

Being Theo *By Jeannie McLean*

Introduction

In *Being Theo*, Theo decides to be someone he isn't. However, he finds it is not easy being someone different. After trying a variety of personalities, he finds that, in the end, he is happiest being himself!

Reason for reading

You could use this book with your students to:

- explore the topics of identity and how your identity shapes your life
- explore how students see themselves in relation to others – how much does the opinion of others affect how they behave?
- learn that being yourself is important and that, when you are, others will respond better to *you*.

Setting the scene

Draw on your students' prior knowledge. If necessary, introduce concepts or vocabulary to help them access the story. Also communicate the reason for reading.

- Brainstorm ideas about identity. What does it mean? How does our "identity" affect the way we think about ourselves? How much does the opinion of others impact on our behaviour?
- Students explore the cover and determine what they think the story is about.
- Students think about situations where their understanding of their identity has changed because of the people they are with.
- Introduce vocabulary that the students may need to access the text. Refer to the vocabulary worksheets (3, 4a and 4b) for words that are unfamiliar.

Getting stuck in

Choose the prompts that you feel your students need. Remind them to note any unfamiliar words and check for clues to the meanings in the text or images. The meanings of words in bold text are in the glossary at the back of the book.

- End of page 4 – "Why is Theo unhappy?"
- End of page 11 – "What does Theo decide to do and why? Who, according to Theo, have interesting and exciting lives? Can you empathise with Theo?"
- End of page 14 – "What does Theo decide to change first?"
- End of page 17 – "What do you think Theo's parents think of his new image?"
- End of page 21 – "Why are Theo's old friends ignoring him? Nothing seems to be working. Why?"
- End of page 23 – "Do you think Theo makes the right decision to change again?"

Taking a closer look

Choose suggestions that suit your students and reason for reading.

Exploring ideas and opinions

- Ask for your students' opinions of this story. How do they feel about it and why? Why do they think the author wrote it? Can they identify with Theo? Have they ever felt the way he does at the beginning of the story? Have they ever tried to change their image?
- After completing the three-level thinking guide (Worksheet 1), students discuss their responses in pairs, in small groups, or as a class.
- Students discuss in pairs or small groups: "A time when I tried to change my image; how my behaviour changes when I'm with different people; what I like about myself as I am."

Exploring character

- Ask students to explore how Theo changes during the story. Think about how he is feeling at the beginning of the story. What is it that ultimately helps Theo decide to be himself? Who are the most important people in his life? Why?
- Discuss: Who are the other characters in this story? Imagine you are Theo's mum or dad. How would you feel watching Theo change? Would you have reacted as they did or differently? If you were Ella McKenzie, would you still be interested in Theo at the end of the story?
- Working in pairs, students choose two characters from the story and develop a conversation between those characters that reflects how they feel about Theo's efforts to change his image.

Exploring structure

- Give the students the statements from Worksheet 2 to sequence correctly.
- or
- Students take a statement each from Worksheet 2 and arrange themselves into the correct story sequence. Then, taking turns based on this sequence, they retell their part of the story.
- or
- Students create a visual sequence of events from the story.

Exploring language

- Cut out the words and definitions from Worksheet 3 and mix them up. Hand them out to students, who then find their correct "partner".
- As an alternative to the above activity, divide the class into two groups: one group fills in the second column of Worksheet 4a and the other fills in the second column of Worksheet 4b. This activity involves the students in creating definitions, which they then use to test the other group.
- Students complete Worksheet 5 – the cloze activity.

Moving beyond the text

Choose activities that suit your students and reason for reading.

Reading

- Read *Fab!*, the magazine from the GO for IT that complements this book.

Writing

- In pairs, students choose two of the characters from the story (other than Theo) and, taking turns in role as their character, write the conversation they might have that reflects what both characters think about Theo changing his image.

or

- In pairs, one student takes the role of Theo and the other takes the role of Ella or another character. Taking turns in their chosen role, they write the conversation they might have as Theo explains why he feels he needs to change.

