

ONYEKA

AND THE ACADEMY
OF THE SUN



TEACHERS' NOTES



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INTRODUCTION TO ONYEKA AND THE ACADEMY OF THE SUN

1. Can you guess from the title, strapline and artwork on the cover what the story in this book might be about?
2. From looking at the artwork on the cover, what do you think Onyeka's superpower might be?
3. What feelings do you get from looking at the artwork on the cover?
4. How does the cover artist use colour to indicate Onyeka's superpower?

Activity Suggestion: (Cross-curricular link to art)

For homework, produce a cover of a superhero with superpowers of your choice.



THEME 1: MANAGING EMOTIONS (SUBJECTS: PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION)

LESSON 1

Learning Objective: To enable pupils to identify physical changes that can occur to the body when a person is about to lose control of their emotions.

Extract (Pages 2–3)

'Open up,' Cheyenne hollers, and the whole changing room grows silent around us. My belly tightens. I hate it when Cheyenne does that. Just because she loves attention, doesn't mean I do too. The already tiny space of the cubicle closes in around me and my chest tightens, making it difficult to breathe. Energy surges across my skin, but I force it back down. I can't get upset. I am absolutely not allowed to lose control. It's Mum's number one rule.

I remember the first time I felt like this. Mum and I were waiting hand in hand at a bus stop and a group of kids started making fun of my hair. Mum ignored them, then bent down to me, as if she knew I was about to lose it. Her smile was gentle as she told me that I needed to control my emotions because bad things would happen if I ever set them free.

This was before she taught me the Fibonacci numbers that help keep my emotions in check. Apparently, it's some mathematical sequence from ancient India, but someone decided to name it after an Italian guy. It works though. It's hard to lose your temper when you're trying to remember what the next number is.

I close my eyes now and start counting, running through the numbers as I try to calm down. Zero ...

One ...

With each number, I trace the shape in my mind, giving it a colour, texture and taste.

Zero is a rough-edged blue and tastes like waffles, no syrup.

One I give a shiny orange with the sharp tang of vinegar.

Bit by bit, the prickle under my skin goes away, but I continue to count, just to be safe.

I'm back to number one again. This time it's brown and squishy, but with the rich flavour of the doughnuts Mum never lets me have.

Two is a hazy, dull grey. Completely boring and normal.

I stop counting as number two does the trick and my racing heart begins to slow. The door handle rattles and I jump.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Chapter 1 introduces us to Onyeka and her difficulty with managing her emotions. Why is she afraid to let her emotions run loose?
2. Onyeka's mum taught her to use the Fibonacci numbers to manage her emotions. How does Onyeka know that the technique is working? Can you find the words in the extract that show this happening?
3. Can you describe any helpful strategies that you use to manage your own emotions?

Activity Suggestion 1:

Create a table with two columns. On one side (from the extract above), list the changes Onyeka's body experiences when she is about to lose control of her emotions, and on the other, list all the changes that show she is in control once more.



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Activity Suggestion 2: (Cross-curricular link with mathematics)

- Research the Fibonacci numbers on the internet, then answer the following questions.
- In which country were the Fibonacci numbers first described?
- Why do you think they are named after an Italian?
- Can you name examples of the Fibonacci numbers appearing in nature?
- Can you create a Fibonacci sequence of your own?

Activity Suggestion 3: (Cross-curricular link with art or design and technology)

Design a swimming cap that would suit Onyeka's hair.

LESSON 2

Learning Objective: To identify some of the emotions associated with new change.

Extract (Pages 53–56)

'Erm, there is one last thing,' I add as I reach the hardest part of my story.

Cheyenne frowns at me. 'What could top this?'

I gulp. 'My powers are making me sick and Mum says it's really dangerous.' Cheyenne's face falls, and I rush to reassure her. 'But she reckons my father might be able to help.' Her expression lifts, so I continue. 'Which is why we have to go back to Nigeria to find him.'

Cheyenne freezes and I hold my breath, waiting for her reaction.

