

RE : IMAGINING

A Zephaniah Discussion Resource, enabling you to host virtual discussion groups for Refugee Week 2020

Written by Julie Wilkinson

INTRODUCTION

The theme for Refugee Week 2020 is 'imagine' - the power that lies in imagining a better world, whether in entering the experience of another and building our understanding, or daring to dream of a future full of hope.

This discussion resource is aimed at enabling you to use your imaginations to engage with issues of sanctuary - to think about stories and language and the way we define people through the words we use and how we treat them; and to dream of a better world, to identify together simple acts of hope to create a brighter, more open future.

In these days of pandemic, the pack is designed to be used remotely. Here's what you will need to do to host a discussion group:

1. Choose who you would like to invite - it could be a group of friends or family or colleagues, or a youth group or secondary school class.
2. Set a date and time - we think it would be very powerful to know that others were meeting at the same time, so we're suggesting Wednesday 17th June at 7.30pm - but you can meet anytime, whatever works best for your group.
3. Choose a video calling app - e.g. Skype, Zoom, Facebook Messenger, Google Meet. The resources require you as a group to watch online resources together, so we'd recommend using one that has a screen-sharing facility, like Skype.
4. Let everyone know the details of the event - which app you're using and when, plus sharing any details you'll need like passcodes or email addresses.
5. Have a look through the following pages ahead of time to prepare - look up all the relevant resources and have them ready to share on your laptop/tablet/device when you share your screen. You might decide to give your participants a sneak preview of some of the questions - e.g. Name one of your heroes - so they have some time to think.
6. Let us know about your group - we'd love to know how you are using these resources and whether you are finding them helpful!
Email us on zephstoryteller@gmail.com.

Together, we can do great things. Get talking.

Julie Wilkinson
Storyteller, Zephaniah Trust

P.S. Further ideas are available in our free resource pack - *Acts of the Imagination* - available to download now from www.zephaniah.org.uk/refugee-week

STORIES - & WORDS

The discussion focuses on the story of Yusra and Sara Mardini, two sisters from Syria who fled their country due to war. After discussing the first question below, you will need to watch our storytelling video together using a screen-sharing facility. Juxtaposing the story of Yusra and Sara with that of the unwitting Victorian heroine Grace Darling, the questions that follow will enable you to think about language, heroism and humanity - and how the way we collectively imagine people creates a public perception.

Your job as discussion host is to welcome everyone, make them feel comfortable, and allow them space to speak. Depending on your group, you might want to establish some agreed principles - respect, giving everyone space to contribute etc.

1. ICE BREAKER BEFORE WATCHING:
Who are your heroes? What makes them heroic?
2. Watch *Water Babies* on the link opposite - then use the questions below as the basis for your discussion.
3. What are your initial reactions to hearing these stories?
4. What similarities did you notice between the stories of Grace and Yusra/Sara? What differences were there?
5. Grace. Yusra. Sara. All acted responsively to the need in front of them. Were their actions heroic? Why/why not?
6. Grace was feted as a Victorian heroine. Yusra is an Olympian, UN ambassador and features in books as a source of inspiration. Sara is facing criminal charges and a potentially life-long jail sentence. All three young women chose to enter turbulent waters to save the lives of others.
Why? What factors give their stories such different endings? Do you agree that their stories should have ended so differently? Are they heroes, criminals, or ordinary people responding to shared humanity in extraordinary situations?

RESOURCES

Watch the *Water Babies* storytelling video here:
<https://youtu.be/T8Jx7IZwTCE>

ACTS OF HOPE

This section focuses on questions about identity and choice, and how we can respond to build a more hopeful world.

7. Read this extract from Yusra Mardini's autobiography, *Butterfly*, about how she initially responded to the prospect of being on the Refugee Olympic Team:

"I'm reeling. This is crazy. Sven said himself there's no way I'm ready to swim in Rio. Suddenly it hits me. If I compete it will be because I'm a refugee."

'Ok, yes, I admit it, I'm a refugee,' I say, holding my hands up. 'But refugee isn't my team, is it? That word doesn't define me, does it? I'm Syrian. I'm a swimmer. I'm not starting for a refugee team. It's so... well, it's a little bit insulting.'

Sven looks at me like I've just slapped him.

'Huh?' he says and shakes his head. 'You don't make sense.'

He leans towards me, looks me square in the eye.

'Tell me again what you want,' he says.

