all put the same cards on the same pictures? (There are no right answers). They should justify where they have put the pictures.

Having placed the research information with the pictures, ask the young people to work in groups of four or five and pick one picture and the research information to look at. Ask them to consider what they think the implications of the research information are for young people today.

You may not wish to use all the research cards – select to suit your purpose.

**Research information for cards:**

- By 2015, more than half of youngsters in the UK will be in homes with incomes less than the minimum necessary for a decent standard of living.
- The average salary for all full-time employees in the UK is £25,900, but men earn £28,091 compared to £22,490 for women – 19.9 per cent difference.
- 64 per cent of the lowest paid workers are female.
- Half of all women over 50 in the UK work part-time and the majority earn less than £10,000.
- February 2012: Women’s employment down 18 per cent since the recession compared with one per cent for men – that’s over one million more women in work.
- The pornography industry is worth £63 billion a year, more than the combined revenue of Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Yahoo! eBay, Apple, Netflix and EarthLink.
- “Girls as young as ten feel under pressure to have a perfect body.”
- Ten per cent of girls have a really serious eating disorder.
- 80,000 women are raped and 400,000 sexually assaulted every year in the UK.
- One in three women will be hit by a partner.
- One in three girls say they have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school.
- 28 per cent of 16- to 18-year-olds are sent sexual pictures on phones a few times a month or more.
- Sexual crimes are taking place against girls from every kind of background and social class – the problem is rising.
- Pornography’s representation of girls is prescribing desires for boys and influencing how girls see themselves and what they do with their bodies.
- 25 per cent of girls and 18 per cent of boys reported some form of physical violence from a partner.
- One in nine girls and four per cent of boys had experienced severe physical force from a partner.
- 31 per cent of girls and 16 per cent of boys report some form of sexual violence from a partner.
- 75 per cent of girls reported emotional violence from a partner.
- 35 per cent of girls’ partners said negative things about their appearance, body, friends and family.
- 12 per cent of girls and four per cent of boys said their partners had used mobile phones or the internet to humiliate and threaten them.
- 33 per cent of girls and 13 per cent of boys had partners who controlled who they could see or where they could go.



## Activity 5: Generating questions

**Purpose:** For young people to generate their own questions about a specific photograph.

**Resources:** Display all the photographs – make sure they are numbered.

### Procedure:

Stage 1: Ask the young people to view the photos individually and take a note of the number of one picture they would like to ask more questions about.

Find out if anyone has chosen the same picture and put them together in pairs. Pair up the rest of the young people and ask them to discuss their choice of picture and say why they want to generate more questions about the picture. Ask them to choose just one picture between them. (They could decide to use a different picture if they wish).

Stage 2: Join pairs together to form groups of four. Ask them to discuss their chosen pictures and again decide on one picture they would like to spend time discussing.

Allow each group to collect their picture (be prepared that some groups may have chosen the same picture and you may need a second copy). They should write a title for the picture in the middle of their sheet. Ask them to brainstorm as many questions as they can around the picture.

Stage 3: Classification of questions. Pass the pictures and sets of questions on to the next group in a clockwise direction. Ask the new group to look at the picture and questions generated and classify the questions. Are they:

- Closed questions – with one right answer that can be researched.
- Open questions – which could have a range of answers.
- Thinking questions – questions which are about concepts (e.g. justice – for example, Is it fair for ... to...?) or a moral issue (Should...?)

Ask them to put a tick by closed questions, a smiley face by open questions, and a smiley face with a question mark above next to thinking questions.

Discuss the questions. Ask the groups to report on the thinking questions (assuming they have some). What makes these thinking questions?

Stage 4: Concentric circles. To test out the quality of the 'thinking questions', ask students to form two circles – an inner circle and an outer circle. Ask the inner circle to turn round to face someone in the outer circle (if numbers aren't even, you may need one group of 3).

Taking each of the young people's 'thinking questions' in turn, and making sure the children can see the picture that each question relates to (these can be displayed on the whiteboard), read them aloud and give them one to two minutes to try and answer the question in their pairs. Call 'stop!' and ask the inner circle and the outer circle to move one person to the left. They will now have new partners. Read out the next 'thinking question' and give them another one to two minutes to discuss. Repeat until at least one 'thinking question' from each group has been discussed.

Stage 5: Community of enquiry. Write each of the questions the students have discussed on a sheet of A4 and place them so everyone can see them.

Read all the questions in turn once. Then explain to the young people that they are going to vote for one question they would like to discuss as a whole group. This should be a secret ballot. Ask them to close their eyes. Read each question aloud and ask for votes.

When a question has been chosen, conduct a community of enquiry with the class. The Philosophy for Children approach works most effectively.