'You're kidding, right?' she practically shouts, and I throw a worried glance at the door. 'How are you just gonna up and leave like that? What about your mum's job, or school . . . or me?'

Her voice ends on a loud screech, and I wince.

'It's not for ever and I don't really want to go,' I mutter. 'I wish I could stay.'

Cheyenne rolls her eyes. 'Stop lying. You fully hate it here.'

What I really hate is that she knows me so well and she's right.

'Okay, fine, but it doesn't mean I'm happy about leaving you behind.'

Cheyenne frowns. 'The way I see it, you don't have much choice. I mean, you've got superpowers, fam. You can't stay here.'

'But—'

'Yeka, you'll finally get to meet your dad!' Cheyenne cuts in, her voice a hushed whisper. 'You'll be a family again, just like you've always wanted.'

Trust Cheyenne to clock right on to the thing I've been avoiding – the thing I've not let myself think about. Because if I do, it will actually be real and it might be taken away from me. Cheyenne is the only person who truly gets how much finding my father means to me.

Cheyenne and her dad are total mates and she tells him everything. He takes her to all the comic exhibitions, and he even dresses up with her. It's why I like spending time at their house so much. Seeing Cheyenne and her parents together makes me feel good.

Uncle Dàpò always tries to include me too, and for a little while I get to pretend I'm part of a happy family . . . that I have a father who loves me. Once, he took us to Comic Con in central London. We'd been queuing for ages to meet the star of Cheyenne's favourite TV show. Finally, it was our turn, and after we got her autograph and picture, she turned to Uncle Dàpò with a smile and told him his girls were adorable.

'Yes,' Uncle Dàpò replied, 'they are.'

The warm feeling that entered my belly lasted a whole week. I stare at



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Cheyenne, standing in the middle of her playroom, watching me expectantly.

'I know,' I finally reply.

She grins. 'Scared?' 'Petrified.' I look down at my hands. 'What if he doesn't like me?' My voice rises to a squeak. 'What if I don't like him?'

Cheyenne takes my left hand and squeezes. 'He has to like you, and you're gonna think he's awesome.'

I look up. 'What if he doesn't want to be found?' I whisper.

'Then you come home, innit?'

I don't feel myself move, but the next thing I know, I've closed the distance between us and my arms are wrapped round her. 'I'm gonna miss your big mouth and your crazy fox ears,' I whisper as tears fill my eyes. 'I'm even gonna miss the way you always smell of coconut oil.'

Cheyenne sucks in some air. Her arms hang loosely at her side for a moment, as if she's unsure what to do. She's never been much of a hugger. Then they wrap round me too.

'Don't forget my amazing playroom,' she says.

I flick her on the arm. 'I'm being serious. I'm really gonna miss you.'

'Please, you'll be too busy living the Naija life,' she replies with a small snort. 'Besides, we can chat on the phone and I'll try not to be too jealous.'

I pull away and we stare at each other. There aren't enough words. At least, not the right ones.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Cheyenne react to Onyeka's news?
2. The impending trip to Nigeria triggers new emotions in Onyeka too. Can you identify what they were?
3. How did having someone Onyeka could totally trust and who understood her help her cope with the impending change?

Activity Suggestion 1:

- Think about a recent change you had to make.
- List the different emotions you felt.
- List all the things that have helped you cope with the change.

Activity Suggestion 2: (Cross-curricular link with literacy)

- Pretend you are Onyeka and imagine you were not able to slip away and meet up with Cheyenne before leaving for Nigeria.
- Write a letter to Cheyenne explaining what happened and how you feel about it.

LESSON 3

Learning Objective: To identify strategies that can be used to cope with hostility from others.

Extract (Pages 88–89)

I don't even bother trying to hide the smile that breaks out across my face. Hassan's antics are almost enough to make me forget how silly I must have looked to everyone.

'I don't know why you're so pleased,' Adanna calls out in a bored voice.



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'He's like that with everyone.'

The smile drops from my face pretty sharpish and my scalp prickles with annoyance. What is up with this girl? I open my mouth to give her a Cheyenne-worthy clapback when I remember I'm on her turf.

