



# **World Words**

## **Be Near Me**

Andrew O'Hagan

# Teacher's Notes

### **The Extract**

This extract from Andrew O'Hagan's novel, *Be Near Me*, is centred around a boat trip that the narrator – a priest – is taking with two young parishioners of his. Mark, a 15 year old boy, is recalling a football match that – temporarily – seemed to bring him a little closer to his father. The boat trip itself seems to cast a magical spell on the trio. Will they be the same afterwards?

### **Method**

It is important that the students do some creative thinking before they engage with the text, either by listening or by reading. Use the Pre-listening 1 activity first. As the text will be heard as part of a longer broadcast, prepare students for the interview part as well before they listen to it – Pre-Listening Activity 2.

When they have had the opportunity to explore the theme of the text and have contributed some of their own ideas, then they are ready to listen. There is no 'best' way to do this, but the authors would suggest the following method:

1. Students listen to the whole broadcast, checking their activity 2 charts while doing so. Ask them to recall, orally, any words or phrases from the extract after the listening has finished. Write these on the board.
2. Use the words on the board to orally reconstruct the story, as a class activity.
3. Hand out the text and read through. Interrupt with questions if appropriate.
4. Allow the students to listen again, this time with the text in front of them.

Now the students are ready to move onto the final part of the activities. These consist of following through ideas or themes.

## Pre-listening Activities 1

The two **imagine** questions are aimed at getting the students to think about how people within communities organise themselves, and how they relate to the people around them. The idea is for the students to become sensitized to how communities gain identity. The story extract they are going to listen to uses sport as a unifying element within a community, in particular football, but any element will do to create the same thinking process. Allow students time to think themselves, perhaps making a list (3 minutes) then working in small groups to share ideas (5 minutes) and then a whole class sharing activity (5 minutes).

The sport being referred to is football. Clues:

*fans* (any sport)

*terraces* (games where large numbers of fans congregate, especially football)

*songs* (common on football terraces, more than any other game)

*free kick* (common penalty award in football)

*blootered* (slang jargon - to kick very hard; common expression in football)

*the wall* (defensive wall in front of goal when a free kick is given)

*goal*

## Pre-listening Activities 2

1. Give students the second pre-listening activity. Ask them to read through the quotations from the radio broadcast and decide who is saying what - writer or student. Then they must choose which category the quotation comes from and to write the appropriate letter in the appropriate square (see answer key below). They then listen to the broadcast to check their answers. The listening activity will have been made easier by this process of identification first.

- a. "The language he uses, the way the words are accented - the English don't talk like this."
- b. "He explains the way that the players played in detail. If you're not a fan of football you won't know all this."
- c. "There's a lot of tribal competition going on in this extract too."
- d. "Blooted...is also used, as here, to describe kicking the ball so hard that it seems to be out of control but actually it is going to hit its target."
- e. "For me something magical happens on this journey. The children get to see Scotland as they have never seen it before."
- f. "This just goes to show that maybe he and his father are not that close and because of soccer and the team they support, maybe this can bring them together."
- g. "They had transformed themselves by this journey. They would never live as they had lived before."

- h. "There's also a difference between Father David - the rather middle class story teller - and the children who come from a background that's much more deprived."
- i. "I have lots of brothers, each of whom is a fan of Celtic Football Club so I had to talk to them to remind myself about their great love of the game."
- j. "I've always been interested in relationships overall and I wanted this book to address not only what it was like in Mark's family ..."
- k. "The schoolchildren's way of talking is very much the way I spoke when I was a kid myself."
- l. "One of the things that happens to Scots dialect is that you often find words that have been shortened, so you see here Mark says 'intit' rather than 'isn't it?'"
- m. "It is a good country, a good place to live, the way it was described in the story."

	Setting	Voices	Language	Relationships	Football fan
The author	e, g,	k	d, l	c, h, j,	i
The students	m	a		f	b

## After Listening Activities

1.

How many people were in the boat? *3, as far as we know (narrator, Mark and Lisa.)*

What is the usual relationship between Mark and his father, according to Mark? *(Cool? His father doesn't like him, according to Mark.)*

Why did watching the match on TV change this? How temporary do you think the change was? *(They shared something in common - the game, the team - it probably only lasted as long as the game)*

Explain why there is reference to Mark's father, and him referring to the narrator as Father. The narrator, a Father, is a priest.

2. Explain the life changing effect of the journey to Aisla Craig on the children as referred to in the interview by the author.