Teachers Notes

**Warning:** be selective with the materials. Do not attempt to do everything!

**Pre-performance**
As the title implies, these activities are best done before the performance of Chinese Whispers is seen as they will help the student to appreciate more fully what it is about and what it is trying to achieve.

**Suggested activities without student worksheets:**

The students are invited to do some research about Francesca Beard’s life and work through a webquest.

Students present the product(s) of their research (written works, posters…..) to the class.

Teachers and Students involved, exhibit their works in the school library or anywhere at school.

Simultaneously a contest in the library can be organised. It can consist of a quiz about Francesca Beard, her biography and her performances, especially Chinese Whispers, origin of this expression…..

1. **Auto-bio poem**

Having as a background the first section of the Chinese Whispers that deals mainly with Exploring Identity in a Multicultural World students are encouraged to write a sort of a bio-poem that works in circle where sts. introduce themselves and the main events that have most influenced their lives while images run on a screen which portrays the national and international events that took place the year they were born. This activity should activate and empower sts. to expose themselves to the importance of the role of body language in the oral tradition.

**Before Reading –**
Students brainstorm the title of the poem Chinese Whispers and discuss together what it might be about.

The first sentence of the section one. "**First there were the dinosaurs**" can be introduced at this stage in order to stimulate reticent students to participate more positively in this discussion.

Students read section one of Chinese Whispers to confirm their predictions.

After reading, the sts work on the text with the purpose of identifying the poet’s purpose as well as the events that are referred to in the extract.
Sts. select the most important moments of their lives as well as the main influences (heroes, books, people) who/which were crucial to build up their own identity.

**Written Activity:**
Students write their own bio-poem, something simple or more complex depending on the students’ skills. Through this activity students are supposed to interact with the images (-using also their body language as a way to convey meaning – as they were a text in themselves), establishing in this way an interaction with visual aids/words music and dance. (*Aspects that are related to the oral tradition and which play a very important role in Chinese Whispers*)

Pictures, photos or other stuff that the students choose as visual aids should be organized in such a way that they show the process of self development at work.

Some written clues are given to students in order to help them to write their Auto-Bio Poem

- Line 1 – Your first name
- Line 2 – Four descriptive traits
- Line 3 – Sibling of / weak points (if without siblings or if preferred)
- Line 4 – Lover of (people, ideas
- Line 5 – Who feels…
- Line 6 – Who needs …
- Line 7 – Who gives….
- Line 8 – Who fears…
- Line 9 – Who would like to see/ to feel..
- Line 10 – Who believes in …
- Line 11 – Resident of (living place)
- Line 12 - Your last name

**2. Performance and writing as reflection**
3. The queue at Tesco’s

- Matron in sari
- Angry man in queue
- False lead
- Nervous man in queue
- Security guard
- Philippina cashier
- False lead
- 3 Jamaican women
- Australian chef
- Japanese art students
4. Schrödinger’s Cat

Ethical Consumer

Quiz

Your consumer style?

Mostly a’s: the citizen
Mostly b’s: the communicator
Mostly c’s: the chooser
Mostly d’s: the activist
Choose Your Own Death!

1) Play ‘Connections’ * using the facts below. In teams of 3/4 sts, give sts the following information - groups have to guess the connection between the following:

Attila the Hun – a nosebleed

Francis Bacon – a frozen chicken

Jean-Baptiste Lully – a conductor’s baton

Tycho Brahe – a banquet

* Connections rules

1 point for tentative right answers – maybe... it could be...

3 points for a committed answer – it was...

But -1 for an incorrect committed answer

Each group is then asked to offer their answers. If no team has the correct answer, the question is then open to all teams and the team that can guess the correct answer first wins the point. Scoring depends on the degree of certainty the team has in their answer:

Connections Key

- The notorious villain Attila the Hun died of a nosebleed on his wedding night because he was too inebriated to notice his nose.
- Francis Bacon, famous British statesman, essayist and philosopher, died stuffing snow into a chicken - trying to prove that snow, instead of salt, could be used for meat preservation. Look who got frozen instead.
- The famous French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully got carried away by over-zealouness during a rehearsal and drove his baton through his foot. He died of blood poisoning.
- Of course, the most tragically funny story award goes to 16th Century astronomer Tycho Brahe, who made the triple mistake of forgetting to go to the bathroom before attending a banquet, drinking far too much during the banquet and then not daring to go to the bathroom during its course. His bladder - stretched to its limit - exploded. Brahe took eleven days to die a very painful death.

(taken from Darwin Awards website: http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A988798)
Explain to sts they are going to hear and read some extracts from Chinese Whispers referring to unusual ways to die. (This activity can be graded according to the language level of the sts / any particular language point the teacher wishes to focus on from the text.)

