

The Incomers

Home is ...

Our feelings about 'home' and the significance of 'leaving home,' are central to this workshop. The opening activities are intended to evoke personal, emotional, positive memories linked to the 'home', 'in order to deepen their emotional responses about 'leaving home' within the drama.

The lesson enables participants to engage with the word 'home' personally and collaboratively, affectively and cognitively, physically, orally and aurally before jolting them with lines of poetry from 'Home', by the young Somali poet, Warsan Shire, (who now lives in the UK).

What is home?

Move if ...

Class, standing in a circle. The statements below are called out one at a time by you (the teacher). Ask the participants to move and walk across to the other side of the circle, if the statement is true for them personally.

- You still live in the country you were born in;
- You have lived in a different country;
- You can speak a language that is not your mother tongue;
- You have been in a country where you could not understand any of the language;
- You have felt unwelcome in a country;
- You have ever felt that your life was at risk;
- You have left people you love, knowing that you might never see them again.

Home is ...

Thought walk: What words and phrases do they personally associate with the word 'home'?

What is it about home that they value, e.g. safety, comfort, love, security, belonging?

They walk around the room and 'thought-walk' i.e. they speak their words and phrases about home, aloud to themselves, as they walk, e.g. 'Home is comfort and safety... love and caring ... warmth and food...etc.'

Statues: Ask them to choose just one of your words or phrases and now make themselves into a statue (still image), that physically depicts their selected word or phrase.

Eavesdropping: Ask them to now put the word or phrase into a full sentence that starts with, 'Home is...' As the teacher passes by each statue, it will speak the sentence aloud. The teacher passes by each statue in turn, so that all the statues' sentences are heard.

Voice Collage: Ask the class to now stand together in a close group, with their eyes closed. Explain to them that they will be spontaneously creating a vocal improvisation together, using all or parts of their 'Home is ...' sentences. Tell them that the voice collage they are creating together, will reach a crescendo, after which they should become gradually quieter and finally end in silence. Ask them to keep their eyes closed once they are silent and not to open them again until you tell them to.

When the class ends in silence, the teacher reads aloud the following lines, which have been selected from the poem 'Home' by Warsan Shire.

***no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark***

***you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.***

***no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet, hot blood in your belly***

***no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore***

***no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your
ear saying leave,***

***run away from me now
anywhere
is safer than here***

The introduction of the poem at this silent and 'blind' moment, is likely to increase its impact on the listeners. Positive 'home' associations and emotions have been the focus in the drama so far, yet suddenly the silence is shattered by a sharply contrasting image of home as 'the mouth of a shark'. This is the stimulus that leads them into considering the reasons for this negative transformation of home.

Why do people leave their homes?

Statues: Ask them to create a second statue, depicting a sentence that starts with, 'Home is the mouth of a shark when...' They complete the sentence and physically become the statue that goes with it. Alternatively, you can give them one of the lines from the poem to work from.

Eavesdropping: When the teacher passes by, each statue speaks the accompanying sentence aloud, e.g. 'Home is the mouth of a shark when the bombs start dropping...'

The shark's mouth is a metaphor, as is the dragon in Shaun Tan's 'The Arrival'. The shark's mouth in Warsan Shire's poem and the dragon in Shaun Tan's, 'The Arrival' both represent that which drives people to flee from their homes. The participants have had the aural stimulus of the poem and are then additionally, shown the dragon picture (a visual stimulus). <http://www.shauntan.net/books/the-arrival.html>

Possible reasons for this transformation of feelings about home, is being considered in the next part of the drama.

They are asked to consider these questions.

- If we lived in this place, what might the dragon represent that would make us flee?
- What might be 'The Last Straw' that finally makes us decide to leave our homes and escape/migrate?

Small group playmaking: Ask them to get into groups of 4 and create a short scene that shows, 'The Last Straw' i.e. what is happening at the decisive moment, when someone actually decides to leave their home (probably forever). The scene must be short (no longer than a minute) and will start and finish with a still image.

Storytelling: Alternatively, the scenes can be shown in turn, with the group narrating an accompaniment to the scene (talking like a writer), e.g. 'He looked into the hard eyes of the man with the gun. His heart was beating like a drum ...'

