

Notes for Teachers: Overview of themes and concepts

Context in which the film is set: Los Angeles 1992

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Los_Angeles_riots#Underlying_causes

<http://archives.cnn.com/2002/US/04/28/la.riot.anniversary/index.html>

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0429/p01s07-ussc.html>

LA'S Darkest Days has accessible personal accounts and recollections of the riots by those who were there which will engage students

- 29th April 1992. 3 police officers acquitted from charges of excessive violence used in the arrest of Rodney King, an African American with previous convictions. Only 1 officer was charged.
- There was wide media coverage of the case. Shortly after the announcement, banners were held up near the police station 'No Justice, No Peace'. Riots began in the city and reprisals against other communities were fast, with an attack an hour later, on a white lorry driver. Attacks, shootings and killings took place over the next 3 days and schools and major institutions were closed.
- The toll from civil unrest and riots was high, with 53 deaths, 25000 injured and 12000 arrests. The damage caused in those 4 days cost \$1 billion
- In **LA'S Darkest Days**, Professor Edward Chang from the University of California says, ' We began to examine whether or not multiculturalism is a myth. The riots showed that perhaps white, black, Asian, and Hispanic are still all-too-separate, unequal societies.'

Social and economic background- characterised by recession and high unemployment

- A divided city; ghettos of communities living in areas apart, mainly trusting those like them, who belonged together and distrusting those different from them.
- **Film** begins with pictures of riots, acknowledging the separation of groups into Latino, Asian, Black African American, Vietnamese, Korean, Caucasian, and is narrated through extracts from **Eva's** journal.
- Eva, is a Latino girl who recalls understanding '**war**' for the first time, on the day she was due to start Elementary school. Her father was shot down by a white policeman, accused of a crime he did not commit and was taken to prison, despite being innocent. This triggered her hatred of whites.
- Hostilities in the communities are brought into **Wilson High School**, where a system of **voluntary integration** has been enforced by the LA government.

Teacher Expectations and Attitudes

- Teachers who have given their life to the school, regard this enforced voluntary integration (multiculturalism) with scepticism and the mixed students from all races, who frequently arrive with low grades,, as 'unteachable'. They are not optimistic about the future of these disaffected students, This has implications for

both how the students are regarded ' they will come to nothing' and their **access** to book and other resources.

- The teachers also **blame** the new intake for the drop in **standards** that affect the once excellent reputation and results of Wilson High. Reading Lessons and Scores are Low
- They have **very low expectations** of ethnic students, except for **Ms Erin Gruwell** a new student teacher, who is assigned to the Junior High class.
- For Erin Gruwell ,the **fight to change** the racial tensions, gang fights and hatred between groups, needs to be **in the classroom**. She is out of her depth at first when fights break out in the class, and she finds that the students have 3 things in common-they hate school, teachers, and each other. She is determined to change things and finally does when she listens to and engages her students, adapting the curriculum to meet their needs

Turning Points

- The day the drawing by **Tito** a Latino student, is passed around the snickering class. It was a gross caricature of a fellow African American student depicting him with overlarge lips. Horrified she challenges the students and asks Tito how he would feel if it was a drawing of him. '*It ain't*' was his quick reply. The drawing reminds her of the extreme **Nazi propoganda** of the caricatures of the Jews during the Holocaust with huge noses by the 'biggest gang in history' who gave their own pride by wiping out those who were different.
- **Respect uncovered**
- **The Line**
- **Books and Field Trips**
With renewed inspiration, takes two other jobs to subsidise her teaching to pay for books and field trips for her students.
 - Night by Elie Wiesel
 - The Diary of Anne Frank
 - Zlata's diary
 - The Colour Purple
 - Other books
- The students are not enthusiastic about reading until they discover that in these books people have lives and experiences similar to their own

Respect uncovered

- '**Respect**' is a constant theme that emerges. The students reveal that life in Long Beach depends on what you look like. If you are Black, Latino or Asian you can get 'blasted as soon as you walk out of your door'. Lives are lost because the different communities will fight each other for respect. Straying over the boundaries of another community's territory is disrespectful, an aggressive demand for something that is not earned. It can lead to gang fights and death. 'At least if you die for your own, you get respect'