'How long have you been at AOS?' I ask instead, pushing my irritation down. I rush to catch up with her.

'Six years,' Adanna replies without stopping.

Rah, I think, feeling a bit sorry for her. That's a long time to be away from your family.

'I don't want to hear your pity,' she continues, as if I'd spoken my thoughts out loud. 'So keep it to yourself.'

I frown. What is her deal? I hope she's not a mind reader, although I guess that would explain her crankiness. If I had everyone's thoughts invading my mind, I'd probably be a bit cranky too.

'I'm sure you've made lots of friends,' I try again, determined to make an effort.

Adanna stops and turns so suddenly I almost bump into her. Her face is tight, like one of Mum's perm rods just before it snaps.

'What do you mean by that?' she hisses at me.

I lift my hands quickly in surrender. 'Nothing. I . . . I was just being friendly, that's all.'

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Adanna and Onyeka did not get off to a good start and for quite a while Adanna remained hostile. What was Onyeka's instinctive initial response to Adanna's snarkiness?
2. What strategies did Onyeka use to handle the hostility and avoid confrontation?

Activity Suggestion:

- Think of a situation where you had to deal with someone else's hostility.
- What strategies did you use to avoid confrontation?
- Working with a partner, share your example and strategies.
- Did your partner use any interesting strategies that you could use in future?

LESSON 4

Learning Objective: To explore how persistence can lead to break through.

Extract (Pages 109–110)

'Don't fight the emotion,' Adanna reminds me. 'Find your anchor and use it.'

Don't fight the emotion, I repeat to myself. With a deep breath, I close my eyes and push the next number away. It's time to stop running.

Then something strange happens. A memory flickers inside me. It opens slowly, a small thing really, but the brilliance of it glows brightly as it overpowers my fear like a floodlight.

Cheyenne standing up for me in after-school club when Joshua Effiang said my hair looked like a dirty mop.

The memory begins to glow bronze and the taste of chocolate floods my mouth.

Cheyenne sharing her food with me whenever I didn't have any dinner money.

A silver shine coats the memory, this time ham-flavoured like Cheyenne's



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sandwiches.

The image shifts again and now it's Cheyenne going after my swimming cap, because she didn't want anyone to laugh at me. Even though she could barely swim. Even though it nearly killed her. The memory burns a blazing gold, with a metallic edge . . . like blood.

This final memory is so strong, it wraps around the fear like a net, harnessing it. It grows stronger and stronger until I'm pulsing with power.

With Ike!

A ripple of energy sparks across my scalp, and I feel a stirring as everything else fades away. My eyes snap open again, just in time to see my hair converge into a solid mass of wiry strands. It whistles through the air, punching through the hologram of Cheyenne. The projection of my room shatters into tiny fragments of light before fading away, leaving behind a dark grey room, lit by blue beams criss-crossing the walls.

'I did it!' I whisper into the shocked silence.

Niyi gives me an amused smile and Hassan raises his thumbs. I'm so giddy with excitement that nothing can ruin this moment, not even Adanna's smirk as she steps away from me.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Onyeka was initially fighting the emotion?
2. What did Onyeka say to herself that helped her take the first step towards changing her situation?
3. What was unique about the memories that helped Onyeka gain control over her Ike?
4. How did Onyeka feel about being able to control her emotions without using the Fibonacci numbers for the first time?

Activity Suggestion:

Think about a situation you need to change.

- What do you think your first step needs to be?
- What will you gain if you are successful?

LESSON 5

Learning Objective: To understand that managing emotions is a life-long challenge.

Extract 1 (Page 200)

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cause any trouble,' I say quietly. 'I was looking for Adanna. I thought she might be in danger . . .' My voice trails off as the weight of my mistake fully hits me.

'You did well in Ìdánwò,' Dr Dòyìnbó says gently, 'but you can't go jumping into things you don't understand.' He squeezes my shoulder. 'I'm glad you're unharmed,' he adds. 'Now, if there's nothing else, I suggest you head back to your dorm.'

