

EXPLORING IDENTITY

Learning objectives:

- Explore different aspects of identity.
- Develop ability to question and challenge representations and stereotypes.
- Recognise difference as positive and enriching rather than threatening.

English learning objectives:

- 1.2 Understanding and responding to what speakers say in formal and informal contexts.
- 3.1 Developing and adapting discussion skills and strategies in formal and informal contexts.
- 5.1 Developing and adapting active reading skills and strategies.
- 5.2 Understanding and responding to ideas, viewpoints, themes and purposes in texts.
- 6.1 Relating texts to the social, historical and cultural contexts in which they were written.
- Also, locating and extracting information.

Preparation/resources:

Exercise 1: Electronic white board to present pictures to class, flip chart board and paper.

Exercise 2: Internet web page of extract/copies of extracts.

Exercise 1 (10 minutes):

Whole group

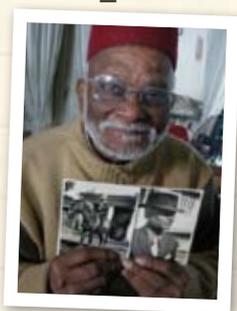
Looking at these pictures ask the students to brainstorm what their initial thoughts are about each individual.

1



Husna Ara Begum Matin

2



Abu Md Jehangir

3



Anwara

4



Rushanara Ali

On a flip chart make notes of ideas expressed by students. Ask them to think about the following:

- When assumptions *might* be made about the individuals in these photos.
- How much we can really know about these individuals just from looking at their pictures.
- What kinds of things one might assume about these individuals (for example, where they live, what language they speak, what jobs they do, etc.).

Exercise 2 (20 minutes):

In pairs

Ask students to reflect and make notes on how each of these interviewees either describe themselves or are being described. Encourage students to highlight words or phrases to emphasise how individuals are choosing to represent their identity.

Husna Ara Begum Matin (picture 1)

(www.banglastories.org/husna-ara-begum-matin/who-i-am-5.html)

Husna Ara Begum Matin is a grandmother in her 60s. She arrived in the UK with her husband in the early 1970s, before many Bengali women had migrated.

She has five daughters and a large extended family in the UK. Her husband died of a heart attack in 1995. She is actively involved in local community organisations, including Jagonari, a women's organisation, and the Nirmul Committee, a voluntary organisation.

Abu Md Jehangir (picture 2)

(www.banglastories.org/abu-md-jehangir/who-i-am-7.html)

Jehangir speaks five languages: Urdu, Arabic, Persian, Bengali and English. He loves English best as he has a fascination for English culture and language and he loves throwing a party for his friends at Christmas. He has always had a thing for hats and has a great collection. His hobby now is to read books.

I was very much influenced by English literature as my father used to encourage me. I have always loved reading novels, especially romances. And I love painting.

Anwara (picture 3)

(www.banglastories.org/anwara/who-i-am-8.html)

I have always been a housewife and a labourer and a tiger-prawn fishery worker. My husband died six years ago. He used to be a labourer.

Rushanara Ali (picture 4)

Rushanara Ali was the first Bangladeshi MP, taking Bethnal Green and Bow in 2010. She was an Oxford graduate who won with a majority of 21,784 votes. (See also www.rushanaraali.org/)

Mohammed Shamsul Haq

(www.banglastories.org/mohammed-shamsul-haq/who-i-am.html)

Mohammed Shamsul Haq... remembers being a young man when the British left India (in 1947)... Shamsul has travelled all over the world as a 'lascar' on a British ship and now lives in Dinajpur, in north-western Bangladesh.

I was born in Khidirpur, at 10/2 Wardon Street, in Calcutta. I've travelled to Colombo, London, Africa, Rangoon, Singapore, Jeddah... I went on the hajj when we moored off Jeddah – this was in British times. I lived and worked on a ship. I was the oil man – in charge of oiling the machinery. I was getting a salary of 35 rupees when I retired. I had started on 24 rupees.

Ashim Sen

(www.banglastories.org/about-the-project/migration-themes/religion-2.html)

After a short visit home to Bangladesh, he returned and opened a small restaurant. Ashim notes that the Bengali Hindu community in Bradford is very small - 'about 20, 25 families, all of them from Sylhet' - but for him, being Bangladeshi is the most important connection:

Hindus and Muslims lived together in Sylhet. We lived together in Bangladesh. We are so similar in our thinking that religion was not a problem in our relationship. That is why amongst the hundreds of my friends, 99% are Muslim.

Because of the small numbers of Bengali Hindus, however – Ashim estimates that there are only about 125 Bengali Hindus in Bradford – religious worship takes place with other Hindu communities in the city.

As a whole group

Go through each of the individuals and ask students to consider: what information have these individuals shared with us? Students can be prompted:

- languages they can speak and ones that they prefer;
- clothes they wear;
- interests they have;
- literature they read;
- their relationship to other family members (e.g. a grandmother, a son, etc.);
- involvement with groups or organisations;
- where they have travelled to;
- where they were born;
- how much they earned;
- their jobs;
- their education;
- their achievements;
- their religion; and
- their ethnicity



Exercise 3 (20 minutes):*Whole group*

Steer the discussion around to thinking about identity more broadly.

- What surprised you about the first 4 accounts when comparing them with their pictures?
- What identity and culture do you identify with?
- What do you think about the way these individuals have answered these questions?
- What aspects of the person's life did you focus on when describing them?
- What questions would you ask them if you had the chance?

Reflection (10 minutes):*As a whole group*

Even though all these individuals are Bangladeshi/Bengali they define themselves in many ways, not just through their ethnicity. Ask students to reflect on:

- Whether attaching only one label to someone is a good way to define that person; and could this be a way to stereotype someone?
- How stereotypes can be challenged.
- Is identity how other people view me?
- Is identity how I view myself?

Extended activity/homework*Individually*

For more detailed work on multiple identity, students can be given a copy of a case study from the 'Who I am' section - either:

Jubair Ahmed (www.banglastories.org/case-study-three/who-i-am-3.html),

Abu Md Jehangir (www.banglastories.org/abu-md-jehangir/who-i-am-7.html),

Anwara (www.banglastories.org/anwara/who-i-am-8.html)

or Aleya Parveen (www.banglastories.org/case-study-four/who-i-am-4.html)

or asked to visit the website: www.banglastories.org.

In pairs

Ask pairs to read descriptions from one of the case studies and to write down what aspects of identity emerged from that extract. Ask learners to consider whether the individuals in the case study are parents. What their hobbies or interests are. What are their roles? What jobs do they do?

Whole class

Following this activity it would be good to have detailed reflections on the identity traits of their case study and what they think this tells them about that person.