

# A Friend for Farouk

## Key ideas

- respecting racial and cultural differences
- concern for others
- freedom from discrimination and prejudice

This short piece is based on a true story and recounts the isolation of Farouk as he tries to settle into a new school in which the children are not very welcoming. In Farouk's case, the barriers are partly cultural and linguistic at first. Eventually, Farouk finds a friend in Lenny, who is a traveller and is equally an outsider. Together, Farouk and Lenny can support each other but when Lenny goes away again, Farouk is faced with the prospect of returning to his former isolation.

The events are seen through the eyes of Farouk in order to increase children's ability to understand how it feels to be isolated and rejected. The story offers the opportunity for children to explore different kinds of prejudice and can be used to challenge children to examine the factual basis of the stereotypes they are familiar with.

Teachers of older juniors might find it interesting to adapt a technique used in a research project on prejudice in the United States. The teacher divided the class into blue-eyed and brown-eyed children and gave one of the groups certain privileges (eg they would always be allowed to speak first). The situation was sustained for some time and was then reversed and the class discussed their feelings about it all. Such a technique can be effective in terms of experiential learning but must be handled with a great deal of caution. It might be worthwhile seeking the backing of the head in case of complaints from parents that their children were unfairly treated.

*Below are some of the issues you could explore arising from this story. Remember to ask the children if they would like to raise any issues of their own for discussion.*

## Moral reasoning

- Why do you think Farouk was not made to feel welcome at first? Think of all the reasons you can.
- Was Farouk treated fairly, in your opinion? If not, why not? What should the children in his class have done differently? Why?

- Now think about Lenny. In what ways was Lenny treated like Farouk and in what ways was he treated differently from Farouk? What is the evidence for this? Do you think:
  - a) Farouk was treated worse than Lenny;
  - b) Lenny was treated worse than Farouk; or
  - c) They were treated the same?
- Was there any truth at all in the stories that people told about Lenny? If not, then where did these ideas come from? Why do you think people would believe stories which might not be true?
- What arguments would you use to tell the boys who were unkind to Lenny to leave him alone?
- Think of some rules about how we should treat other people in the class or the school. You could work in pairs first, then share ideas to make a class list. Choose the rules you think are the best.

## Thinking things through

- If someone is treated unfairly because of general ideas about the group of people they belong to, this is called stereotyping. Stereotyping happens to a lot of people. It is helpful to be aware of all the ideas which common stereotypes conjure up. They are often spread or kept going by people who do not like particular groups. Match up these common stereotypes. Notice that they are usually (though not always) unkind or designed to put someone down.

### Common stereotypes:

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| a) blonde women (not blonde men) | 1) careful with money, mean                        |
| b) gypsies and travellers        | 2) not very emotional                              |
| c) Irish people                  | 3) very athletic                                   |
| d) African British people        | 4) not very clever                                 |
| e) Jewish people                 | 5) not well educated                               |
| f) Scottish people               | 6) careful with money, mean and no sense of humour |
| g) English people                | 7) not to be trusted                               |

- There are laws against treating people unfairly because of their race, skin colour or nationality. Do you think the law can change people's attitudes? What else might be done to help people of different communities get along together?
- Why do children pick on others to make them unhappy?

## **Community building**

- How do you think Farouk and Lenny felt when they were left out and teased? Have you ever felt like that? Share experiences. Did things get better for you? Were you able to do anything about it?
- Draw up a charter of rights for pupils in school. It could begin something like this:

"We believe that all pupils in our school have the right to ... "

