

Albert worked in the city, earning good money.

But as he walked from his first-class train compartment to work, he noticed there were people in London who had very little money at all, because they were sitting on the streets asking him for some of his.

Sometimes he felt guilty about having so much when they had so little. So he sometimes gave them a few coins.

Albert's job was to invest the money of rich customers to help make them even richer. Sometimes he felt it was unfair that they were incredibly rich when he was just comfortable.

So he sometimes overcharged them, knowing they had so much money they wouldn't notice.

One day, Albert decided he was fed up with the whole business of people being so unequal. He was going to get a job where you could make a difference to that.

So he went back to university and trained to become a teacher. And when he started teaching, and came to your school, he was determined that he was going to treat all of you equally.

So he made sure he learned all your names at the same time... the brightest, the naughtiest and the quietest.

He smiled at all of you the same when he saw you around the school.

He made the same effort to get to know each of you.

He spent the same time helping each of you with your work.

Every time any of you answered a question, he said the same thing: 'Well done, that's excellent.'

He made sure he set you all the same work... and gave you all the same time to do it.

Whenever someone did something wrong, he set you all the same detention.

Whenever you wrote an essay, he gave you all the same grades.

At parents evening, he said the same things about all of you.

And at the end of the year, he gave every single one of you the same report.

Albert was pretty pleased that he'd done such a good job of treating all his students equally.

So he was upset and puzzled when every single one of you said, in the same angry way, the same thing, 'It's not fair, you treat us all the _____.'

The Fairest Teacher of Them All?

This enquiry often leads to interesting questions about fairness and equality.

Warm ups

Perhaps the best way to warm up for it is 'arbitrary discrimination'. While the others are arranging the chairs in a circle, pick out three or four pupils according to an arbitrary trait, such as 'name begins with J' or 'is wearing a hairband'. Treat these pupils with especial kindness at the start of the lesson – asking them to decide whether your bag of Minstrels taste better crunched or melted, for example. Meanwhile, be severe with the others, who will soon notice, and, with luck, complain that you are treating them differently.

An alternative/additional warm up is the 'stand by' exercise included here. Space the four sheets around the circle. Pupils have to choose which of the four is the most unfair, and then give their best reason for choosing it.

The Stimulus - The story makes exactly the opposite point to the 'arbitrary discrimination' warm-up: sometimes unfairness arises precisely because people are treated the same. The last word of the story is deliberately left blank: prime the pupils that when you give them a signal, they all have to say what they think is the final word of the story – practice them chorusing a word in response to the signal before you start.

It helps if you slow down during the last section of the story, so they have time to take in the shift from sensible to ridiculous.

Thinking Time/Sharing - Give pupils a minute of quiet thinking time to choose three words or phrases that are important to the ideas in story – they can be words from the story, or things the story makes you think about. Then form small groups for the sharing of those ideas in conversation.

Question Formulation - Get each group to frame a juicy, philosophical question. A good prompt is to say it should be a question that would make sense to someone who hadn't heard the story – so one about the ideas and issues in the story, not about the character Albert in particular. Have them write it on an individual sheet of A3 paper big and bold in fat pen, with their names.

Airing - After each question has been read out loud, place them in the circle and ask for a volunteer to rearrange them to show any connections or groups they can see between the questions. Repeat with an alternative layout, with different reasons given by another pupil.

Voting - Try an "invisible omnivote" – pupils stand and face outwards, hands behind backs. They can vote as many times as they like. As each question is read, pupils give a thumbs up to indicate that they want to vote.

First Words – Ask the pupils who framed the question to give their first thoughts at an answer, then ask if anyone disagrees with them, to establish a starting range of opinions for the enquiry and get pupils used to referencing one another's thinking.

Discussion - Themes and Questions - A key thing to get across in a first lesson is the "pass it on" turn-taking system of pupils passing the discussion from one to another. The most likely questions are around fairness, and you can probe into what sort of differences make it right to treat people differently, such as needs, and which ones don't, such as appearance (or, at least, those aspects of appearance that can't be changed).

You might also get questions about teaching. If so, to avoid potential awkwardness, get the community to agree some rules about not making the enquiry personal. Other themes are the gap between rich and poor, or whether crimes matter if no-one notices.

Last Words – Just go round the circle giving all a final chance to speak, or pass if they prefer.

**A teacher treating
you better
because they like
you.**

**A teacher treating
you better
because you are
like them.**

**A teacher treating
you worse
because they do
not like you.**

**A teacher treating
you worse
because you are
not like them.**