Image theatre: Groups of 4. Alternatively, ask groups to create two contrasting still images. The first image will portray the positive 'ideal' of home and the second image will portray the negative 'reality' of what home has now become, for those who need to flee it. You might decide that the images need to be realistic or you could ask them to make symbolic images. Explain that the transition between the first and second images, should be done seamlessly, as a continuous performance.

Performance Carousel: The groups' images and scenes will be presented as an uninterrupted sequence. As one group finishes their scene (with a freeze-frame), the next group will begin moving (in slow motion), into their opening still image.

Once scenes and images have been shared, the teacher may wish to gather information and get greater clarity about the moments presented in the images and scenes. Groups might be invited to ask questions of each other, about what is happening in the scenes they have portrayed. The 'last straw' moments and the reasons why home has become 'the mouth of a shark', need to be clear, shared and considered.

People who migrate will usually have been considering leaving home for some time before the decision is finally made. Even when bombs might be dropping, the decision to leave home is not necessarily an easy one to make. The pros and cons of this course of action will probably have been considered. The drama strategy, 'Conscience Alley' involves speaking aloud the cases for and against a particular course of action. It enables us to become persuasive voices and to listen to the contradictory voices of others.

Conscience Alley: Ask the class to get into two lines facing each other. You (the teacher), will pass between the lines as someone who is trying to make the decision about whether to leave home and flee or not. The people in one line will try to persuade you not to leave. The people in the other line will try to persuade you to leave. Both lines must justify and give reasons for what they say to you, as you pass by.

Teacher in role: The man has decided to leave. The teacher can either become the man who has decided to leave or else someone who knows him well, e.g. his mother

or close friend or partner. The class now become questioners in 'shadowy role' and can ask questions, to find out more about the man and his situation, plans and hopes.

Refugees cannot carry many belongings. They take objects that are essential and sometimes carry small objects that matter personally to them. The internet has images of real objects that have been carried by refugees and recorded refugees' accounts of journeys.

Through drama, the participants can become significant objects and can recount their journeys and key moments that they have been 'eye-witness' to. The strategy 'Talking Objects' enables this.

You can ask participants to consider what personal possession they would take with them if they too had to flee their homes.

Talking Objects: Standing in a class circle. Each person decides on an object, that a refugee might take with him or her when they flee? One at a time, they can enter the circle and speak, as the object. They say what object they are and also give a little information, e.g. 'I am a photograph of his mother and father on their wedding day. He kisses me sometimes and talks to me. I have had tears on me.'

Improvisation: Once everyone has had the opportunity to enter the space, as an object, the objects can then speak to each other and ask each other questions.

The real objects listed below, were carried by real migrants, who escaped Syria. They explain why they chose to take a particular object and what it means to them.
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-31987373>

Ibrahim and the balloon

I had heard from people who tried to flee before that I shouldn't take any valuables with me. So I didn't take anything except cash. My cousin told me that I should take a balloon and he gave me one. He advised me that I should put my money inside it to keep it dry if I had to cross the sea. I have kept this balloon all this time. It reminds me of my cousin. He is the same age as me. He even has the same name as me. He was killed in Idlib province by artillery fire two months after I left Syria.

Firas and the whistle

The only thing I brought with me from Syria was a whistle. I trained as a sports teacher in Damascus. My coach, who was also a great friend of mine, gave me this

whistle in 2008 when I qualified. It reminds me of my first day at work when I was young and happily employed. It also reminds me of my coach. He was kidnapped in Damascus and later killed, even after his family paid a ransom.

Mamoud and the coins

I used to collect a lot of old Syrian postal stamps and coins. I took these things because they were light and I could carry them. When I look at the stamps or at the coins now, they remind me of my father. I used to show them to him and he would tell me what they were worth (even though they are worthless now). These things remind me of when my country was safe.

Imad and the trombone

I worked with the National Syrian Orchestra in Damascus. I brought a trombone; it's my job and my life. This particular one was my first trombone that I bought with my own money. It reminds me of lots of things, mostly about my journey here. Here in the UK, I play with the Leeds University Orchestra. I have just got my refugee status and I would love to carry on working with them.

