

Storykit - injustice, race inequality

Race to the Frozen North, the Matthew Henson story by Catherine Johnson



Summary

The true story of black arctic explorer Matthew Henson, who got written out of history. Driven from his home at a young age, young Matthew embarks on his first adventure seeking safety and a new life. He finds care and work and stories of a life at sea that inspire and excite him. Matthew sets off on a life of adventure and discovery in parts of the world few have ventured before. Along the way he experiences extreme hardship and inequality but also friendship and kindness from unexpected places. His final adventure to a place never explored before shows Matthew how cruel and prejudiced people can be.

Theme: Injustice, race, inequality,

Additional themes: Exploration and age of discovery, child labour, Black Lives Matter

Recommended age range: Yrs. 5-8 (KS2-KS3)


Orientation

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/adventure-blog/2014/02/28/the-legacy-of-arctic-explorer-matthew-henson/>

<https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Matthew-Henson/399967>

<https://www.coolkidfacts.com/matthew-henson-facts/>

Activities	Empathy skills practised	Learning approaches
Read the novel with the class over a few sessions, having explained that reading stories can help develop our empathy skills - by introducing us to people with	Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other	Story sharing

<p>very different experiences from our own. You may want to point out that Matt refers to himself as “coloured” and explain that this is a term with negative associations that we would not use now.</p> <p>http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/30999175/warning-why-using-the-term-coloured-is-offensive</p>	<p>people’s perspectives and feelings</p>	
<p>‘Spend a day in my Shoes’- on-going activity through the book.</p> <p>Ask pupils to each draw a large outline of a boot – similar to the one below.</p> <p>Ask them to keep track of their thoughts as you read the story – can they imagine being in Matthew’s shoes? They should write their thoughts and feelings on their boot drawing whenever they experience feelings of empathy for Matthew. For example in the first chapter after he is forced to leave his home, a pupil might write in the boot <i>‘Matthew must have been terrified leaving his home, he was so young and alone in the world and to not know where he was going. I can feel how brave he must have had to be to make this decision.’</i></p> 	<p>Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other people’s perspectives and feelings</p>	<p>Art and Design</p>
<p>Empathy Map - on-going activity.</p> <p>Give each pupil an empathy map with the sections- Hearing, Thinking, Seeing, Saying, Doing and Feeling. (See Appendix 1). Encourage pupils to add to the list when they read about these things happening to Matthew.</p> <p>For example, in Janey’s kitchen Matthew sees kind people willing to help him out. He hears stories of old sailors that make him want to go to sea, he feels relieved when Captain Childs smiles at him.</p>	<p>Wider vocabulary to recognise and share own and explain others’ feelings</p>	<p>(Example of map attached)</p> <p>Listening</p>
<p>Letter writing</p>	<p>Stronger ability to imagine, understand</p>	<p>First person creative writing</p>

<p>Ask pupils to imagine they are Matthew. And as him, to write a letter to his sister telling her of his achievements and how he feels about his experiences.</p> <p>Imagine how Matthew would explain to his sister what he has seen felt and experienced through his life. What would he want to ask his sister?</p>	<p>and reflect on other people’s perspectives and feelings</p>	
<p>Visualisation task Read chapter 9 and ask the pupils to listen to the words and imagine they are Matthew. They should think about everything going on around him in these harsh and difficult conditions. Read the chapter for a second time and allow the pupils to draw what they are hearing, imagining they are Matthew. What is going on around him? How is he feeling, what is he thinking?</p>	<p>Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other people’s perspectives and feelings</p>	<p>Listening and responding in picture format</p>
<p>Diary entry Read chapter 10. Then ask pupils to write a diary entry as Matthew, sharing thoughts and feelings through a day in his life in these extreme conditions. Remind them to reflect carefully in describing how they (as Matthew) feel about what is happening around them.</p>	<p>Wider vocabulary to recognise and share own and others’ feelings</p>	<p>First person creative writing</p>
<p>Exploring prejudice Print the following quotes in large readable type onto A4 or A3 paper (one quote per piece of paper). Pin them around the classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I didn’t like it when people called me “boy” – I was twenty-one - wasn’t I a man? But I said nothing. There was no point.”</i> • <i>“Life for a coloured man in the United States of America was never easy. Back home the sort of jobs I could get were dull and badly paid: delivery boy, errand boy, shop assistant.”</i> • <i>“Life on the ice was different. People respected me there.”</i> • <i>“Who wouldn’t choose adventure and excitement over a life at home that was hard and unfair?”</i> • <i>“I know you’re used to hardship, to struggle. You work as hard as three men. I need someone like you, Matt.”</i> 	<p>Wider vocabulary to recognise and share own and others’ feelings</p> <p>Stronger empathic communication skills: deep listening and conversation</p>	<p>Personal reflection and group discussion</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“A coloured man, an orphan beaten and homeless, with no money in his pocket and no shoes on his feet, working since the age of eleven.”</i> <p>Ask each pupil to read them all and then stand by the quote which resonates most strongly with them. There are no right or wrong answers. Ask them to talk about the quote with anyone else who has chosen the same one. Then to share their thoughts/emotions about the quote with the whole class.</p>		
<p>Exploring Matthew’s feelings in more depth <i>“I froze. A white man had just put out his hand to shake mine. A ship’s captain. Was it a trick? Would he swing me up and into the water quick as a blink?”</i> Page 43</p> <p>Display this section on the white board or on paper. In pairs, ask pupils to discuss what they think this quote means and then their reaction to it. Ask them to jot thoughts down, thinking about how Matthew must have been feeling at that moment and what it must have been like to be him. What must he have seen in his past to make him think this way? Ask the pupils to share thoughts and ideas with another pair. Are they similar? Do they think this happens today?</p>	<p>Stronger empathic communication skills: deep listening and conversation</p> <p>More developed social values which turn feelings of empathy into moral actions in the home, school, and community</p>	<p>Paired, group discussion. Jot ideas down on a mind map to share.</p>
<p>Discussion about injustice Matthew’s great achievement was ignored by the American media because of the colour of his skin. He says, <i>“There were still a lot of people in the United States of America who thought we coloured folk didn’t count. They thought a man like me wouldn’t survive a journey to the pole. That I couldn’t know how to drive dogs or survive intense cold.”</i></p> <p>Ask the class to discuss this. How must Matthew have felt not to have his great achievements recognised? You could relate it to the Black Lives Matter movement and experiences witnessed around the world.</p>	<p>More developed social values which turn feelings of empathy into moral actions in the home, school, and community</p> <p>Stronger empathic communication skills: deep listening and conversation</p>	<p>Speaking and listening Group discussion</p> <p>Research</p>
<p>Character Twins In small groups, pupils make a poster with an image of Matthew Henson and a character from another story they have read who they think has experienced similar</p>	<p>Wider vocabulary to recognise and share own and others’ feelings</p>	<p>Research for image of Matthew Henson and other book character</p>