Research

- Students do research on: How many different “images” are there among the students at your school? Find out what these images are, what they mean and how they look. Interview students (perhaps using audio or video) who represent these images and find out why they have chosen their particular image.

Art and design

- Prepare a static image, poster or book cover that advertises *Being Theo*.

WORKSHEET 1

Being Theo – Three-level thinking guide

- Level 1 – Reading on the lines (interpreting what the text says on a literal level)
- Level 2 – Reading between the lines (inferring, or interpreting what the text might mean)
- Level 3 – Reading beyond the lines (evaluating ideas and information)

Students write “agree” or “disagree” beside each statement and then discuss their responses in pairs, in groups, or as a class. The value of this activity lies in the discussion it generates as students justify their views. The activity is not intended as a test for comprehension.

LEVEL 1	Agree/disagree
No one takes any notice of Theo because he is good.	
Theo washes the dishes every night of the week.	
Theo’s mother never has to remind him to do anything.	
Theo’s father never has to lecture him about anything.	
Ella really likes Theo, but he doesn’t like her.	
Theo thinks being sensible, responsible, and easy makes him invisible.	
Theo is too uncoordinated to be good at sports.	
Everyone notices Theo’s new clothes and walk.	
Ella is really worried about Theo.	
Theo doesn’t wear the sunglasses much because he can’t see where he is going.	
Theo’s tongue is sore and swollen.	
Theo misses his friends Brandon and Jonah.	
Theo does not miss Ella.	

Sheet 1 of 2

LEVEL 2	Agree/disagree
Theo wants to stand out from the crowd.	
Theo thinks Ella is immature.	
Theo knows he could be really good at drama.	
Theo decides to join Mandy and her gang, because then people will notice him.	
Mandy and her friends are keen to have Theo join them.	
Theo's mother and father think he looks ridiculous with his head shaved.	
Theo's mother is sure he is taking drugs.	
Ella is not interested in Theo any more.	
Theo is interested in Ella.	
Theo's friends like him best the way he usually is.	
LEVEL 3	Agree/disagree
Being noticed by others makes you feel good.	
To be noticed, a person has to be "cool" or "awesome".	
Theo is an insecure person.	
How a person looks is more important than what they do.	
Actions speak louder than words.	

Sheet 2 of 2

Worksheet designed by Barbara Freeman, Wellington, New Zealand, 2007

WORKSHEET 2

Being Theo – Restore the order

Cut out the statements and mix them up. Ask your students to place them in the correct order

No one takes any notice of Theo and he is unhappy.
Theo's mother thinks he's good because he washes the dishes three nights a week.
Theo's father thinks he's good because he mows the lawns and takes out the rubbish regularly.
Theo's friends think he's good because he lends them money and CDs.
Ella really likes Theo, but he doesn't like her hanging around.
Theo decides to work hard to change his image.
Theo thinks being sensible, responsible, and easy makes him invisible.
Theo wants people to think he is <i>cool</i> or <i>awesome</i> .
Theo is not coordinated enough to play rugby or any other sport.
Computer nerds are noticed in an odd sort of way.
Drama students are noticed, but Theo gets nervous speaking in front of others.
Theo is not too sure about becoming a gang member.

Theo decides to be like Bede, Leno, and Jamax, because then people will notice him.

Theo practises slouching and swaying when he walks.

Theo wears his new black jeans and t-shirt to school.

Ella thinks Theo isn't well when he scowls at her.

Theo shaves off all his thick, dark, curly hair and gets a silver tongue stud.

Theo is not sure how his parents feel about his new image.

Nobody reacts to Theo's new image the way he wants them to.

Theo buys a pair of wraparound dark glasses.

Theo feels sad, miserable, and lonely when he is trying to be like someone else.

Theo goes back to being himself, joins in with his old friends, and feels much happier.

