

‘The Memory Box’: Film and Teaching Pack on Family Reunification for primary schools (Ages 10-12)

‘The Memory Box’ is a 6-minute animated film produced by Siobhán Twomey of the Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS) at the Dublin Institute of Technology. The film won first prize in the Irish-produced shorts category at the ‘Stranger than Fiction Documentary Film Festival’ in Dublin in September 2007. It tells the story of Abbi, a young Nigerian schoolgirl who lives in Dublin with her mother Lillian. Abbi, along with her classmates, has created a ‘memory box’ containing treasured mementoes of key events of her time at primary school. She wants to send the box to her father in Nigeria because he has been refused a visa to visit Ireland for Abbi’s graduation from primary school. Through Abbi’s eyes we experience the obstacles facing migrants in Ireland wanting to be reunited with family members who are still overseas.

As far as primary teachers are concerned, the strength of this short film is that it comes with a teaching pack which has been designed and written by two practising teachers, Liz Morris and Niamh McGuirk. The pack consists of a rich and comprehensive set of lesson materials in an easy-to-access format which will be of great use in the classroom.

The pack has three sections:

1. Extensive background information for teachers including curriculum links, along with a very useful section containing a detailed list of books and resources, weblinks and related organisations.
2. The second section consists of practical lesson ideas under a number of headings, each corresponding to key frames from the animated film: Homes / Homelessness, Family, Family Reunification, Diversity in the Classroom, Historical Perspective on Movement in and out of Ireland, The Memory Box / Graduation Ceremony.
3. The third part of the pack contains teaching suggestions on integrated topics from the animated film, such as: Communications, Visas and Passports, Transport, Cityscapes, Cultural Diversity, and a brief ‘country focus’ on Nigeria.

With such a wide range of topics, the pack is a treasure trove of suggestions and ideas for the classroom. It also includes a set of helpful guidelines on the appropriate use of visual images of different cultures and ethnicities with children, something which is particularly timely given the accessibility of imagery through the internet, as well as the wide-range of 'locality' teaching packs which are now available to schools.

Teachers will find that 'The Memory Box' contains child-friendly and teacher-friendly material on subjects which are of critical importance in Ireland today, including on its central theme of family reunification. The postscript of the film itself states that there are thousands of immigrants living and working in Ireland whose family members are not allowed to visit, let alone stay. In October 2007, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Dr John Neill, highlighted the plight of families living in this country who have been separated from a family member who remains overseas, and called for legislative change on the issue.

While this animated film brings the topic to light in a way that will engage children's interest, the accompanying pack will ensure that teachers can develop the related themes in a constructive and practical way in a series of follow-on lessons.

'The Memory Box' is a refreshing new resource in a medium sure to grasp children's attention. It will be a welcome addition to every teacher's portfolio of materials for intercultural education in the primary school classroom.

The pack can be obtained from FOMACS at DIT by contacting Maeve Burke on maeve.burke.fomacs@dit.ie

Reviewed by Barbara O'Toole, Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education