

A Sense of Belonging

At Shaping Futures, we realise that different groups of students may have different concerns about university – they might worry about how they'll manage academically, whether they'll enjoy their course or even how they'll fit in. We realise that concerns around fitting in or 'belonging' can be a particular issue for students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, with research supporting this (*Believe, Belong, Achieve: Listening to BAME students; education experiences*, University of Wolverhampton, November 2019 and *How can you thrive if you don't feel you belong?* UCL Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, 2017). Recognising this as an issue, we held focus groups with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic undergraduate students at Shaping Futures partner institutions to understand this issue in the content of the Liverpool City Region.

As a result, Shaping Futures, working with our local university partners and **Action Transport Theatre**, are pleased to present 'A Sense of Belonging', a recorded theatrical performance based on those conversations.

We know that Higher Education is about much more than lecture and seminars, and a student feeling part of their university community is pivotal to their success. 'A Sense of Belonging' follows Constance as she explores what it means to find home and belonging in a place that feels very alien to her. Using a blend of storytelling, original music, poetry and real-life stories from local undergraduates, this piece deals with a common anxiety for young people.



'A Sense of Belonging' is suitable for students in Years 7 to 13, particularly those from a Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic background, as this is a central theme within the play. However, students of any ethnicity will find the play of interest, particularly in the current context of the Black Lives Matter movement.

'A Sense of Belonging' is offered to schools to be used as a supporting resource in a range of subject areas and topics. We have provided several discussion points as a starting point, but this list is not intended to be exhaustive. If you would like to discuss how you could use 'A Sense of Belonging' or are interested in further support in this area, please contact our team via our website:

<http://www.shaping-futures.org.uk>

Please note:

'A Sense of Belonging' is based on the authentic, lived experiences of students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, which they have shared with us during the research for this project. It depicts a realistic university experience and includes references to alcohol and one to smoking. The film is in line with the BBFC guidance for PG films, and we have provided a short introductory film from the Director of 'A Sense of Belonging' to help frame the content of the film.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upvgwa67>



Full performance



Discussion Points

These discussion points cover some of the main topics addressed in 'A Sense of Belonging', with supporting links where appropriate. They are intended to be broad ranging, easily tailored to the year group you're working with. If you would like additional resources or support with these discussion points please get in touch.

1 – Getting into University

Constance isn't successful on Results Day and needs to go through Clearing. Do you know how Results Day will work, and what your options are if you don't get your grades? Do you understand the Clearing process? What might be the benefits of Clearing? What would you need to consider if you were going through Clearing?

<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/results-clearing>

2 – Support at university

Constance finds that her university experience improves drastically when she joins the Afro Caribbean Society. What do you already know about societies? What are some of the benefits?

<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/student-life/getting-student-support/students-unions>

Societies are all about finding a space of your own and somewhere to belong. They are generally based on shared interests outside of your studies, either existing interests or new ones you explore at university. Examples include societies based on different sports or the LGBTQ+ society – what sorts of societies would you be interested in joining?

3 – Wellbeing

In the film, Constance refers to drinking, smoking, and clubbing. As she's over 18, these are decisions she's able to make for herself.

What advice would you give to someone deciding to engage with cigarettes and alcohol in terms of their health and wellbeing? What wider advice would you give to someone who has moved away from home for the first time, thinking about how they might look after their physical and mental health?

4 – Unexpected friendships

Constance makes friends with Megan, another student on her course, but recognises that she may not have been friends with her back home. It's common at university to make unexpected friendships because you meet so many different people from different walks of life.

How can we be more open and accepting of other people, and therefore open to making new friendships? What could get in the way of new friendships? Is there anyone you don't think you'd be friends with? Why?

5 – Common values

In the film, Constance found her 'crew' in unexpected ways. She talks about Megan challenging their lecturer on the lack of authors of colour on the reading list and three others joining in the questioning. Afterwards, Constance, Megan and the others who'd questioned the reading list became a group of friends due to their shared values of inclusivity.

Do you and your friends have shared values? What do you think they are?

6 – Finding your voice

Constance talks about feeling brave as she uses her voice and speaks up in seminars.

Why is using your voice important? When do you use your voice? Are there any times you haven't used your voice and regretted it?

7 – Musical expression

Writing poetry and music is a great way to express how you feel. In the film, Dorcas (the actress who played Constance) wrote the poetry you hear set to original music and vocals written by Kyami and Tee, the musicians.

Why might creative and performing arts be helpful in expressing your feelings? What other ways are there to express your feelings? Are there any particular pieces of music or performance that you can think of that express particular feelings and emotions?