

Student handout 3.1

The school on the edge of the forest

There was once a community of people who lived in dense forests on the side of a mountain range. They were religious people who brought their children up strictly to worship the gods of their people. Their religion believed there were no differences between men and women.

Between the mountains and the farthest edge of the country was a huge expanse of plain. A different community of people lived on the plain. They had no religion, but worked hard for each other. They were fierce warriors and men were the dominant sex. Women were respected but could not rise to become leaders.

The people of the forest had nothing to do with the people from the plains. They hated and feared each other. There had sometimes been wars between them.

One day a young man arrived on the edge of the forest. He announced that he wanted to build a school there so that the children of both communities could be educated together, so that there could finally be peace between the two peoples.

Soon, a simple wooden building was ready and the day came when the teacher opened his school for the first time. A few children from both communities came to see what it would be like. The parents and the leaders of the two communities watched anxiously.

At first, there were problems between the children. They called each other names and there was often fighting. But the children could see the value of coming to school and gradually things began to settle down. The teacher was strict but fair and treated all his pupils equally. He said he respected both ways of life and the children were taught about their different ways of life.

More and more children started attending the school on the edge of the forest.

However, it soon became clear that more children from the plains were attending the school. The forest children now made up only a quarter of the school. The teacher talked to the parents of both sides to encourage and reassure them.

But then one morning, the teacher arrived to find that someone had burned the school to the ground.

(Based on a story by Ted Huddleston of the Citizenship Foundation)