<p>things. It could be prejudice, hardship, cruelty at home, hard work. Ask pupils to write empathetic vocabulary on the poster to link the two characters.</p>		
<p>Social Action: Rewrite History In small groups, pupils create newspaper headlines or TV news bulletins reporting on and celebrating Matthew's expedition. This can be done in pairs as role play, one person being an interviewer and one being Matthew.</p> <p>Invite the class to create a Charter to treat everyone in the class equally and fairly.</p>	<p>More developed social values which turn feelings of empathy into moral actions in the home, school, and community</p>	<p>Drama, Creative writing, and persuasive writing</p>

Books which touch on similar issues (fiction and non-fiction)

Title	Author	Publisher	Age group
The Hypnotist	Laurence Anholt	Penguin Random House	12+
Noughts and Crosses	Malorie Blackman	Penguin Random House	13+
Maya Angelou - Little Guides to Great Lives	Danielle Jawando	Laurence King Publishing	7-10
Rosa Parks (Little People Big Dreams)	Lisbeth Kaiser	Lincoln Children's Books	7-10
Stories for South Asian Super Girls	Raj Kaur Khaira	Kashi House	11-14
How High the Moon	Karyn Parsons	Puffin	9-12
Mary Seacole and the Crimean War	Sarah Ridley	Franklin Watts	7-10
The Lies We Tell Ourselves	Robin Talley	Harper Collins	13+
Martin Luther King Jnr (Little People Big Dreams)	Maria Isabel Sanchez Vegara	Lincoln Children's Books	7-10
Watch us rise	Renée Watson	Bloomsbury	12+

A note about Storykits

Empathy Storykits focus on specific stories. They allow children to build practice empathy through character-focused activities. The text is used as a springboard for discussion, activities, and social action.

Teaching children about empathy

In teaching children about empathy, it is important to understand the three different elements to develop the right teaching strategies.

- Affective - the feeling part of empathy. This is where we literally resonate with someone else's feelings, for example feeling upset when someone else is upset. We do this automatically, and very early in life - babies often cry when another baby cries. Since this happens naturally and automatically, we need to help children recognise that it is happening, and help them identify and name the empathetic emotions they are feeling.*
- Cognitive - the thinking part of empathy. This is where we use our reason and imagination to work out how someone else feels as well as understand why they might feel that way (done through perspective taking). We need to give children space and support to use their reason and imagination to try to work out how someone might be thinking and feeling, and why. Giving them the opportunity and encouragement to reflect through the safe distance of literature is a great way to do this.*
- Empathic concern - the acting part of empathy. Often described as empathic concern, this is where we are motivated to act as a result of our understanding. Research shows this plays a key role in our sense of social justice, and is a powerful motivator for wanting to help someone else, a force for social change. We need to encourage children to put their feelings of empathy into action and grow as active citizens, who've really worked out what kind of help to give, based on a deep empathic understanding.*



In order to help children explore all three elements of empathy, Empathy storykits include activities which encourage children to use the following empathy skills:

- Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other people's perspectives and feelings
- Wider vocabulary to recognise and share own and others' feelings

- Stronger empathic communication skills: deep listening and conversation
- More developed social values which turn feelings of empathy into moral actions in the home, school, and community

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Appendix 1 Empathy Map

