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# THINKING DIFFERENTLY

Race & Identity in the  
Classroom

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with  
AUTOGRAPH



Although they seem to invoke an origin in an historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are ... in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.

Stuart Hall, *Questions of Identity*, 1996

These images can be locked away somewhere and held by someone who doesn't think it's important. As soon as you bring them out, it touches you.

Participant response to Autograph archive display

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.

bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, 2003



# What is the inequality you're challenging?

Autograph commissions and collects photographic material that explores issues of identity, race, representation, human rights and social justice. It's a growing collection – a living archive built up over 30 years and continuing today. We have approximately 5,000 prints, 10,000+ negatives, 5,000 slides, archive film and more. The oldest photographs date back to the nineteenth century and show us missing histories and narratives of Black presences. Many of the photographers we represent have been overlooked by other institutions in the UK.

We use this collection of photographic material to challenge and decolonise the lack of representation in visual culture and education of the diverse, multicultural history of Britain. We use the collection to reflect the diverse classrooms and communities we teach in, where pupils of colour or from marginalised backgrounds can feel alienated from the curricula they are taught. We use the collection to promote visual literacy and critical thinking so that students can engage with complex and sensitive social issues of identity and representation. We use the collection to promote the power of photography as a tool for creative learning, self-expression and inclusive practice within the classroom.

# Thinking Differently



➤ Autograph Archive. Courtesy of Autograph, London

This activity can be facilitated by a teacher or educator with a group of pupils or participants using this image *Brother can you spare some change? Sandringham Road, Dennis Morris, 1976*, which you can find using this QR code.



Ask the group:



Imagine Morris' photograph is on the front page of a newspaper. What do you think the headline would be? Where and when do you think the image was taken?



People can individually write answers down or work in pairs or small groups to discuss.



Facilitate a group discussion sharing responses to the images and how this relates to issues of representation and identity.

This activity can be adapted for most age groups but I've found it works best from Year 3 upwards.

## Ideas to extend



Give your group a photocopy of the image and ask them to create a whole newspaper front page, article or story using the image. They could research the historical context and reflect on the experiences of Black and migrant communities in Britain at the time. They could test their journalistic skills and write a piece about how the present relates to this history.



Set a creative writing task where they imagine the experience of the boy in the image.



Ask the group to consider what other stories might appear next to this image. They might consider the design of the newspaper and how different types of media use visual language to communicate their editorial or political line.



Ask the group to consider how this image would appear on social media and what responses it might elicit.

### Notes for educators

- \* This activity uses a photograph to elicit critical discussion with pupils around complex and sensitive issues including identity, representation, media, stereotype, culture, heritage, inequality, social justice and human rights.
- \* Pupils may make problematic assumptions that the photograph depicts 'Africa' or an 'African child' or a 'warzone' such as 'Iraq' or 'Syria'. This is an important part of the learning and educators should allow the group to air a range of opinions before revealing the true context of the photograph.
- \* The image depicts a Black British child in Hackney and the desolate background is in fact slum clearances taking place in the area. The following quote is from the artist Dennis Morris and can be used to give further context to the image and history it documents:  
*'Many houses were being pulled down and, with them, the community. The houses were replaced by flats; it was a new era.'* Dennis Morris, 'Neighbourhood', in Morris, 2012, p.74.
- \* Use the discussion to help pupils think critically about why they assumed the image depicted Africa or a warzone or was simply 'not Britain'. The following questions may be helpful:
  - \* Where do you typically see these kinds of images or representations of Black children? (For example, charity advertisements, newspaper stories).
  - \* What are the effects or impacts in society when Blackness is associated with poverty, war etc?
  - \* How do you think this impacts on the self-image and emotional wellbeing of Black children?
  - \* How can we think differently about such images in the future?

**Ali Eisa** is an artist and educator based in London. He was previously the Learning & Participation Manager at Autograph (2015-2023) and has over 15 years experience in arts education, community and youth work, facilitating participatory arts projects exploring human rights and access for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Ali is co-founder of Lloyd Corporation, a collaborative project with artist Sebastian Lloyd Rees. He's a lecturer in BA Fine Art at Goldsmiths University and facilitator for A Particular Reality, a collective of students, alumni and educators exploring anti-racist practice and participatory research based on values of equity and care.

## Autograph's Learning Programme

For 35 years we have engaged with schools and community groups to co-develop free resources, activities, workshops and teachers' sessions that address gaps in representation within the curriculum. We aim to help educators build confidence in teaching complex histories and enrich people's understanding of the intersections of race, visual culture and individual identity. Drawing on our unique photographic collection, we have developed a range of educational resources that support 'decolonising' efforts in education including the *Archive Learning Resource: Diverse Britain*, *Exhibition in a Box: Black Chronicles* and more recently *Seeing Differently: Learning Together Through Photography*.

**AUT  GRAPH**



For further information, resources and full colour versions of images, please visit Cubitt's website: [cubittartists.org.uk/11-x-11-resource](http://cubittartists.org.uk/11-x-11-resource)