Student Voice: Everyone has their own story

- Erin tells them everyone has their own story and it is important to tell their story, even to yourself. She inspires them to write their journals and gives them a number to retain anonymity, and promises not to grade them or read them unless they give permission

- They get inspired and motivated and call themselves **Freedom Writers** after the Civil Rights Leaders
- **Toast for Change**
- **Visiting speakers**
- **Heroes**
- **Being Different, Belonging Together - building community cohesion**
- She wants to teach her students not to judge each other on the basis of race, but to see beyond the colour and the tribe to the person who is there. She wants to help them to discover that despite differences, they belong together and have what it takes, to face the challenges that surround them.
- Community and a sense of belonging together is engendered in these once disaffected students. Gruwell inspires them, so much that they suggest activities to raise funds so that Miep Gies, the Dutch woman who sheltered Anne Franks Family and Zlata Filipovic can be visiting speakers.

The film is organised around the following themes:

- **Borders** relates to neighbourhood and turf boundaries and gang warfare
- **You don't know me** initial gulf between students and teacher backgrounds – giving and earning respect
- **The Line** teaching method to elicit questions from student's experience this begins the process of change, sharing and learning together
- **War stories - Holocaust** fom student's perspective – turf/gangs and history of the Miep Gies and other visiting speakers
- **Permission** Contracts relating to reading of journals
- **Tolerance** found inside ourselves for the other despite differences
- **Home** clips of home lives of students and Room 2003 class as home
- **The Diary** of Anne Frank and Zlata as an inspiration to writing their own
- **Heroes** wonderful scene with Miep Gies, who tells them that they are the heroes
- **Courage** **Eva in the witness box.** Should you always protect your own, no matter what the cost? Clashing voices – from her background and her new found realization of the truth. **PSHE /Cz/SEAL teachers may want to use Conscience Corridor as an activity to explore courage**
- **Who would you pick?** - her husband or her students? Erin is in for a surprise – she has become so involved with her students which her husband finds 'noble'
- **Blessed with a burden** - her father admires her work with her class and the results she achieves
- **Our Own Voices** - Students write their own diaries using ICT on computers given by a donor businessman. Erin gives entries **numbers**, not names to protect their identify and the issues they share
- Results in a publication called **The Freedom Writers Diary- with Erin Gruwell**
How a teacher and 150 teens used writing to change themselves and the world around them – the **product on which the film is based see extracts**

Has led to the Freedom Writers Foundation see www.freedomwritersfoundation.org

Teaching Suggestions

Links can be made with curriculum subjects and those below are not exhaustive. Teachers can explore links to their own specialisms as well as the cross curricular links of the new secondary curriculum.

Art and Design KS3 Y7 unit 7a (Self Image) helps students to explore and discuss concepts related to identify, look at a range of self portraits in art and to visually portray their uniqueness . (see http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes2/secondary_art/art07a/07aq2?view=get

See **Culture Box** activity that asked students to create a capsule that would contain objects to represent themselves and their culture. Pupils began by collecting objects that

- represented themselves
- told a story about them
- showed who they are and where they come from

http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_7941.aspx

Another idea is to

- Make a memory wall using textiles, paint and ceramics to portray experiences of people in the class, related to a growing sense of personal identity
- Display

KS3 Y9

History: How and Why did the Holocaust Happen?

http://www.qca.org.uk/history/innovating/key3/planning/case_studies/case01/example2.htm

Students could do some intensive project work as suggested for a case study on the Holocaust linking the following to the themes in **Freedom Writers** and what the students there discovered

- The Nazi Persecution of the Jews
- Ghetto Life
- Anne Frank - the experiences of Holocaust victims and survivors
- The Final Solution
- The Legacy of the Holocaust and its continuing impact on the wider world

In the classroom, teachers may like to help pupils to explore the Holocaust and experience of genocide in age appropriate ways giving pupils opportunities to look at the way traumatic experiences are expressed, through art, poetry, quotes and stories of survivors. They may want to enable pupils to portray the experience in creative and visual ways using drama, dance and music, to express, what is often unspeakable.

Key Qs': Why did being different lead to the Nazi persecution of the Jews, Roma Gypsies, the disabled, the mentally insane, blacks and others?

ICT research:

Find a hero or heroine from the Holocaust who had the courage to stand up and see that despite differences, human beings belong together.