A lump fills my throat. I hate that I let everybody down. Even worse, I hate this feeling of being shut out. I thought Niyi, Adanna and Hassan were my friends, but they're clearly keeping something from me. I'm the odd one out again.

A lonely ache shudders through my body, along with a need to connect with someone who truly cares about me.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Onyeka feel about being excluded from Nchebe?
2. Before Onyeka has the time to recover from the above encounter, she learns her mother is missing. Yet she holds it together and does not have a meltdown. Why was she able to do that?
3. In Chapter 25 (pages 209–211), Onyeka gets emotional again when she realises Niyi doesn't trust her. How does Adanna help her overcome this?

Extract 2: (Pages 288–289)

I look back down at Niyi, reluctant to leave him. I can't believe it's come to this – forced to defend ourselves from the very person who swore to protect us. The same person trying to escape up the steps quietly. Of course he's making a run for it!

Rage unlike anything I've ever felt before fills me.

My body shakes with power as it pulses in an overwhelming wave. I want to rip into Dr Dòyìnbó for what he's done. As if it heard my wish, my Ike rises and my hair flashes out, ploughing through his soldiers until it reaches Dr Dòyìnbó and wraps around his arms. He whimpers as I lift him from the steps, but I'm beyond caring. He's taken everything from us and I've had enough.

I pull him towards me until he's within touching distance.

My inky hair floats in front of his face and I let it drift across his frightened features. My hair moves downwards, thickening as it does, until it's wrapped completely around him. I let it tighten, in a slow squeeze. I'll make him pay for what he's done

I unleash all my grief and anger. I want him to feel what I feel. But a part of me knows something is wrong. This rage isn't me. My Ike has taken over, feeding on my pain, and I'm too weak to stop it, my hair constricting even further around Dr Dòyìnbó.

'Onyeka, stop!'

Adanna's voice sounds so distant, and I push it even further away.

'No,' I growl.

'Yeka, this isn't you.'

The sound of Cheyenne's nickname for me coming from Adanna is like a bucket of cold water and I freeze under its hold.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Chapter 35, grief and anger finally take hold of Onyeka, unleashing all of her superpower on the traitor Dr Doyinbo. What would have happened if Onyeka had not found her anchor and allowed her Ike to take complete control of her emotions?
2. What do Onyeka's experiences in these chapters teach us about the recurring nature of emotions and the power of unharnessed emotions?

Activity Suggestion:

Create a road map that plots Onyeka's emotional journey from the beginning of the book, where she has no knowledge of her superpowers to the end, identifying key points in the journey and what/who made the difference, enabling Onyeka to ultimately gain control over her Ike.



THEME 2: MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS (SUBJECTS: PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION; SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION)

LESSON 1

Learning Objective: To explore the different ways individuals can be bullied or treated unfairly because of their physical attributes and the damage this causes.

Extract (Pages 11–12)

We quickly make our way poolside – a brightly lit, rectangular space that is even warmer than the changing room. The swimming cap tightens even more around my head.

In the middle of the space sits a large pool with people scattered everywhere. It's mostly kids, enjoying their summer holidays. Some are in the water, playing in lazy boredom, while the better swimmers zoom past them. The rest hang around the edge of the pool, chatting in small groups.

I feel the eyes and hear the sniggers following my bulbous head as we pass. A girl nudges past me with a wide-eyed look of wonder and I grit my teeth so I don't react. It's always the same and I've heard all the jokes. From how I look like a yeti to the hilarious one about using a rake to comb my hair.

Even adults, who should know better, can't help themselves. Every time we go to the hair shop to get products, Mum is always surrounded by people offering to do my hair, like it's so unbelievable that I would choose to walk around looking the way I do.