Select the language of choice from the following text. For this exercise (Post Cambridge ESOL 1st Certificate / Pre Cambridge ESOL Advanced Certificate level), sts are given handouts listing the language in bold, separated according to the texts. Students are given the selected language in random order and have to predict which death the language refers to:

- Number one: Being ate by a lion. You've seen it on t.v, from the comfort of your couch, but this time it's you, walking through the park on your way home from work when suddenly, RoooarrGh! Raururgh.Roughhh. 500lbs of ravenous predator, crouched for the spring. As you drop your shopping and the adrenalin floods your body, in that moment, you've never felt so alive, you can smell the ozone in the air and see each violent green blade of grass and all the fear dissolves from your body, your in the eye of the storm, the still calm centre of the chaotic world and then Rooahgh! he bites off your head and drags your doll-like body off to a rhododendron bush. Local resident recycled by King of the beasts. Zoo to blame.

- Two. Being et by a crocodile. The crocodile takes you gentle as an egg in her fetid dinosaur jaws and drags you down to drown, that most pleasurable of deaths, but you don't just drown, she spins you round in a fatal pirouette, spins you unconcious - so not only do you have your life playing before your eyes but it's flashing all around you in a panoramic technicolour 3dimensional extravaganza of limbic fireworks. Plus, some primitive tribes believe that the crocodile is an avatar, a god. So -Tourist recycled by Lizard King God. Nature to blame.

- Three. Suicide. Freedom of choice. It's 4am on a motorway bridge, that wierd silvery negative light and the world is swaying in hush hush hush of traffic and you've thought about just about everything there is to think about and you jump swan-like into the abyss, the journey from which no traveller returns, straight into the path of a lorry bringing dairy products to Portsmouth jackknifes off the motorway, yoghurt everywhere and you're killed instantly but the driver survives with a fractured thigh and severe trauma. Fortunately, his insurance pays for therapy during which time he discovers he's gay and now both him and his ex wife are much happier. You are on the local paper, page 8 and a student folk-band writes a song about you.

- Four. Chainsawed by a nutter. It's midnight, you're at home watching telly, bit boring when there's a ding dong really plausible man at the door and he's terribly sorry to bother you but his mobiles out of juice and his car's broken down can he possibly use your phone. Of course you let him in and then, while you make him a cup of camomile tea, he plugs in his BHS chain saw and cuts off your head and puts it in the fridge. You are on the national news and for months after, a really tanned and fit picture of you on the beach in your costume is on CrimeWatch and Crime Stoppers.
Five. Like Elenor Rigby, killed by lack of use. Buried alone. Nobody came. You never had sex, you never had violence. You used to dream of being torn apart, of jumping.

Six. Heroically under torture. Strapped to a chair, bladder full of petrol and the hot knife coming. If you blab, it will mean the end of the free world, and as the last of your moral fibres struggles to hold on, you can see the light at the end of the tunnel and you know if you can just hang on, your name will be a byword for strength and sacrifice and multicoloured children will play round statues of you in parks. Or maybe not. Maybe democracy is fucked anyway, there is no freedom of speech, no-one cares and all is dust. You die, never knowing.

Seven. An astronaut - on a fact finding mission to Mars and you've lost radio contact, there's no way to bring you down. You're imprisoned in a titanium bubble, spinning through eternity in space, surrounded by the pure and wordless stars. And their messages of terror and beauty tattoos itself upon your soul and as you look down on the serene blue green marble of the world, you realise everyone who knew your dreams and thoughts, who heard your laugh, and whose laugh made you laugh, they are dying, like butterflies, for your days are like years and you'll spend your long lonely years, in this wilderness of amazement with a breaking heart, batting at pens.

Lion

Croc

Suicide

Chainsawed by a Nutter

Elenor Rigby

Heroically Under Torture

Astronaut

Guess the text:

the comfort of your couch
walking through the park on your way home from work
ravenous predator
crouched for the spring
smell the ozone in the air
green blade of grass
fear dissolves from your body
the still calm centre
the chaotic world
drags your doll-like body
flashing all around you
your life playing before your eyes
a fatal pirouette
most pleasurable of deaths
drags you down
fetid dinosaur jaws
takes you gentle as an egg

Freedom of choice
swan-like into the abyss
straight into the path of
jackknives
severe trauma
insurance pays

really plausible man
terribly sorry to bother you
out of juice
broken down
on the beach in your costume

lack of use
Nobody came
to dream of
torn apart

• (this text refers to The Beatles song Eleanor Rigby. A text with the lyrics or the song may be used for further work –
  http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/Eleanor-Rigby-lyrics-The-Beatles/9894414D7CA027A48256BC20013CD05
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boc7rnkhL Ak )
Strapped to a chair, bladder full
If you blab
the end of the free world
moral fibres
struggles to hold on
the light at the end of the tunnel
a byword
strength and sacrifice
all is dust

lost radio contact
spinning through eternity
messages of terror
serene blue green marble of the world
dying, like butterflies
wilderness of amazement
a breaking heart

Give students the following headings:

What are the Darwin Awards?
How did the Darwin Awards first come about?
Darwin Mottos?
What Constitutes a Darwin Award?

(In pairs, small groups) Tell students to predict the content and write a text for each of the headings.
Whole class feedback to exchange ideas.

Refer to BBC website - http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A988798
or print the page. Students compare their predictions.

Follow-up – students (in pairs / groups) think about the individuals involved in the stories and write about them, age, background etc and the circumstances that led to their unusual deaths.