Sheet 2 of 2

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WORKSHEET 3

Being Theo – Match the meaning

Cut out the words and their definitions, mix them up, and ask your students to match the pairs.

<i>Word</i>	<i>Definition</i>
available	always there and ready to see people
concentrate	to focus completely on something
coordinated	having good physical control of your movements
drama	performance in the theatre
forfeit	to give up something because of something you've done wrong
gangling	tall, thin, and awkward
gawky	nervously awkward
ignored	deliberately not noticed by someone
image	the way a person looks and acts
invisible	unable to be seen
loped	walked with long, slow strides
nerd	someone who "knows it all" and doesn't care about being popular

Word	Definition
persistence	determination to keep working at something despite difficulties
practise	do something over and over again in order to improve a certain skill
responsibly	with a sense that your actions affect others
scowl	an angry facial expression
sensibly	with good judgement
sneer	an unpleasant, mocking smile
tongue stud	a small piece of metal that goes right through the tongue

Sheet 2 of 2

Note that some words above may have different meanings in other contexts.

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WORKSHEET 4a – GROUP A

Being Theo – Vocab swap

- Divide the class into two groups, and give one group Worksheet 4a and the other group Worksheet 4b.
- In the second column of its own worksheet, each group writes a definition for each of the words listed in the first column. Where a word has more than one meaning, the group may need to check the page of the book that is listed.
- Each group then folds the first column out of sight and swaps worksheets with the other group.
- Each group guesses the original words, based on the definitions given in the other group's worksheet, and writes them in the third column of that worksheet. A group can go to the page in the book that is listed if it needs help. For an extra challenge, the groups can guess without referring to the page.
- You could make this a fun competition and give points for every correct word.

Word	Definition (Group A)	Word (Group B)
available (p 4)	(p 4)	
coordinated (p 6)	(p 6)	
forfeit (p 4)	(p 4)	
gawky (p 6)	(p 6)	
image (p 5)	(p 5)	
loped (p 23)	(p 23)	
nerd (p 8)	(p 8)	
practise (p 14)	(p 14)	
sensibly (p 2)	(p 2)	
sneer (p 12)	(p 12)	

WORKSHEET 4b – GROUP B

Being Theo – Vocab swap

- Divide the class into two groups, and give one group Worksheet 4a and the other group Worksheet 4b.
- In the second column of its own worksheet, each group writes a definition for each of the words listed in the first column. Where a word has more than one meaning, the group may need to check the page of the book that is listed.
- Each group then folds the first column out of sight and swaps worksheets with the other group.
- Each group guesses the original terms, based on the definitions given in the other group's worksheet, and writes them in the third column of that worksheet. A group can go to the page listed in the book that is listed if it needs help. For an extra challenge, the groups can guess without referring to the page.
- You could make this a fun competition and give points for every correct word.

Word	Definition (Group B)	Word (Group A)
concentrate (p 14)	(p 14)	
drama (p 9)	(p 9)	
gangling (p 6)	(p 6)	
ignored (p 15)	(p 15)	
invisible (p 5)	(p 5)	
persistence (p 3)	(p 3)	
responsibly (p 2)	(p 2)	
scowl (p 12)	(p 12)	
tongue stud (p16)	(p 16)	

WORKSHEET 5

Being Theo – Fill in the gaps

Add your own words in the spaces to make this passage come alive!

Theo was than unhappy. He was sad and He realised was lonely. So, Theo another decision. He was tired of to be noticed. He tired of trying to be someone else. He was no good it. He to change.

Theo took out the and mowed the and did the at home. He wore old blue jeans his faded cream-coloured t-shirt. He let his hair grow back. He took the round, silver tongue stud. He the sunglasses off. He loped along, looking all and gawky. He smiled his friends Brandon and Jonah. They back. They asked he could play soccer in the weekend. Ella was at the school He smiled at She smiled and that made him good.

Theo was

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