The worst part is watching Mum try to ignore them, her worry a constant blanket surrounding both of us. Mum says I shouldn't get angry or let it bother me when people chat rubbish. But when I see how sad it makes her and think about how she has to deal with it alone, I can't help but get angry.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is happening in this extract?
2. Is what is happening to Onyeka as she walks to the poolside a one-off event? How do you know?
3. How does the behaviour of other children and adults influence how Onyeka feels about herself and her hair?
4. Have you or other people you know been treated unfairly or bullied because of a physical attribute? How did that make you/them feel?
5. What other things do people do that might be termed as bullying?
6. What should you do if you see other children being treated badly?

Activity Suggestion:

With a partner, underline or highlight all the different ways people are unkind to Onyeka in the extract above. Make a list of what people should have done instead.



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LESSON 2

Learning Objective: To explore the relationship between Onyeka and her mum and identify behaviours that cause and exacerbate conflict.

Extract (Pages 24–27)

'They got in trouble in the water,' I say quietly.

She hesitates then, but only to gather enough saliva to kiss her teeth at me.

'Are you a water guard?'

I roll my eyes. 'It's lifeguard, Mum.'

'That's what I said.' She circles me again, inspecting my body this time. 'Are you hurt? Is Cheyenne okay?' Her voice sharpens and I almost smile. When Mum is scared, she sounds angry. Most people can't tell the difference, but I can. It sounds like love to me.

'I'm fine, Mum,' I reply.

A soft sigh escapes her lips. 'How many times do I have to tell you? You're not like everyone else. You have to be careful.'

She pauses, then reaches for me. The warm weight of her hand cradles my face gently, but it's not enough to erase the sting of her words. My hands tighten into hard fists at my sides as it washes over me.

'Yeah, I know,' I reply, suddenly tired.

Between Mum's overprotectiveness and the way people react to my hair, I've got the message loud and clear. You'd think I was made of candyfloss the way Mum is always going on. The thing is, her messages are so mixed up it gives me whiplash. It's like with one hand she'll push me away, then with the other pull me back so hard and so close I can barely breathe.

'Kí ló selè?' she asks again in a soft voice. A hard knot grows in my belly as I try to find the words to explain something I don't even understand. None come, so I give up.

'They needed help,' I finally reply with a shrug. 'So that's what I did.'

'But how?' she presses. 'You can barely swim.'

'My hair ...' I begin, but my voice fades away into a thin whisper.

The hand on my face drops and a gruff sound leaves Mum's lips. 'What about it?'

It's her tone that does it. I've heard it a million times before. Annoyance, sadness and a strange fear all rolled into one horrible sound. I don't know if it's a tone she's always had or if it came after my father left.

'Why do you hate my hair so much?' I ask her bluntly. I don't even try to hide the hurt in my voice.

Mum's eyes widen. 'I ... I don't hate it,' she stutters. 'It just makes it harder for us to fit in here.'

I sniff at her answer. I can't help it. 'Then why don't we just go back to Nigeria?'

'You do not get to ask me that,' Mum snaps back. 'When you're grown and have to make difficult decisions then you might understand.'

This again? She says this every time I question her. 'Forget it,' I snap back, twisting away from her.

Mum freezes at my tone and her eyes narrow. 'What did you just say?'

I take a step back at the disapproval in her voice and almost trip on the edge of the worn rug.

'You never want to talk about Nigeria,' I croak out, my earlier confidence vanishing like smoke. 'Everything is always a secret, even my own father.'

'Do not exaggerate,' she replies in a stern voice. 'I do talk about him.'

'When?' I say, throwing my hands up. 'It's like he doesn't even exist.'

Her face hardens and the knot in my stomach feels like a rock now.

'You're not being fair, ókó mi.'



I usually love it when Mum uses that pet name, but this time I flinch at the words. I'm probably overreacting, but I can't stop myself. All the fear and panic I felt in the pool crashes over me, and my head starts pounding. My breath locks in my chest, making it difficult to breathe.

'Is that why he left?' I whisper. 'Because you kept so many secrets from him?'

Mum's eyes close as something flashes across her face. It's gone by the time she opens them again.

'Does it matter why he left? He isn't here now,' she says, running a hand across her tired face. 'I am.'

The knot in my stomach loosens like molten lava, burning through me. It boils inside, searching for a way out. I start to count, but something stops me. A small spark I don't recognize. So I let it out and the words pour from me before I can call them back.

