

“Indonesia!”

“Greece!”

“Macau!” (where?)

This is a third year class finding out where their clothes have been made. (Group Discussion – tick) They then tell me about the conditions for textile workers in many countries, and this somehow develops into an impassioned case being made by one student for the “vendies” to stock Fair Trade chocolate. (Individual talk – tick) We discuss how this could be achieved – maybe by writing a letter which others could sign. (Functional Writing?)

It’s unusual to cover so many areas in ten minutes, but it’s not difficult to incorporate Global Citizenship into the English classroom. The courses have no set texts or topics, only skills. English is a global language, and it’s easy to find literature from other cultures which can lead onto exploration of many areas of citizenship. Our S3 in St Aidan’s High School have recently been studying the AQA anthology “Poetry from Other Cultures” and have responded well to the poem “Blessing” which deals with the issue of water in a developing country:

*Imagine the drip of it,
the small splash, echo
in a tin mug,
the voice of a kindly god.*

We can promote reading skills using the many excellent resources available online and from organisations such as Oxfam. Research allows students to own the message, giving them a real life reason to communicate. They often come to class telling us that “I told my da all about it” – a real achievement with teenagers. There are many innovative materials available which take an interactive approach to group tasks, encouraging students to work out their own solutions – we recently used “The Great Escape”, an excellent game from Amnesty which heightens awareness of the problems faced by refugees: <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/education/index.shtml>.

This sort of approach fits in well to other school priorities, such as our development of cooperative learning techniques.

It’s a fallacy that today’s young people don’t care about anything - they have a strong sense of fairness and justice, and we have a duty to help them to see how they can act on their ideals. The English classroom will always be a place where we can promote justice and equality: after all, “a man’s a man for a’ that”.

Fiona McGrogan
PT English
St Aidan’s High School
Wishaw

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