

The Escape

**A story for teaching issues of social
justice**

By Sue Phillips

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Three pounds from the sale of this book will go to the Nick Webber memorial trust for Malawi, The money will support the training of legal aid lawyers and further the cause of social justice

(This sample contains the contents, the introduction and an edited version of the first two chapters of the story. The literacy work on the issues for the children to work on have been omitted in this sample in order not to spoil the effect of the story. This means that you can experience the narrative just as the children do.)

Contents

Episode One : Survival

In which Ernest, a lawyer and his family escape from genocide in their own country

Class goes into role :Who will you be in the story ?

Issues to discuss:

How does it feel to be a refugee ?

Examples that could be used :Apartheid, The Holocaust, Rwanda and Bosnia

Episode Two :The Landing

In which Ernest discovers the refugees are being thrown overboard

Class in role: How do you feel, what will you do?

Issues to discuss:

Is it ever right to take a life?

Examples that could be used:

Churchill scuttling ships with the French troops still on board.

American pioneer woman smothers her baby to avoid discovery of her companions by Indians.

Episode Three: The Detention centre

In which Ernest discovers that the captain of the ship has betrayed them twice over.

Class in role. How would you feel ,do you think you have rights in this situation?

Issues to discuss

Human rights , what are they

Does every one have them

What rights do refugees have ?

Human trafficking

Brat camps, are rights being compromised?

Episode Four : Sophia

In which Ernest searches for his wife and child

Class in role: discuss should Sophia be rescued?

Issues to discuss

Utilitarianism, the greatest good for the greatest number

The rights of the disabled

Episode five: Verity

In which the plan to escape is hatched

Class in role: What would you do if you were Sophia ?

Issues to discuss

Is violence ever justified?

What it is like to be blind?

You may wish to read the next three episodes through in one lesson to keep up the pace and tension in the story ,before spending a lesson on the issues. Then read the next three episodes to the end.

Episode Six: Exodus

In which the refugees escape for a second time

Class in role: Would you take this risk?

Issues to discuss

Heroes.

Courage

Standing up for ones beliefs

Episode Seven: The Train

In which the refugees discover that all is not what it seems

Class in role: What do you think has happened ?

Episode Eight: The Light

In which Ernest discovers he has done a terrible thing

Class in role: Is Ernest responsible? Would you want to survive?

Issues to discuss

Weapons of mass destruction

Read the next three episodes right through to the end in one lesson.

Episode Nine: Survival

In which the group realise they may not survive

Class in role: how are you feeling? What are your concerns?

Episode Ten: The Castle of Fortune

In which the group reach a temporary place of safety

Class in role: how are you feeling in the castle?

Episode Eleven: Sophia's Story

In which Ernest finally learns what happened to his wife and child

Class in role: How do you feel about the future?

Issues to discuss

Is Verity just a normal child?

Is there a purpose behind the events.

Why did these people survive ?

Part Two, "The Journey" can follow on or be left for another year as part of a different course.

If the story is being used as part of PSHE and Citizenship the emphasis for the second part need not be on the Philosophy of Religion, but on whether there is a purpose to life ,whether events are random, whether there are supernatural events and why there is suffering in the world, the importance of hope and optimism in life.

Some schools have used the story in tutorial each week through out the year using the ten minute story to provoke discussion.

(The introduction and first two chapters of the story follow)

The Escape

Introduction

The idea for this story came from my wish to write a story to parallel the Exodus of Moses and the Jews from Egypt.

I had already written two successful concept building stories to introduce children to the ideas they would come across in their studies for the RE examination taken at sixteen, "**The Island**" and "**The Castle in the Clouds**" and had a very positive reaction to them both from other teachers who were using them in their schools.

One of them, "**The Island**", was included in the new Hampshire county religious education handbook. (This story is available in "**Making RE Make Sense**" pub by Tribal (www.sfe.co.uk) since then a third, "**Return to the Island**" has been added to create a trilogy.

The Island is a story about a group of people who were shipwrecked on an Island that did not exist, and from which they could never escape, on a journey from England to New York. Thrown back into a world without any of the trappings of modern civilisation the classes responded to all the situations that arose in the story, instinctively.