'I wish you weren't.'

A pained expression settles over Mum's face and her shoulders drop.

'This is my own fault, I guess, for letting you build this fantasy around your father,' she says in a weak voice. 'I just wanted you to have something. I know how hard you find it here.' Her hand waves around my room. 'With me.'

Mum's voice cracks then, filling me with shame. Mum can be difficult, but I know she loves me, and at least she's here.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What can we learn about the relationship between Onyeka and her mum from the above extract?
2. How does Onyeka feel about her missing father?
3. Why do you think Onyeka says the things she does to her mother?
4. Why do you think Onyeka's mum does all the things that Onyeka finds so frustrating?
5. Given what you now know about the story, why did Onyeka's mum hide secrets from her? Do you think she was right to do so?
6. What do you think they both could have done differently?

Activity Suggestion 1:

Using a highlighter pen, identify all the things Onyeka said or did to make the argument in the extract worse. With a different coloured highlighter pen, identify all the things Onyeka's mum did to make her cross.

Activity Suggestion 2:

What sort of things do you do to wind up adults? Make a list of all the things you could do differently.

Activity Suggestion 3: (Cross-curricular link with literacy)

Re-write the scene, changing all the behaviours so that Onyeka and her mum end the conversation on a happier note.



LESSON 3

Learning Objective: To explore the relationship between Onyeka and Cheyenne and identify what makes their relationship work.

Extract 1 (Page 2)

'I'm not coming out,' I mutter at the thick, wooden door separating us.

A quick shuffle of feet, followed by a sharp knock. 'The pool's gonna close at this rate,' Cheyenne replies without any sympathy. 'Have you got it on?'

I stare at the swimming cap Mum insisted I wear, resting on the floor where I threw it. I knew it was going to cause me problems.

'I'm not coming out,' I repeat, but there's a wobble in my voice that gives me away. I'm no match for Cheyenne.

She knows it too and pounces immediately, like a cheetah from one of the wildlife documentaries Mum loves. We watch them together the rare times she isn't working.

'Open up,' Cheyenne hollers, and the whole changing room grows silent around us.

My belly tightens. I hate it when Cheyenne does that. Just because she loves attention, doesn't mean I do too. The already tiny space of the cubicle closes in around me and my chest tightens, making it difficult to breathe. Energy surges across my skin, but I force it back down. I can't get upset.

Extract 2 (Page 4)

Cheyenne's got Turner's syndrome, and she has to take special hormones to help her grow properly. Her mouth is plenty big though. I once watched her shut down a Year Eleven girl with just one sentence. The girl was chatting about my hair, so I guess she deserved it.

'Okay, where is it then?' Cheyenne's dark eyes scan the small room until she spots the swimming cap. 'Well, of course it won't fit,' she says. 'It's on the floor, you doughnut.'

Cheyenne is older than me, but she likes to act as if it's by years not months. She picks up the cap and her eyes widen in understanding. 'Rah, is your mum having a laugh?'

'I wish,' I reply. 'She thinks it's cute.' I flatten the u into an oo sound in imitation of Mum's strong Nigerian accent. Cheyenne smiles in instant recognition, her downturned eyes sparkling with glee.

Extract 3 (Page 8)

'What am I going to do?' I ask.

'Sorry, fam, but you're gonna have to pack it up . . .'

My mouth twists and her voice trails off. Cheyenne meets my gaze again, but there's no curiosity or pity. Not like I get from others. To Cheyenne, my hair is just another part of me, like the gap between my front teeth and my massive size-eight feet. The same way I see her love of furry fox ears and marmite. It's the way I wish the world would see both of us, instead of only focusing on the things that make us different. It's what drew Cheyenne and me together in the first place.

That, and the fact she's the only other Nigerian I know.

Extract 4 (Pages 52–53)

A sharp pain is the only warning I get before my hair erupts like a halo around me.

'Chey!' I call out in a shaky voice, and she swivels around sharply.



