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Who we are

a citizenship collection

Edited by Geoff Barton
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General introduction

Who we are is about just that – who we are. It is a collection of stories, poems and non-fiction texts that explore what it is like to be human. How are we different from animals? How do we feel and think? Where have we come from? Where are we heading?

It's a collection designed to link with some of the issues you may be thinking about in Citizenship and PSHE, such as rights, responsibilities, identity and tradition. But this is very definitely a book to read and enjoy in English lessons, with lots of activities designed to help you explore not only the issues but also the language of the texts. It is divided into five sections:

Growing pains gets you thinking about where you came from. What kind of young child were you? Who influenced you? What are your earliest memories? You'll encounter texts about other people's childhoods, both real and imagined. How did their experiences shape the person they grew up to be?

Letting go is about how we all start to want to become independent – about how we start to take control of our own lives, the advice we are given and the choices we make. There are memories, celebrations of influential people and descriptions of the way we start to grow apart from other people, as well as accounts of the sort of unexpected events that can catch us by surprise.

Facing the world begins with a poem of advice from Rudyard Kipling, and then shows human beings in difficult circumstances – facing challenges that have tested their courage, character and self-belief.

Britain in the past is exactly that – a section that explores who we were and shows us some of the features of our history. We cannot really know who we are if we don't know something about where we come from. You'll travel down a 20th-century coal mine and see other work that was once an essential part of everyday life but has now almost vanished. You'll share the insights of people who lived through World War I and even explore the battle between George and the dragon from the point of view of the dragon.

The world about us looks at the world we are creating. It touches on some of the big issues facing your generation, the changing nature of the media and our responsibilities as global citizens to the other humans on this fragile planet.

Within these five sections, the texts are arranged so that the more difficult ones are placed at the end of the section. To support your reading, certain words (these are numbered) in the text are explained in the footnotes. Ideas for further reading accompany each text. Each section concludes with a range of reading, writing, speaking, listening and drama activities to help you explore and enjoy the authors' ideas, opinions, style and language.

Through this exploration you will, I hope, gain an insight into what makes a good text work, in terms of its structure and content, and think about what we can learn from the situations the characters find themselves in. The text-specific activities pages are divided into the following activity types: *Before you read* (pre-reading stimulation activities), *What's it about?* (comprehension-style questions) and *Thinking about the text* (activities which move beyond the text itself). At the very end of each section, a series of *Compare and contrast* activities provide opportunities to directly compare two or more texts.

I hope very much you'll enjoy the range of texts. There's certainly a huge variety, including stories, poems, autobiographical writing, biography, articles, arguments and descriptions.

Some of the texts were written specifically for people of your age. Most of them weren't. But the book has been put together with you firmly in mind, to interest, entertain and even occasionally inspire you. It should also, I hope, help you to celebrate the joy and pain of who we are – human beings coping with a complicated, often confusing, world of endless, exciting and terrifying change.

Geoff Barton