As they did so, they created rites of passage, moral rules, festivals, a holy book, and special place containing precious artefacts from the ship rescued before it finally rusted away into oblivion.

The special place became a centre of pilgrimage and the story ended five hundred years on with the community planning a special ceremony in a stone castle on a mountain to celebrate this important anniversary. A heated debate arose about whether the holy book should now be translated into modern island speak and whether the beautiful ball gowns and dinner jackets preserved from the ship wreck should no longer worn at special ceremonies. The island helped the children understand why members of religious traditions do the things they do – because they were just what they themselves instinctively chose to do. Religion was no

longer, as it often seemed to the children in my secular school, the strange and alien thing that *other* people do. The story of the Island made RE make sense.

“Return to the Island” is a new story that takes the children to the Island ten years on where various characters they met in the first story face moral issues which the class can debate (Available as an e book via njphillips@supanet.com)

A year later, in my lessons, the classes returned to the Island five thousand years on to find it in chaos. It was full of greed, racism, slavery and poverty. The Island has become an allegory for the earth. In this story called **“The Castle in the Clouds”** from **“Teaching Christianity with the Theatre of Learning”** published by Tribal (www.sfe.Co.uk) the children found themselves in role as the spirits of the first ones, on the Island, the elders and decide to send someone down to show the Islanders the right way to live as they had set out in the beginning. As the story progresses and the person is rejected and killed the children begin to understand why the story of Jesus is as it is, and most importantly, the concepts of incarnation and atonement make sense.

The Island was so successful that we decided, as many schools were doing, to move it into our first year, year seven to introduce our eleven year olds to the concepts of religion. This meant I was looking for a new story to begin the examination course in year ten on Judaism.

The Escape

As soon as I had begun to work on a story to parallel the Exodus I realised that it could have a much wider application and it developed into the two part story you have here. **“The Escape”**, where a group of refugees escape from genocide in their own country. In the course of their adventures many moral issues are raised for the children to discuss, motivated by the intensity of the story into which they enter.

In the second part, **“The Journey”**, having undergone a second escape, the refugees find their way home giving rise to the philosophical and ultimate questions that are so important in RE.

The central character is **Ernest**, whose name is a play on words, like the names of all the chief characters. There is **Verity**, his wife,

her name means truth and **Sophia**, his daughter, whose name means wisdom. Ernest is escaping from genocide in his own country with his wife and child on one of three boats with 1500 other people.

The sufferings of the journey and the shocking and unexpected events they face when they arrive at their destination gave us a springboard for looking at all kinds of moral issues.

The story was intended to last just three lessons, providing a ten minute introduction to lessons about refugees, genocide and asylum seekers but it acquired a life of its own and developed into a term's work. What you have here are the separate episodes of the story. At the beginning of the chapter there are indications of the issues that we used it to explore.

There are supernatural hints in the story which allow the teacher to use it to explore religious as well as moral issues. Ernest does have a certain affinity with Abraham and Moses, both of whom who faced temptation and moral dilemmas. The story offers scope for asking whether God is looking after this family. It allows one to explore the problem of evil and even the miraculous. We used the story to help pupils empathise with and understand the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, some of whom we had, not only in the school, but in the class. Interestingly one of these was the only one who guessed what was happening to the refugees when they were taken up for air on the boat.

We took articles from the press, with current real life examples, to look at the serious issue of trafficking into sexual slavery prevalent in Europe at the moment, especially in Eastern Europe where economic depression has followed war.

We looked at Tranquility Bay, another article in the press, about a school in Jamaica where the children of rich Americans were sent for re training as good children. These examples allowed pupils to empathise with the treatment of asylum seekers in detention centres and to consider the whole issues of human rights . Do refugees have rights too ? It enabled us to confront the pupils with their prejudices as we showed them how the refugees benefit our economy by 2.4 billion pounds a year.

