

I'm me and I'm proud of it

Using stories to develop intercultural understanding and language awareness

Helen Stanistreet teaches Spanish in several primary schools in Sandwell, West Midlands. These very different schools have culturally and socially diverse populations, and the pupils bring a whole range of experiences and languages to the schools.

Working across the whole of KS2, Helen used bilingual versions of the well known picture book 'Handa's Surprise', supported by the 'Language Investigator' resources by Coventry City Council and Tide's '[Fat felts and sugar paper](#)'. She developed a series of activities which aim to:

- ☐ encourage pupils to share their own knowledge of languages and cultures;
- ☐ be proud of their skills as linguists;
- ☐ learn Spanish.

Helen explains:

"The children didn't tend to use and share their home languages in the classes - this was the thing that I wanted to change. I wanted them to be proud of themselves for already being bilingual, and celebrate this fact with others."

The activities here were developed for Year 5, but could easily be adapted for Year 7 and above.

Key objectives	Activities
To begin to explore commonality and difference – we all see things differently.	Using images of the main characters from 'Handa's Surprise', children draw what they imagine would be around the image eg Outside the box activity. Compare with other children working with the same image. ☐ Why are they different? ☐ Why have children drawn certain things? ☐ Children have to talk and explain themselves. Read 'Handa's Surprise' in Spanish. ☐ Have words like friends/music/health/education/religion/language/sport/family [in Spanish] on board, with English equivalent. Children match them up. Children have the words on pieces of paper. Children place these words under the headings according to what they think Handa will think: ☐ Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not important

To explore perceptions and stereotypes. Why are certain things important to one person and not to another?	Repeat 'importance' activity but this time children complete it from their perspective. Ask questions: ☐ What is important to you and why? How important is language? ☐ Compare with peers. ☐ Compare to Handa's list. Children offer suggestions and reasons for their thinking. Teacher challenges children to analyse their own thinking. This is an opportunity to explore perceptions and stereotypes in a sensitive way.
To use existing knowledge of language to make sense of other languages. What does a detective do? What qualities does a 'Language detective' need?	Class discussion re: what a detective does and what a language detective would have to do. Groups think about the following questions: ☐ Why do we speak different languages? ☐ Why are some languages more similar than others? ☐ Why is it important to learn other languages? ☐ Which are the most widely-spoken languages? 'Big question' for homework to be answered on post it notes and discussed later, for example: which language is the most important, and why?
To identify languages, sort words into languages and give the words their correct meaning.	Language investigations - based on ideas in the 'Language Investigator' resources by Coventry City Council. Give pairs of children a language investigation grid: the first column contains English everyday words [<i>hello, good morning, goodbye, thank you, yes, no, good day, please and goodnight</i>]. Each of the other columns has the same words, but in different languages. Some of the words are blanked out. Give the children the missing words on pieces of paper. First, they work out which language they are from, and then correctly place them in the grid. Class discussion: ☐ How did you do complete the task? ☐ What knowledge and skills did you need? ☐ What clues did you use? ☐ What or who helped you? Using bilingual versions of Handa's Surprise and a language detectives word grid such as shown below: ☐ Children find a particular set of phrases in the different languages. ☐ Groups discuss how they did it and what/who helped?

Cities, people and change



To explore the range of languages spoken in our class.

What language does Handa speak? How many languages are spoken in African countries? How many languages are there in the world, or in this classroom? How can we find out?

- Set up investigation.
- How can we represent everyone in the school?

The 'Language Investigator' resources are available by contacting Sian Dark, Education and Learning Service, Coventry City Council: sian.dark@coventry.gov.uk

Using bilingual versions of 'Handa's Surprise', Helen adapted an activity in the Coventry City Council 'Language Investigator' materials to create this word grid. She chose a range of languages including those spoken by the children.

Let's be Language Detectives

Using the books in the different languages can you find these phrases?

Think about how you do it! What skills do you use?

English	Spanish	French	Polish	Punjabi	Portuguese
... put seven delicious fruits ...					
My favourite fruit					
... said Akeyo..					
Will she like ...?					
I have brought you a surprise.					



Helen Stanistreet shares her reflections about using these ideas with her pupils:

"I have been teaching Spanish in primary schools for four years and I am very aware of the intercultural understanding aspect of the Framework for Languages; it is the strand that I find hardest to deliver.

"At the time of writing, I was working in two different primary schools, but children in each of the schools were a variety of nationalities and spoke many languages. This, I felt, was something to celebrate - a resource within the children themselves, offering me and their peers a rich introduction into languages and culture. Up until this point the children didn't use their home languages in the classes - this was the thing that I wanted to change. I wanted them to be proud of themselves for already being multilingual, and celebrate this fact with others.

"Being 'language detectives' enabled many children to be the experts within the class setting. They knew a lot of the languages and, given the opportunity, could speak and often write them, so their sense of self worth increased greatly. I made it quite clear to all the classes that I don't speak as many languages as the children do, so they were the experts.

"As a teacher of Spanish, I am used to structuring my lessons with clear language objectives in mind; I usually know what language point I want to develop, or what key language I want the children to practice. But this whole project, with its emphasis on intercultural understanding and Global Learning, demanded something different. I was completely out of my comfort zone! The whole experience took the focus off me as a teacher and aimed it straight at the children who, I must say, rose to the challenge brilliantly.

"I saw a child who had barely spoken to me before, reading the entire book in Polish to the whole class. One child in Year 5 gave me a story that she had written entirely in Punjabi. She read it out with great pride, whilst the other children listened and 'followed' the words on the screen. Other Punjabi speakers took great delight in telling me what the story was about, and I had only managed to pick out two key words! To know more than the teacher? Priceless!

"This was only really the start of my 'I'm me and I'm proud of it' project. I know we need to do more. I do feel that the children are happier to use their language in the schools, and want to share the fact that they can speak another language - something to be proud of indeed. They also questioned themselves and their own thoughts, and were able to learn from their peers."

Ideas developed by Helen Stanistreet, Teacher of Spanish in Sandwell primary schools.