Her eyes widen into big, round saucers. 'Woah,' she breathes, backing away from me. Her eyes are glued to my hair in a weird mix of fear and curiosity. 'Wh . . . what is that?'

I don't know how to answer her, and I'm petrified my hair is going to do something stupid. 'Super Yeka?' I finally reply.

'When did . . . ?' Cheyenne pauses and swallows hard. 'How is this . . . ?' She stops again, struggling to find words. I almost feel sorry for her. 'I don't believe this,' she finally pushes out.

'It's still me,' I say softly.

Cheyenne narrows her eyes at me as if I said something silly, but she can't see the expression on her face. She looks proper scared. So I just wait, wondering how she's about to react, but totally convinced she's going to freak out.

As if she's determined to prove me wrong, Cheyenne takes a step closer, then another, and before I can stop it, a strand of hair curls towards her. She freezes as my hair stops just centimetres from her face. Then Cheyenne's hand lifts slowly. It's all the invitation my hair needs, and it wraps around her hand eagerly. Cheyenne stiffens for a second, then her whole body relaxes.

'No freaking way!' Cheyenne squeals as she runs her fingers through my hair.

'Yes way,' I whisper, relieved that she's not running away screaming.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. From the extracts above, how would you describe Onyeka and Cheyenne's different personalities? In what ways are they alike and in what ways are they different? How do the similarities and differences affect their friendship?
2. Why didn't Cheyenne run away when Onyeka's hair began moving towards her?
3. Was Onyeka right to sneak out to say goodbye to Cheyenne? Explain your thinking.
4. Do you have a friend who accepts you the way you are? Do you accept them the way they are?

Activity Suggestion 1:

Make a list of all the thing you appreciate in your best friend.

Activity Suggestion 2: (Cross-curricular link with science)

Research Turner's syndrome on the internet.

- Although the author doesn't tell us directly, how might Turner's syndrome affect Cheyenne's life?
- Do you think this makes Cheyenne a more understanding friend to Onyeka?

LESSON 4

Learning Objective: To explore how and why people try to manipulate each other. To understand that people who appear to be your enemy may actually be your friend and that the reverse is also true.

Extract (Pages 154–155)

By the time I get my pounded yam and efo, there aren't too many empty tables left. As I pass the recycling station, I scan the room looking for a free seat.

'Onyeka! Over here.'

I turn to find Eni waving me towards her table. I hesitate, thinking of



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Adanna. But then I stop myself. I'm done with letting her affect what I do. Besides, I need to at least try to make new friends and Eni has been nothing but nice to me. If Cheyenne were here, she'd tell me to get my butt over there. So I do.

'Hi,' I say, putting my tray down.

'Hey,' Eni replies. 'Love your hair today.'

I tense and stare down at the table, waiting, out of habit, for the insult that must be coming. But my hair has actually been looking all right lately. Styling it is getting easier too, and I mostly wear it in a thick braid now, though it still tries to escape.

'It's such a cool Ike,' says a girl wearing yellow, a pair of matching earrings dangling from her lobes. 'I'm Oluchi, by the way.'

I nod back, feeling slightly dizzy from all the attention.

'That's Fa'idah,' Oluchi adds, pointing to a girl wearing a hijab that matches her patterned leggings. 'I think you know Amandi already.' The boy with the supersonic voice gives me a wave. 'Welcome to the cool table,' Oluchi finishes, arms spread wide.

The table erupts in laughter, like she said something funny.

'So you've been training with Adanna,' says Eni, a slow smile spreading across her face. 'Bet that's fun.'

'Ugh, she's so annoying,' Amandi whispers, though he still sounds incredibly loud. 'She's always sucking up to Dr Dòyinbó and she thinks she's so brilliant.'

My fists clench in my lap and the hairs on my arms tingle. I'm always complaining to Niyi and Hassan about Adanna, but it feels wrong listening to these kids do it.

'Erm, yeah, it's been okay,' I reply.

'I heard she lost it in the gym today,' says Oluchi with a laugh. 'I mean, we all know she hit you first, that time with Ms Bello.'