# A Friend for Farouk

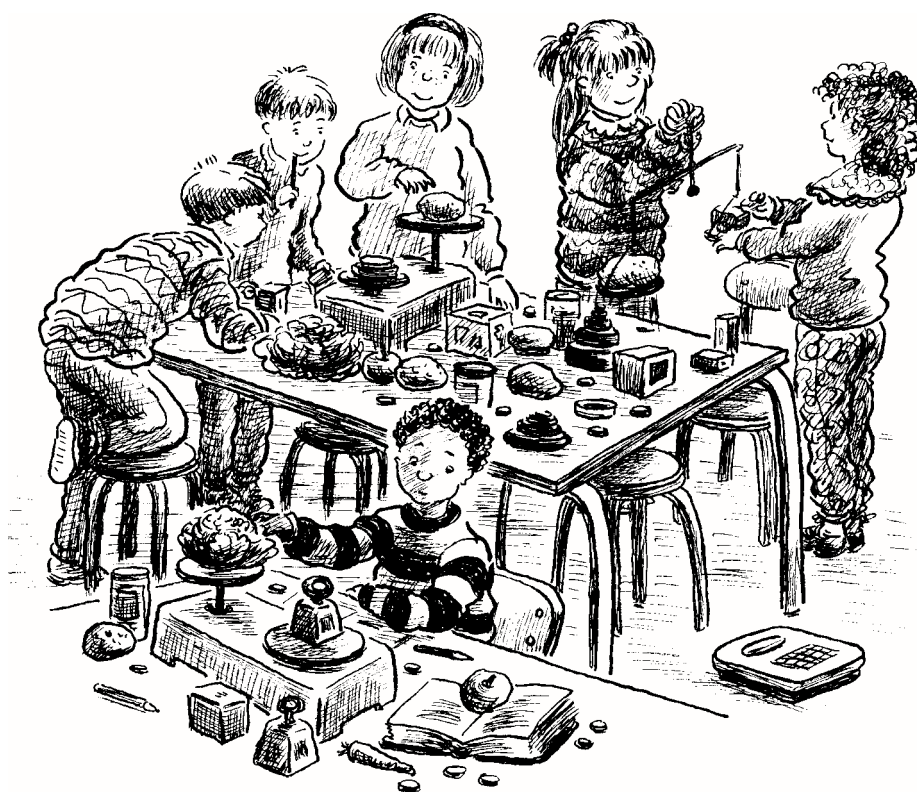
When I started school, my family had only just arrived in this country. They had come from a part of the world where there had been a lot of fighting and killing. My parents wanted me to grow up somewhere where it was safe.

Life in a new country is very confusing and it was hard going to school at first. I could hardly speak any English and it was very difficult to understand what I was supposed to do and, worst of all, it was hard to make friends.

My teacher took a special interest in me. I was glad because the other children in my class did not seem to notice I was there. When it was time to choose who to work with I found

myself alone and when it was time to line up I never had a partner. My teacher would say: "Come and let me hold your hand, Farouk," and I would put my hand into hers. The other children would notice me than and sometimes Andy, Martin or Sally would give me a funny look or even a sly kick without my teacher seeing them. I never knew why they did that. I had done nothing to them.

By the time I moved into my next class I had learnt to say quite a lot and I could understand what the others were saying. But I was still left out of things. I went to school, I sat down, I tried to do my lessons but, when playtime came and we all went



outside, I was alone again unless my big brother came to play with me.

Then the day I was dreading arrived. My brother left the infant school and at playtimes there was no one at all who would play with me. I hated going out to play and I used to try to think of any excuse I could to stay in. I began to think that it would always be like this, but one day I heard an excited buzz in the classroom. A new boy was joining our class. I heard someone say that he had been to lots of schools because his family moved around a lot.

The morning the head teacher brought the new boy into the class was bright and sunny. I remember that the sun shone on his blonde curly hair. Like me, he looked different from the other children. His deep brown eyes sparkled in his rosy face as he gazed

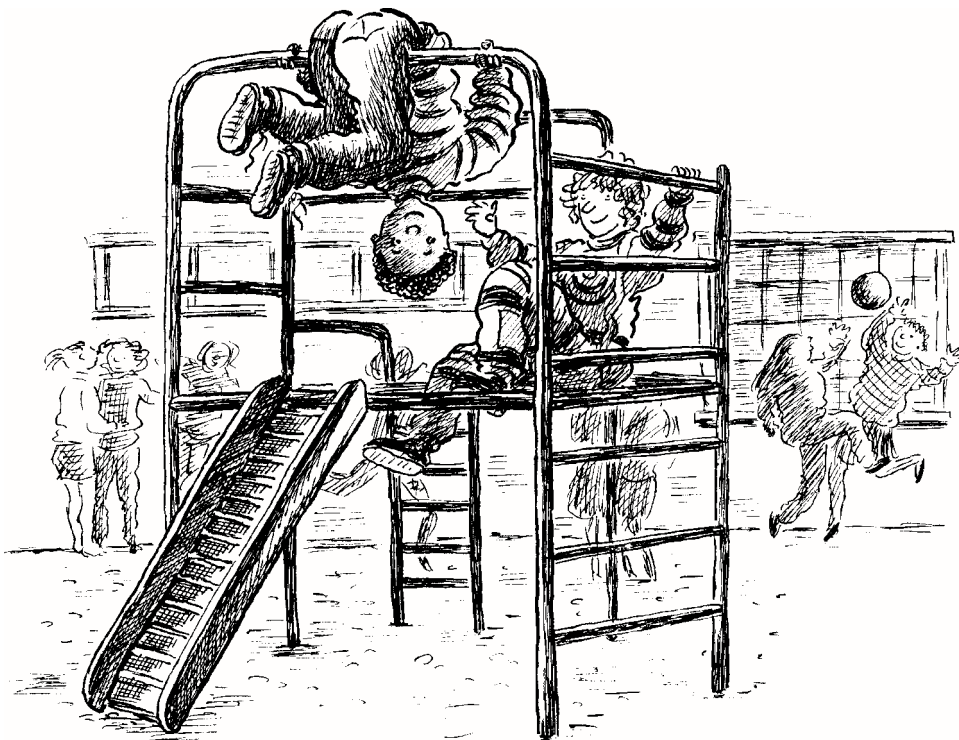
around at the class and then his eyes met mine. The teacher put him on my table and I got the surprise of my life when he ignored the other children and turned to me.