Wedding ring

The smugglers told me to leave everything. They even made me leave my clothes and buy new ones to look more European; shorts and a t-shirt. The only thing I was able to keep with me was my Syrian ID and my wedding ring. These are the only things that matter most to me. A year after arriving here in the UK, I was able to be reunited with my wife and children.

Huthaifa and the shoes

I hadn't seen my mother for about 13 years. She went to the UK many years ago. Five years ago I bought a pair of shoes that I really liked. I promised myself I would only wear them when I saw my mother again. My journey was very long and difficult but when I arrived in Holland I applied for asylum and then applied for a visa to the UK. I wore the shoes for the first time in Manchester airport, just before I saw my mother.

Fairouz CD

I brought a CD with me to the UK. My fiancée gave it to me when we were saying goodbye. It's an album by Fairouz, one of the most famous singers in the Middle East. The title of the album is 'Yes There is Hope'. I have applied for a visa for my fiancée, but it's been refused. I hope that I will see her again one day.

Eyad and his wallet

My wallet is the only thing that survived the two-year journey from Syria to the UK. I remember the day I bought it in 2010, in Al-Halboni market in the old city of Damascus. I bought it from a street merchant who had lots of wallets for different football teams. This wallet has been with me to many places. I was arrested by government forces for trying to deliver food to the people. It even followed me as I moved between prisons in Syria, from the secret service prison, to the military hospital prison and the military court

Rumours: Everyone has heard rumours about the perilous journeys that refugees have already taken. Ask them to make up a rumour about an incident on a refugee's journey. It can be based on a true story or they can create their own. Now they will spread gossip and rumour stories, e.g.

- He nearly drowned in a lorry tank of liquid chocolate and his feet were stuck solid;
- The fuel tank of the lorry became very hot and the fumes made him struggle to breathe;
- The man took his deposit and then did not arrange the transport;
- They took them out to sea and just left them there, on an inflatable boat.

The above examples are true. The teacher can join the gossipers and feed in true stories, such as those above.

Teacher in Role: The teacher becomes the middle man for a people smuggler. The class become those who are attending this meeting and are potential refugees. The smuggler's representative meets them in a warehouse. He says he can arrange for them to get to a neighbouring country. He requires a \$3,000 deposit per person, if they decide to go. He says that the full cost will be \$7,500 per person if they travel by land (with a greater risk of getting caught than by sea). If they go by sea, it will cost \$5,000. By sea is riskier but they are less likely to get caught. Having given the key information, the people smuggler will now answer their questions. He is inflexible about the price. They have to decide by tomorrow. He cannot promise their safety. They can only bring one bag per person and won't get help carrying it. There are only 12 places this time. No price reduction for children.

The Teacher in Role as the intermediary, says he has to leave now but will return at the same time tomorrow. Does anyone want to commit now and pay the deposit now? Those who commit and pay first, get the places. The teacher takes the deposit from any who are willing already to commit.

Improvisation: The teacher in role leaves and the people at the meeting now can talk together. What do they say to each other, once the people smuggler has left? Do they trust him?

Proxemics: A standing circle. The smuggler's representative returns and stands in the middle. The class may now enter one at a time and physically position themselves in relation to him. They must offer a reason for their positioning, e.g. Someone might turn their back on the smuggler's representative and say, 'I am standing here with my back to him because I don't want to deal with him at all'.

Passing thoughts: Alternatively, people in turn may walk past the smugglers, representative, (who is in the centre of the circle). When they pass by him, they can speak aloud, what they are thinking and/or what they would like to say to him.

Movement/Dance Drama: Some people have paid and will leave early tomorrow. This is likely to be the last night that they will ever spend in this place. They do not sleep well. What might their nightmare look like?

Ask them to get into groups of 4 and to create a recurring nightmare, using symbolic and exaggerated movement. The nightmare title is, 'Fear of the journey'. It will be performed twice, flowing between nightmares seamlessly. Sound and words may be used but not naturalistically.

Dreams and nightmares are a useful way of getting participants to emotionally, critically and creatively draw on what has already happened in a drama and imaginatively consider what might lie ahead. Dreams and nightmares may contain elements of reality but they can also express fears and hopes for the future.
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