

Shabina's Story

Activity A

- Organize students into smaller groups of 3 or 5.
- Explain that each group will be given a different statement, a pen and a sheet of A3 or flipchart paper.
- They are to discuss the statement and record their ideas for and against: suggested methods are mind maps / posters, encourage the students to be creative and consider all factors.
- Allow adequate time for the small group work, challenge the groups and stimulate debate by questioning how would it affect you? This school? The country? How would it be enforced? Is it fair? What are their reasons behind their decisions?
- Inform the students that each group needs to come to a joint decision whether they are for or against their statement and invite groups to come and present their findings and share their ideas with the rest of the class.
- Allow other participants to challenge or question points that are raised.

Statements

All religious symbols should be banned in schools.

Schools should not put on a nativity play at Christmas as is not inclusive off all people's beliefs.

If people are allowed to wear turbans, headscarves and other religious headwear then it should be ok to wear hats, caps and have your hood up.

People should be allowed time off during the school day to pray.

Uniforms are pointless; we should just be allowed to wear what we want.

Everyone should be made to do Religious Education all through school.

At school we should celebrate ALL religious holidays and occasions so nobody feels left out.

It would be better if religious people went to specialist faith schools.

Activity B

- Read the students the below newspaper article / story
- Explain to the students that they are going to take on this fight!
- Ask for volunteers to take on the following roles: Shabina Begum (student), Mrs Yasmin Bevan (head teacher), Mr Stuart Moore (deputy head), school governor, local councillor, head of the PTA.
- Divide the rest of the class into two groups, explain that they are going to represent students at the school in the article: half are 'for' (which will obviously include the student who volunteered to play Shabina) and half are 'against' the motion.
- Explain that each team will be preparing and presenting a case to the head teacher and the panel of adults in a bid to secure a victory for their team.
- Allow as much time as is available for the teams to work on their case, encourage lots of research, creative thinking, planning. Use of the internet would be advantageous. Teams may need to divide into smaller groups to carry out work and then reconvene.
- Photocopy and hand out a copy of the story and allow students access to the SRtRC resources.
- The students who are going to be on the panel will also need to carry out lots of research, they will need to work on having all factual information correct, they may also want to do some background work on past cases, the law, examples of school uniform policies, unions, Islam and what it says about dress etc.
- At the specified time and date of the meeting, if possible rearrange the classroom to look like a court room, with a table at the front for the panel and chairs on each side for the teams.
- It will be necessary to have someone chairing the event, this could be a good role for the teacher or a teaching assistant, and if they felt comfortable they could do this 'in role'. This will ensure control is maintained, both teams get a fair chance to express their side and also students can be prompted and directed if necessary.
- Conduct the debate, encouraging all students to challenge, question and use any evidence they have found.
- At the end of the debate, allow the panel some time to confer and come to a decision, obviously it needs to be agreed by the majority. It is important to tell students not to be influenced by what actually happened with the real case and they must try and be objective and form their own opinions.
- Invite the panel to reveal and explain the reasons for their decision.
- Evaluate and feedback with the group, how they felt, did they agree with the panel? How was it fighting for something that maybe you didn't believe in? What if it happened at this school? What skills do they think they used during the activity? Have they learnt anything new?

The Story (<http://www.4-5graysinnsquare.co.uk/cases/index.cfm?id=1606>)

Denbigh High School is a maintained community secondary school taking pupils of both sexes aged 11-16, it has a diverse intake with 21 different ethnic groups and 10 religious groupings represented. About 79% of its pupils were Muslim. It was not a faith school and was therefore open to children of all faiths or none.

The head teacher, Mrs Yasmin Bevan, was born into a Bengali Muslim family. She grew up in the Indian sub-continent and had had much involvement with Bengali Muslim communities here and abroad and was familiar with the codes and practices governing the dress of Muslim women.

She believed that a school uniform played an integral part in promoting a positive sense of communal identity and avoiding manifest disparities of wealth and style. The school offered three uniform options. One was the shalwar kameeze: a combination of the kameeze, a sleeveless smock-like dress with a square neckline revealing the wearer's collar and tie, with the shalwar, loose trousers tapering at the ankles.

Shabina Begum was a Muslim. Her father died before she entered the school. She lived with her mother, who did not speak English and had since died, a sister, two years older, and a brother, five years older.

For two years before September 2002 Shabina wore the Shalwar Kameeze happily and without complaint. It was also worn by her sister who continued to wear it without objection throughout her time at school.

On September 3, 2002, the first day of the autumn term, Shabina, then aged nearly 14, went to the school with her brother and another young man. They asked to speak to the head teacher, who was unavailable, and they spoke to the assistant head teacher, Mr Stuart Moore.

They insisted that Shabina be allowed to attend the school wearing the long coat-like garment known as a jilbab that she had on that day. They talked of human rights and legal proceedings.

The jilbab she said was the only garment which met her religious requirements because it concealed, to a greater extent than the Shalwar Kameeze, the contours of the female body and was appropriate for maturing girls.

Mr Moore felt that their approach was unreasonable and threatening. He told Shabina to go home, change and return wearing school uniform. He did not believe he was excluding her, which he had no authority to do, but did not allow her to enter the school dressed as she was.

Shabina hasn't returned to school since and has begun legal proceedings, fighting for her right to wear the Jilbab.