'Swimming,' I say. 'I want to swim at the Olympics.'

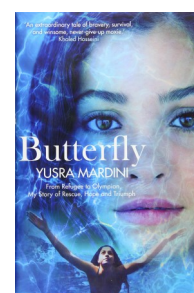
'Swimming, right,' says Sven. 'At the Olympics, right. So tell me this. Does it really matter who you swim for?'

I sit in silence, struggle with myself for a minute. It's that word. Refugee. It's the bomb and the sea and the borders and the barbed wire and the humiliation and the bureaucracy. And yes, it's the painful charity too."

8. How do you respond to Yusra's struggle with her identity? Can you empathise with having an experience you didn't choose that comes to define you in some way, even for a short time?
9. Yusra didn't choose to be a refugee. And it didn't even come close to defining her identity. But she faced a choice about whether to embrace that part of her experience and bend it to make it fit with the rest of who she is. How do you think it feels to go from being a fully rounded person with multi-layered identities, who must give up their home and culture, move to a new country, and be redefined by the systems as a refugee?

RESOURCES

Quote taken from
Butterfly
by Yusra Mardini



ACTS OF HOPE

10. In her book, Yusra goes on to explain why she decided to join the Refugee Olympic Team, after a conversation with her Dad:

“ ‘Maybe you’re right,’ says Dad on the phone. ‘But maybe you’re also thinking about this the wrong way. Think how hard you worked to swim. All those hours, all that sacrifice. Why not take this chance? And afterwards you can use your voice to help people.’

I think of the horrors I see every night just scrolling through my newsfeed. The suicide bombings, the gas attacks, the starving, bloodied children. The desperate escapes, the prayers at sea, those stuck indefinitely along endless barbed-wire borders. Help people. Yes, I’d love to do that. But how? If I go to the Olympics it won’t stop the war, or open the borders, or even reduce the queues at the LeGeSo office in Berlin. But Dad says I could help people in a different way.

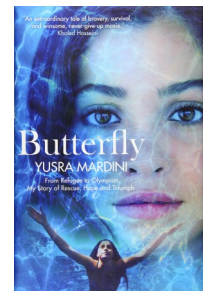
‘Very few Syrians get this kind of chance to speak up,’ he says. ‘You can be their voice. You know a big part of their story because you’ve been through it too. It’s an opportunity for all of us to be heard.’

Later, I lie in bed thinking it over. I’m sick of watching helplessly from the sidelines while my people suffer. If I go to Rio, I’ll certainly have more power than I do now. Besides, the whole thing has a momentum of its own. In a few days’ time, I’ll be speaking to the world. Journalists and TV crews from Japan to Brazil, the American news networks, the global wires, newspapers and magazines from all over Europe and America. Dad’s right. I should tell them our story. For all of us.”

11. Yusra chooses to use her voice, as a deliberate act of hope to change what she can and build a better future. Is this a choice that is also open to us? If so, how can we take it?
12. How do you respond to the stories you’ve heard today? Do you want to take action towards a better, more hopeful future? Every world-changing action starts with an act of the imagination, an ability to dream of a better world. Listen to the song on the link opposite while you think about all you’ve heard today.

RESOURCES

Quote taken from
Butterfly
by Yusra Mardini



Listen to *Tell 'em about the dream* here:

[https://
www.youtube.com/
watch?v=OIHDtqibr0E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIHDtqibr0E)

CHALLENGE

If you want to respond to the discussion you've had today, the stories and songs you've heard, here are some ways you could do that. Share them with the group and let people discuss whether they would like to do any of them - or something else!

- If you've found this discussion helpful, you could share some of the resources on your social media - the *Water Babies* storytelling video, the song, or the Discussion Pack or Resource Pack.
- Read Yusra Mardini's book - *Butterfly* - hear her voice and find out more about her story.
- Look up [The Worldwide Tribe podcast](#) to hear first-hand, empowering and heroic accounts from those caught up in the biggest humanitarian crisis of our time.
- Listen to Sarah Mardini's Ted Talk - [How I was arrested for handing out blankets to refugees](#)
- Download the free [Acts of the Imagination](#) Resource Pack from our website, which is full of suggestions for further action you can take - books, films, websites, campaigns and more.

Thank you for joining us in
discussion!

Now go - and build a more hopeful
world.

If you'd like to feed back on this Discussion Pack, we'd love
to hear from you:

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