Examples with **some** website suggestions – students and teachers could find others for characters here or any other hero of their choice

- o Hannah Sennesh
- o Janusz Korczak
- o Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- o Raoul Wallenberg
- o Corrie Ten-Boom

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERsenesh.htm> Some very accessible material for pupils to encounter the life of Hannah Senesh

<http://www.ou.org/about/judaism/rabbis/senesh.htm> this site is also very accessible and provides brief but excellent background to Hannah Senesh

<http://www.hannahsenesh.org.il/>

<http://www.wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=1376> biography of her life

<http://www.geocities.com/Broadway/Stage/3619/hannah.html>

http://english.gfh.org.il/korczak_learning_center.htm Useful site with brief introduction to Hannah Senesh life and poetry

<http://www.raoul-wallenberg.org.ar/english/Wallenberg%27s%20Fate.htm?did=129>

<http://www.auschwitz.dk/Wallenberg.htm> Moving site dedicated to this man of courage

<http://www.raoul-wallenberg.org.ar/english/wallening.htm> Biography of Wallenberg accessible to teachers and secondary students at KS4

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/wallenberg.html>

QCA Personal Wellbeing KS3 and KS4 is very relevant to the theme 'Being Different and Belonging Together'

Link to QCA

- o **1.1 Personal Identities** 1.1a understanding that identity is affected by a range of factors including a positive sense of self
- o **1.4. Relationships a, b,c –**
- o **a)** relationships affect all we do and we need to learn and practice relationship skills
- o **b)** Understanding that people have multiple roles and responsibilities in society and that making positive relationships and contributing to groups, teams and communities is important.

- c) Understanding that relationships can cause strong [feelings and emotions](#)
- **1.5 Diversity 1.5a;1.5b**
- **1.5a** Appreciating that, in our communities, there are similarities as well as differences between people of different race, religion, culture, ability or disability, gender, age or sexual orientation.
- **1.5b** Understanding that all forms of prejudice and discrimination must be challenged at every level in our lives

KS4

Especially 1.1a; 1.1c; 1.4a,b,c; 1.5 a,b,

Freedom Writers offers pupils curriculum opportunities in personal wellbeing that include

1. using [case studies, simulations, scenarios and drama](#) to explore personal and social issues and have time to reflect on them in relation to their own lives and behaviour
2. take part in individual and group discussion to consider personal, [social and moral dilemmas](#) and the choices and decisions relating to them

Teaching Method: Conscience Corridor

This could be used by students being asked the question about Eva Benita on Courage. Eva could be rehearsing what she is going to say in the Courtroom Scene

Is she going to do what her father, family and community have told her? To protect your own kind, or

Is she going to tell the truth, risk her own standing in her community and stop an innocent person from going to jail?

Exploring Personal and Social Issues through the use of Conscience Corridor

Process A) and B)

A) Get two students to be one to be Eva Benita and 1 to be her father

- Ask the other students to form two lines opposite each other.
- Their role is to act as
- **Eva's conscience**
- **her father's honour** (for dramatic licence he is out of prison for a week)
- The voices on each side of conscience corridor express what is going through Eva and her fathers heads. Some voices will be telling her to honour her family and community and others may be telling her to have courage and to do something different.

- Others will be telling her father what he wants to hear and others may give him a different perspective

Eva and her Father are invited to **tell their own stories** before travelling down **conscience corridor**. They express what they are wrestling with and take no more than **2 minutes** each to tell the assembled group or conscience what the problem is for them

- They then walk down the corridor and each person leans forward as they pass through to **give a word in their ear of advice**.

Eva and her father are then **invited (2 mins)** to express what they have wrestled with and what decisions they are going to take to the assembled group as a result of their walk through the corridor. Issues are identified and shared and the social and personal dilemmas each of them faced, are highlighted.

