**Bringing a sense of Wonder to the Secondary Classroom:**

**A free lesson plan by Sean Stockdale**

Students will:

* work towards develop their empathy for others
* Make an impact on discussion through challenging and constructive contributions
* Use their own experiences and those of peers to develop an argument

**You will need:**

*Wonder* by RJ Palacio

*Max the Champion* by Sean Stockdale and Alexandra Strick

**Introduction**

By Sean Stockdale

Like many English teachers I am always on the lookout for that text which will provide me with ideal spring board for discussion and writing. Just to make things interesting I also wanted an inclusive text that would allow me to explore the issues of disability in the classroom whilst avoiding the usual stereotypes. It was with this brief in mind that I selected *Wonder* by RJ Palacio. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the story, it centres around a young boy called August (Auggie) who is born with a facial deformity. The book documents his struggle to be accepted having moved to a mainstream school. A significant amount of time in this lesson is given over to speaking, listening and role play; this is in part to start to develop their ‘emotion toolkit’ in preparation for going into Auggie’s world.

**Starter activities**

Essential - Before the lesson starts appoint two pupils as scribes, they will document key points through the lesson(A flip chart works well for this).

**Warm up:** Begin the lessons by asking the students to discuss a time they felt self- conscious with their partner. Can they sum up the situation in one word? Share their word with the class using conscience alley technique (Any one the teacher points at shouts the word, quick swipe to warm up then slower movements to focus on particular groups words).Scribes choose a selection of words to document on flip chart.

**Hot seating:** Ask pupils to talk about themselves, switching between confident and self-conscious. Can their peers identify key differences and build each other’s performances?

**Introduce inclusive characters:** Using the scene from Max the Champion(Image included) on the IWB show the studentsa 3 second flash (The time limit really focuses them on the second and third pass).

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* What can they see?
* Repeat for a 5- 10 seconds flash depending on how much detail they spotted on the first pass.
* Look at the detail – build a picture in words.
* Full reveal – anything unusual?

Ask the students to look closer at the image. Did they will notice that it is full of inclusive characters?

**Challenging stereotypes:** Ask the students which character is being described in the following statements?

* I love basketball.
* l enjoy going to school and seeing my friends.
* I’m in top set for Maths.

Reveal to the students that all three statements are from the same child, the character that uses a wheel chair. Ask the students why they made their character choices?

Use the image of the wheel chair user to discuss then hot seat how people make assumptions based on appearance. If they used a wheel chair what assumptions would annoy them?

**Main activity**

Tell the pupils that they will be reading Wonder, which is about a child with Treacher-Collins syndrome. Show the front cover of Wonder then an image of a pupil with Treacher-Collins syndrome.

* In pairs, discuss the kind of problems a child like this might have to face in situations such as school, visiting a theme park, at a party, in a shop

**Extension:** Add their own situation, exploring any potential problems.

Wonder has a number of precepts within the text which are presented to students by the inspirational Mr Browne, for example: ‘YOUR DEEDS ARE YOUR MONUMENTS’. Working in pairs explore their meaning, their effectiveness and select one which would the most pertinent to them. **Extension:** create their own examples or find precepts they think would add to the text.

* Using a quote from the text(p162), “I was disturbed that more consideration was not given during this child’s application process to the fact that Beecher Prep is in an inclusion school. There are many parents – myself included – who question the decision to let this child into our school at all.” Working in pairs create an email response, give reasons why August should attend the school. Ensure that the response is measured and includes any benefits to the pupils.

**Summary**

To assess the pupils knowledge I give students a post it note and ask them to write a tweet summing up what they have learnt today. I can add the tweets to my display and build up a picture of their expanding knowledge as we progress through a unit. Getting what you want to say in so few characters is a skill in itself and also helps develop note taking.

Many of the students have little or no experience of inclusive story characters but many will have experience of disability issues. This lesson will have prepared them for many of the themes which run through Wonder but would also serve as an ideal opportunity to take disability issues in a more wider school context such as contributing to your school disability policy.

**Key Resource**

I regularly use pupil note takers to provide the pupils with a record of discussions so that students can focus on the tasks set. These notes can also be photographed and shared on the school LAN or the web, so are ideal for ensuring you don’t get ‘I don’t know what I’m doing’. All the pupils participate over the course of a term.

Conscience Alley – A technique well know to drama students where you pass through an alley of children sharing you ideas/thoughts as you walk through. I often work in classrooms where there isn’t the space to get all the pupils lined up so often let them remained seated whilst I move across the class expecting them to share as I pass them.

Homework

Asking the pupils to find examples of characters in stories who have a disability or a special need really opens up the debate on how few books there are which feature positive inclusive characters. Alternatively they can do some research on why RJ Palacio wrote *Wonder*, which is an account I’ve found really affects even the most cynical of students.

Useful links:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/9086974/Interview-with-RJ-Palacio-author-of-Wonder.html>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2279591/Hes-brother-It-doesnt-matter-looks-like-What-protective-twin-said-sibling-born-half-face.html>

**About the author**

Sean Stockdale works for nasen as Editor of Special magazine; he is also an Advanced Skills Teacher for ICT and children’s author. His first book *Max the Champion* co-authored with Alexandra Stick was published in June 2013. For information about Max and disability issues visit: [www.maxthechampion.co.uk](http://www.maxthechampion.co.uk).