These articles were later included in lesson recipes in “Teaching Tolerance” and “Teaching Human Rights”. These two resource files for teachers, which I wrote with my husband, Neil, were the result of thinking about and teaching the issues discussed in these lessons. They were published by Tribal/ SfE in 2007 and 2008 (www.sfe.co.uk)

A term later the attitude of our pupils to the deportation by the British government of refugees who are reaching the age of 18 was been gratifying. We put a huge display in the corridor about these children and the schools who campaigned for their release. We wrote an article for the pupils’ new citizenship magazine. Their writing and comments during the process showed a growing awareness, understanding and sympathy, one child asking for a congress to be called to address the situation properly within the European community. Now it is an important part of our work on tolerance helping our pupils come to terms with and see the benefits to our society of the Eastern European economic migrants. This is an issue that has arisen since “The Escape” was written during 2003/4 and the “The journey” in 2004/5. Our pupils struggle with it.

No doubt , whenever we tell this story, we will illustrate it with different issues , whatever is topical at the moment, using the sympathy for the characters in the story, with which they identify ,to help them care about the real characters in the news items we look at.

In a sense, the story ends only part way through. The ending is appropriate, it has served its purpose and could stop there but the second part “**The journey** “ takes the refugees towards home - their Exodus – across a devastated landscape. During their eventful journey they will be guided by a supernatural figure and a series of events which will enable the pupils to consider the existence of God, the validity of religious experience and miracles, the problem of evil, life after death and as Ernest nears his Promised Land what kind of world they, the pupils, really want to live in – and that is why we have not drawn out the religious significance of what happens to Ernest and his family. I hope that you enjoy it and that it provides an engaging tool for you to use, reading (which I do) or telling in your own words, to inspire your classes to think, reflect, empathise and ultimately to care.

Episode one: Ernest

My name is Ernest. I am 43. I have become your leader in a way. We are a group of refugees who have escaped from genocide in our own country. We are a mixed group; doctors, scientists, teachers, mechanics, nurses, shopkeepers and lawyers like myself. Some of us were wealthy in our old life. We had never known a days hunger or been cold or thirsty or terrified. When I think of what we took for granted then... Like I said, I was a lawyer then, I was used to standing up in court speaking up for people, and I know the law, so people kind of looked up to me, expected me to take charge. I lost my wife and my child on that terrible journey.

Why don't you introduce yourselves , who are you, what did you do in your old life and who did you leave behind ?

(pupils could introduce their own character in a round – are they themselves ? are they elderly or a child , perhaps)

We came here by boat. There were 1500 of us, who left in three boats. We gave our last pennies to get away. They were able to ask whatever they wanted . We were so desperate. If we stayed behind we would have been killed, raped, tortured. After the invasion it was decreed that not one of us should be left alive. We didn't know that of course . It had to be secret to stop the rest of the world from protesting. They began by taking the children. They would be late home from school. Parents would wait and worry . They would call the police, all the details would be taken, but nothing happened.

It was the *police* who had taken the children. That's why it was so easy. Everyone knows you shouldn't talk to strangers, but the Police, well, they are different, if a policeman tells you to come with them, or to get into their car ...it took us while to work it out. Boys would disappear on their way home from football or rugby. Even Toddlers disappeared with their nannies and minders. It was when we realised that we decided to escape

The journey was a nightmare. We were packed in so tightly, Five days it was supposed to take. We were hidden below decks in the

hold that was designed to take cargo. They packed in far more than they should to make more money. We were told to bring our own food. They gave us water but there was not enough and only one toilet at each end. The heat was stifling there was no window, only the opening where the stairs came down from the upper decks. You don't bother with windows when all you are carrying are containers.

We had to stay out of sight unless we were spotted. Lots of people were sea sick, the stench was appalling. People were slipping over in the vomit. My wife had it badly. She said she wished she had stayed behind to die quickly. Our baby was sick, too. She was eighteen months old. She cried with thirst. On the third night, my wife was very weak, the baby cried all the time. She was too weak to cry loudly, just a piteous, grizzling sound of sheer misery.

One of the crew came down. He beckoned to the people who were most sick and invited them to come up on deck in the fresh air. My wife and the baby were chosen. That was the last I saw of them. Over the next two nights more and more went up on deck. They did not come back. I spoke to some of the others who were still strong. After they came for others we crept up and saw what they were doing. They were gagging them, binding their hands and feet and throwing them overboard. There would be no cargo to have to smuggle ashore.

Diary account - What happened in today's lesson ?

Discussion : Who are you ? Invite each pupil to describe who they are and who they are with. How are they feeling?

How must it feel to be a refugee?

