

Coming to England By Floella Benjamin

In 1960, Floella Benjamin moved from Trinidad to England.

Her touching and atmospheric account first describes her idyllic childhood in hot, colourful Trinidad: her happy family life, the delicious exotic foods and dramatic carnivals.

But everything falls apart when her father decides that they should move to the UK. Her parents and younger siblings travel first, and Floella, her sister and two brothers are sent to live with foster parents who treat them like servants. After a miserable fifteen months, their parents send for them and they look forward to a blissful reunion and being welcomed by the people of the Motherland, which is what they were told Britain was. However, they are shocked to find the whole family has to live in one room, endure dreadful weather and great hostility and racism. Floella and her siblings are stared at and spat at, and few can understand their accent. Gradually though, things improve, both in the weather and their family circumstances, and Floella ends her memoir with a positive and determined view of her future in Britain.

- **Group discussion:** Ask the children in groups to discuss what 'home' and 'identity' means to them. Encourage them to think about people and events as well as places and things. Afterwards, ask them to create a personal list of the six things, people or celebrations that are most important to them and that represent their world.
- **Descriptive language:** Ask the children to work in pairs to capture descriptive language from *Coming to England*. Tell them to divide a piece of paper in two and write descriptive noun phrases associated with Trinidad on one half and descriptive phrases for England on the other.
- **Expressing empathy and feelings:** Ask the children to verbally share their feelings about a new experience, for example: starting a new school, a new club, moving house, staying away from home for the first time. Ask them to try to articulate their various emotions. Encourage any child who has experienced living in another country to share their experiences and then discuss how others might support those who are experiencing new situations.
- **Summarizing ideas:** Help the children to investigate current migration stories. Encourage them to ask questions about why people might move country and discuss what the positive outcomes might be. Tell them to take notes and present one or two of the facts that they find out.
- **Selecting appropriate forms:** Recap on information learned about migration and ask why people become refugees (due to war or famine, for example) and why people might need to leave their country en masse. Learn about refugee camps – perhaps in Jordan, Tanzania, or Calais, France.
- Carry out a **charity event** to raise money for a refugee charity. Create posters and leaflets to persuade people to donate items or money.
- **Role play:** Organize the children into groups and give each child one of the character cards from the 'On the Move' section supplied with these notes. Ask them to make up a backstory for their character before taking the hot seat and answering their group members' questions.
- **Writing narratives:** Give each child one of the character cards and ask them to write a fictional account of leaving their country, travelling and arriving somewhere new. Challenge them to use noun phrases to capture details and atmosphere. Provide them with copies of 'My Journey' for their planning.
- **Asking relevant questions:** Give each child a copy of 'My Journey', the interview sheet supplied with this pack, and ask them to interview someone they know who has moved country.



Guided reading notes

Session 1: Chapters 1 to 5

Challenge the children in pairs to find examples of their favourite descriptive language from this section (for example: 'spicy marinated mangoes', 'busy, bustling market', 'the juice often dribbled down our faces onto our necks'). Suggest they look for phrases that describe the market, the food Marmie cooks, the cakes, the melon accident, making ice cream, the carnival, and so on. Ask them to use their own words to summarize this section. Ask:

- Why is food described in such detail? (It's intrinsic to Floella's memories of Trinidad.) What foods are important to you? Apart from food, what other aspect of Trinidadian life are described? (School, church, family.) Talk about each of these in turn. What is most important to Floella? (Family.)

Session 2: Chapters 6 to 9

This is the climax of the story as the children transition from idyll to despair. Together, track the build-up: first intimation from her father; her mother agrees but says she won't leave the children; the children are left in dire circumstances; the journey, the dramatic arrival and reunion. Ask:

- What is Floella's greatest fear? (To be separated from her mother.) How do Floella and her siblings feel on the ship? (Liberated and free; excited.) Why do they dress so smartly for their arrival in Southampton? (They have a tradition of dressing smartly, they feel it is an event; they believe they will be greeted with enthusiasm by the people of Britain.)

Session 3: Chapters 10 to 12

After the build-up and anticipation, the disappointment for Floella outlined in these chapters is heartbreaking. Ask the children to outline the different overwhelming and upsetting experiences Floella goes through – distinguishing between the two emotions. Ask:

- Why do people stare at Floella and her sister? (Because of the colour of their skin.) How does England compare to Trinidad? (Share and compare details about Trinidad from Chapters 1 to 7 and about England from Chapters 9 to 15.) What happens at school? (Floella is bullied but she learns to stand up for herself.) What positive experiences does Floella have? (Snow, Spring.) How did her experiences compare to her expectations? (She had expected to be treated like a princess and was disappointed when this didn't happen.)

Session 4: Chapters 13 to 15

Sensitively discuss the racism that Floella and her family are subjected to. Ask:

- Why were the British people so hostile to the immigrants from Trinidad? Why do you think some people still feel negative about people coming to settle in Britain from other countries?

Discuss the end of the book. Ask:

- How do things begin to improve for Floella? What does her mother do? What does she herself learn that helps her?

Discuss Floella and her siblings' success in England. Ask:

- Was Floella's father right to move his family to England? Was it worth it?



On the Move

Imagine you are one of these characters.

Make up a backstory for yourself. Use your ideas to fill in the chart 'My Journey'. Carry out some research if possible.

Onesimus, aged 24:

I moved from Kenya to go to university in England. After university I couldn't find a job back in Kenya, but I did find a job in Sheffield, where I live now.

Ramah, aged 28:

I moved to England from South India to get married. I'd only met my husband once before the journey!

Hassan, aged 10:

We had to leave our home in Syria because of the war. We are safe in England now, but I am homesick and I am worried about my granny and grandpa, who still live in Aleppo.

Aliah, aged 8:

My family was not safe in Afghanistan so we paid a lot of money to travel to Turkey. From Turkey we travelled in a small boat across the sea to Greece. It was terrifying.

Josh, aged 11:

My Dad got a job in Shanghai and we moved from England to China for three years. I went to an international school with children from all over the world.

Agnieszka, aged 9:

My mother and I moved from Poland to Scotland. I miss my friends, but there is another Polish girl in my class and we have become friends.



My Journey

Use this interview sheet to:

- Interview someone you know who has moved country.
- Create a backstory for one of the characters from 'On the Move'.

Name.	
What country have you travelled from?	
Describe your life in your home country.	
Why did you leave your home country?	
Where did you travel to?	
Describe the journey.	
What was it like when you first arrived?	
Where did you live?	
How did you feel?	
Did you go to school or have a job?	
What did you miss about your home country?	
How did people treat you?	
Were you happy in your new country?	



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