

Dear Hetty

Year: Y5

Subjects and Issues

◆ Being different ◆ Emotional needs ◆ Feelings ◆ Resilience ◆ Dealing with loss ◆ Relationships education ◆ Emotions ◆ Managing change

Introduction

Ask for a volunteer to step outside the classroom briefly. Whilst out of the room, ask two children to swap places. The volunteer outside should then return and try to identify who has moved. Repeat a couple of times - perhaps changing something different each time.

Ask the volunteers how they felt whilst waiting outside the class. They may describe feeling separated - if not, you could ask them whether they felt separated from the rest of the class. How do we feel when we are separated from what is going on?

Explain that the session is going to focus on what feeling separated from someone or something might be like and explore what might help someone who experiences this in their lives.

Explain that whilst today in England we have supportive networks to help people, they have not always been in place. During the 19th century, if a mother had a baby and was not married to a partner who could support her, she had a difficulty. Employers didn't want babies around and such mothers needed to work to earn money to look after themselves.

In such a situation, mothers in London sometimes gave up their young babies to a place called the Foundling Hospital. Some babies were accepted from their desperate mothers, then sent out to foster mothers until they were old enough to go to school. At that stage - often with no preparation at all - they left their foster families and lived full-time at the Foundling Hospital where they were schooled and taught skills to enable them to enter service (which for girls means that they would become a maid or a servant in someone's house) and earn a living.

Introduce the story of Hetty Feather – a character who Jacqueline Wilson has created for her fictional book about a child at the hospital.

Activity 1

Read the first extract from the book with the children. Establish it is written in the first person from the baby's perspective.

- How was the mother feeling?
- Which words tell you this?
- What evidence is there that the mother took care of the infant whilst she was with her?
- What do you think the author wants us to understand when she describes the mother and baby in front of the long polished table where a line of solemn men sat asking questions?
- 'Hands' are described undressing the baby. What effect does this give?
- Once the baby has been taken from its mother, we don't hear much about her again. What do you imagine the mother felt as she left the hospital?
- When people are separated from those they love, what can make their situation more painful?

- What might the mother think to help her cope with the loss of her little child?

Read the second extract from the book which describes Hetty's return to the Foundling Hospital after being fostered. Her new mother (a foster mother) is with her this time.

- What feeling does this sentence create in the reader's mind? We stared up at all the windows but we couldn't see inside.
- How does the use of numbers instead of names by the woman who meets them at the door suggest life at the hospital will be like?
- Hetty calls her foster mother "Mother!". What feeling is there between Hetty and her foster mother? What does this show us about how Hetty has coped since the separation from her birth mother?
- Now that she is at the Foundling Hospital, what can you think of that might help her adjust to her new life?

The children may have some really useful contributions to offer such as: friends, kind gestures, becoming familiar with new routines, talking to people, learning new things, determination, optimism, resilience. Hetty also uses 'picturing' or imagining to help her.

Activity 2

Ask the children to write a letter from the foster mother to Hetty. The letter should explain how she felt when she had to leave Hetty at the Foundling Hospital. The letter should include words and phrases of encouragement to Hetty, to help her in her new surroundings.

When we leave someone or something that is very dear to us, we can experience strong feelings. However, humans have a great capacity to adjust and learn from experience.

Memories are useful learning tools. Our memories can show us that we have managed in difficult situations previously and that we can grow stronger through such experiences to deal with future challenges.

Plenary

Share some of the children's letters. Praise the use of words and phrases that would help Hetty.

It can be difficult for those of us who have never experienced being separated from loved ones to imagine what it might be like. But giving thought to the impact it can have might help us be more understanding and supportive of those who do.

Extension (optional)

Gather names of stories with characters (fictional or real) who are separated from loved ones, e.g. Anne Frank, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, Goodnight Mr Tom, the BBC character Tracy Beaker, for children to read or discuss.

Learning Outcomes

Children will be able to:

- Explain how someone might feel when they are separated from someone or something they like;
- Suggest ways to help someone who is separated from someone or something they like.