How did it feel to be in the less

Episode Two: The Landing

The story continues

I cannot begin to describe to you how I felt when I saw what was going on. In that moment when I saw people I knew, struggling, as they were being thrown overboard, I realised what had happened to my wife and child. I could not bear to think about how they died. Their terror and their innocence. The anger, grief,

despair it almost overwhelmed me. I controlled myself and crept downstairs, I needed time to think. I and the others were not sick .I guessed they would leave us alone. I was worried, though

What about the other boats ? There were three ships. Was it the same on all the others ?

What should we do ?

The group discuss in role :The issue is about killing the captain and the crew, it would be interesting to discuss whether killing the crew is justified. Is murder the right response to murder? What about the other ships. Should they warn them ? how ? Should they wait until the killing starts or take over the other ships first ? would killing the captain and his crew be justified when they may not have committed a murder .

Ernest is a bit like Moses in a way. Moses was a murderer, he killed an Egyptian taskmaster for beating a Hebrew slave, he had to run away from Egypt because of it.

Thousands of Egyptians died so that the Hebrews could be free, all the firstborn died when the angel of death passed over, more died when the chariots chased after the Hebrews as they crossed the red sea.

Let's see what happens

I was wrong. At the time I did not realise that I had been seen. They knew I had found out what they were doing. I was taken and blindfolded and shoved down some stairs. It was a black hole, deep in the hull of the ship. It was bitterly cold, the walls were running with water. I could smell the rust. I shivered. I did not know where I was and then I remembered. I groped in the pocket of my cargoes and found my phone. The battery was low . The signal was faint. I sent a text to a friend on one of the other ships. I told him to take control while they could. I turned the phone off. I missed the light. It was a spark of comfort in the dark. The metal hull creaked. Water dripped. I shivered in the icy, cold depths. Time passed.

The hatch opened, a black shape peered down. It called my name. When I clambered back up on deck it was night. I could

see the black shape of the other two boats through the mist. Beyond them was the dim outline of the coast.

Ask the class, in role, what have they done ? how are they feeling?

We had to get ready to land. Searchlights played out to sea from the shore, sweeping back and forth, watching for us, waiting to catch us and send us back, back to certain death. We had to make it to shore undetected.

What do the group think we should do ?

I had a plan. We have to get everyone to shore in the lifeboats , but we cannot afford to be seen rowing them. We will be shot. If we get everyone to lie down and cover them with tarpaulins, they will look like fishing boats moored on the sea. Those of us who are strong enough will have to jump in after the boats and swim to the shore towing the boats with the elderly and the children in . Who will volunteer to help drag them to shore with me?

Who will be in the boat and who will be swimming ? How are you feeling ? What do you think might happen?

I ordered everyone into the lifeboats. We pulled the tarpaulins over everyone, leaving just enough so they could breathe, we lowered the boats with winches onto the sea. Once they were floating we jumped in after them. We swam round to the front of the boats and took hold of the mooring ropes. Several of us holding on every metre or so and we began to swim. It was hard. We were exhausted. It was bitterly cold. Every time the searchlight came near we took a breath and went under the water for a count of five. We moved very slowly toward the shore. Every twenty minutes we stopped and trod water, trying to save our energy. Tom was next to me. I could hear his asthma was bad, he was wheezing badly. I shouted to him to get into the boat . He shook his head. He looked at me for a moment a curious look in his eyes.

A wave came and knocked me side ways. I almost lost my grip on the rope, as I recovered I saw the place next to me on the line was empty. Tom was gone.

What had he decided to do and why ?

I shook my head and spat out the water choking my lungs . The search light swept over my head. I didn't duck in time. Machine gun fire broke out all around us. The children under the tarpaulins screamed.

Within moments the beach was full of armed guards. They stopped firing. We had no choice but to go forward towards the barrels of their guns . Why weren't they firing ?....and then it dawned on me, they were *waiting* for us..... it was a trap.

So this is why I had been kept alive. Those of us who were fit and healthy were *expected*. The Captain had been paid twice, once by us and once by these men who were now running into the surf to help us drag the boats to shore while others held the machine guns on us. But what shore was it ? Where had we been brought? Why were we here?

Plenary : What do the group think is going on ? How do the class feel?