“What’s your name?” he said to me.

“Farouk”, I said, “what’s yours?”

“Lenny,” he said with a smile. “Do you want to see my lorry?” And he showed me a toy lorry. Lenny said his Dad drove a lorry like that. He let me hold it. I felt warm inside. When is playtime, I showed Lenny the playground and we played on the climbing frame. He was a brilliant climber. After that we became very good friends.

We helped each other with our work and play. We learnt to read together and when school was over, we often played together. Lenny came to my



house sometimes. I found out that Lenny and his family lived in a huge caravan. It was beautiful. I remember wishing that I could live in one, too. I thought it must be marvellous to be able to move your house around whenever you feel like it.

After one and a half terms, that is just what happened. Lenny suddenly started to be away from school. I missed him a lot and at playtimes I was on my own again. Then after a few weeks, one dinner play, I noticed something happening near the school gates. A group of boys were crowding round somebody and when I caught a glimpse of who it was, I was so excited. It was Lenny – he was back! As I ran towards the boys I knew something was wrong. They had formed a circle around Lenny and were chanting things at him.

“Traveller! Traveller!” they shouted and one of the boys jumped on Lenny and started to hit him while the others cheered.

I wanted to shout “Leave him alone!” but the boys were bigger than I was and I was scared they would turn on me. They were shouting horrible things at Lenny which I knew were not true. They said he had no furniture at home and that he pinched things. I knew that wasn’t true but who would listen to me. By this time Lenny was in tears and I wanted to make them stop. As I ran to find my teacher, the bell went and the boys ran away from Lenny still shouting at him over their shoulders.

They were patting each other on the

back and laughing at how clever they had been.

I was so pleased to see my friend back again.

“Why were they shouting those things at you?” I asked.

“They always do to travellers,” said Lenny. “Because we don’t live the same way they do, I suppose. At my last school it was worse.”

Not long after that Lenny told me his family was going away for the summer to a different part of the country but Lenny said he hoped to come back in the autumn.

After Lenny went it was like the old days – nobody to talk to or to work with or play pretend games with. I missed him. Every morning as I went to school I hoped this would be the day Lenny would come back. I used to think about all the games we would play when he was there again. I couldn’t understand why everyone else was so unkind to him because I knew how kind Lenny really was. How could they know? They had never bothered to find out whether the things they said were true or not. But then, no one had bothered to find out about me, either.

One day when my teacher had finished calling the register, she closed it and looked straight at me.

“I’m sorry, Farouk” she said, “Lenny won’t be coming back, I’m afraid. I have heard that his family has moved to a

new place to pick fruit for the autumn.”

My heart sank. Now I knew I would probably never see him again, the only real friend I had had. I had hoped and hoped that Lenny would come back and now all my hopes had suddenly gone. I felt a huge wave of disappointment swell up inside me and I turned my face away from all the children in the class who were looking at me. I didn't want them to see me cry.

But then I heard another voice suddenly say: “Miss, it will be hard for Farouk if Lenny's not coming back.”

I couldn't believe what I was hearing but after that many of the children began to be more friendly. At playtimes, I had someone to play with and I was so much happier. But I never forgot Lenny, who had been my first true friend. I couldn't help wondering what the children in his new school were like.