B) Get the students to do the same thing differently and relate it to the theme of 'Being Different, Belonging Together'. They could choose another two characters from the film. The conscience now acts to prompt participants what being different and belonging together means and could be linked to the theme in the film 'Toast for Change'

Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning

The **SEAL Anti-bullying** resource for **KS3** for pupils in **Y7-9** is organised around **3** themes

- Individuals; resilience and bullying;
- groups bullying;
- prejudice driven bullying

There are a number of **Learning Objectives** in SEAL that relate to 'Being Different, Belonging Together' and can be found on **Pages 11-13** of the SEAL Resource

There are particular activities that relate well to this Years Anti-Bullying theme of '**Being Different, Belongin Together**' as well as activities that can be linked to themes in **Freedom Writers** such as the work on **Respect**. Some suggestions are given below, and teachers will find others that suit their purposes

Being Different,

Theme 1:	Learning Opportunity 2: Me Myself and I	(MM1)
	Learning Opportunity 3. Celebrations	(C))
Theme 2:	Learning Opportunity 4. Friends or Enemies	(FE)
	Learning Opportunity 6. Better when we're together	(BWWT)
Theme 3;	Learning Opportunity 8 Respect Yourself	(RY)
	Learning Opportunity 9 Then they came for me	(TTCFM)

Learning Opportunities in Theme 3 link very well to the themes in Freedom Writers such as Respect and The Holocaust

Learning Objectives in SEAL are numbered – the nos below correspond to the nos in the resource. LO's are clearly identified and related to the three themes and the activities in the themes

1. I know that I am a unique individual, and I can think about myself on many different levels (e.g. physical characteristics, personality, attainments, attitudes, value, etc).
- 2.. I can identify my strengths and feel positive about them.
- 5). I can identify what is important for me and what I expect from myself, taking into account the beliefs and expectations that others (e.g. friends, family, school staff) have of me.
36. I understand the impact of bullying, prejudice and discrimination on all those involved, am moved to want to make things better for them and can use appropriate strategies to do so.

Theme 1 (MM1)

Starter 1 on Page 17 of SEAL gives scope for pupils to explore being different and what makes up aspects of their identity, followed by

Starter 2

- o Activity 2 p 17 which identifies their interests and hobbies
- o Activity 5 p18 which explores their names and heritage
- o Activity 6 p 18 which examines prejudice and stereotyping

The aim of the Plenary, p19 is to get pupils to reflect on how stereotyping and prejudice can limit engagement with people from different cultures and backgrounds and affect perceptions of 'being different'

Theme 1 Learning Opportunity 3 (C)

- o Activity 1: Page 20 – group work to plan a celebration event that focuses on their unique attributes and strengths
- o Activity 2: Paired work to plan a celebration event for each other

Belonging Together

Learning Objectives

33. I can see the world from other people's points of view, can feel the same emotion as they are feeling and take account of their intentions, preferences and beliefs.
36. I understand the impact of bullying, prejudice and discrimination on all those involved, am moved to want to make things better for them can use appropriate strategies to do so.
43. I can work and learn well in groups, taking on different roles, cooperating with others to achieve a joint outcome.
44. I understand my rights and responsibilities as an individual who belongs to many different social groups, such as my friendship group, school class, school, family and community.

Go to this website to download the SEAL resource for the Themes and Lessons suggested.

http://www.bandapilot.org.uk/secondary/pages/curr_res_anti_bullying.html

RE inks at KS3

Identify: This helps students to recognise that people can have multiple identities which may be determined by a combination of faith, belief, culture, environment and choice

Exploring the variety; difference and relationships

Promoting understanding and dialogue; underpin a commitment to respect and inclusion and help pupils to engage creatively and confidently with a diverse world. This could involve taking part in visits.... Dialogues or community projects that involve understanding differences and seeing similarities

Ultimate Questions

In linking to Freedom Writers these can be about the significance and value of human life, the nature of being human; the causes of suffering or the qualities of a good life. Pupils should be encouraged to explore their own ultimate questions

Choices

Using and developing their understanding and sense of right and wrong to a range of issues in family, community, neighbourhood or world in relation for example to stereotyping

Key Concepts

QCA 1.4 : Identity, diversity and belonging

This involves

- a) understanding how individuals develop a sense of identity and belonging through faith or belief
- b) exploring the variety, difference and relationships that exist within and between religions, values and beliefs.

1.5 Meaning, purpose and truth

Exploring some of the [ultimate questions](#) that confront humanity, and responding imaginatively to them.

1.6 Values and commitments

- a) Understanding how moral values and a sense of obligation can come from beliefs and experience.
- b) Evaluating their own and others' values in order to make informed, rational and imaginative [choices](#).

KS4 RE 1.1-1.6 (see QCA website <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/religious-education/keystage4/index.aspx>