Eni's smile shifts. 'She's dangerous and totally a Rogue spy. I don't know why Dr Dòyinbó lets her stay at the academy.'

Their laughter flows like acid, burning a hole in my stomach. The sound is very familiar. I've heard it too many times before. But usually, I'm on the other end of it. I totally shouldn't have come to Eni's table.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Adanna spent the first few days completely ignoring Onyeka or being rude to her. Why do you think she helped Onyeka harness her Ike that first day in HOME?
2. What do you think is happening in the extract above?
3. In the extract above, what strategies do Eni and her friends use to try to sow discord between Onyeka and Adanna?
4. Why does Onyeka say 'I totally shouldn't have come to Eni's table.'?
5. Following the conversation above, Onyeka defends Adanna thereby making an enemy of Eni. Why do you think she did that?
6. Once Onyeka and Adanna really start talking, what do they realise about each other?

Activity Suggestion 1:

Onyeka's relationship with Adanna changed after she defended Adanna. Make a list of the actions you can take to improve a relationship with someone you don't get along with.



Activity Suggestion 2:

Debate the following statement:

Adanna was right to behave the way she did towards Onyeka when she initially arrived at the academy.

Activity Suggestion 3:

Imagine Dr Doyinbo has heard about the dining room incident and has asked Onyeka and Eni to explain in their own words what happened. Set up a role play scenario where pupils dramatise the conversation with Dr Doyinbo.

Key questions for pupils to consider.

How sincere was Eni being towards Onyeka?

What do you think Eni's real motives were?

Who makes the most compelling argument in support of their actions?

Who is the most believable and why?

THEME 3: IDENTITY, BELONGING AND PERSONAL GROWTH (SUBJECTS: PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION)

LESSON 1

Learning Objective: To explore the concepts of identity and belonging.

Extract (Page 5)

Her eyes shift to my head and the tangle of curls, coils and kinks sitting on top. It springs straight out of my head in an impressive riot that Mum finds overwhelming, so I rarely leave it loose. My hair has broken more combs, trashed more hairdryers and made more hairstylists cry than I can count . . . so maybe Mum has a point.

Straightening it doesn't work, braids won't stay in for long and the only time Mum cut it, the strands grew back bigger and thicker. Now the longest bits that don't stick straight up or out, hang down my back almost to my bum. It always feels dry, no matter what I put in it, which doesn't help. The colour is cool though. A black so deep that when the light hits my hair just right, you can see bolts of blue fire shooting through it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the extract above tell us about how Onyeka and her mum felt about Onyeka's hair?
2. In the middle of page 8, Onyeka mentioned two other parts of her body that make her stand out. Can you name them?
3. Why do you think Onyeka hated standing out in a crowd? Can you find an answer on page 9? Are there any other answers you can think of?
4. How do you think Onyeka's desire to fit in affected her personality and how she thought of herself?
5. What does 'belonging' mean to you?
6. What kind of things can make people feel like they don't belong?
7. Do you feel you have to hide a part of yourself so you don't stand out?
(To be asked with caution, using teacher judgement and bearing in mind the needs of individual pupils and school policy.)



LESSON 2

Learning Objective: To understand that a person might face various challenges before coming to terms with aspects of their identity.

Read pages 33 (from the last paragraph) to the end of page 37.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In chapter 4, Onyeka learned about a whole new aspect of her identity. How did she react to the discovery at first? Why do you think she felt this way?
2. If you discovered you had a superpower, what would you want it to be and why?

Now read pages 165–167

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

3. What emotions did Onyeka have to overcome before she could allow Adanna to braid her hair?
4. After Adanna braided Onyeka's hair, what did she realise about herself. What does this tell us about the power of positive and negative experiences?
5. In what ways do you think this experience changed how Onyeka viewed her hair and her life?
6. Is there a part of you that you find difficult to accept? What could you do to stop fighting it? (To be asked with caution, using teacher judgement and bearing in mind the needs of individual pupils and school policy.)

Activity Suggestion:

List the words Onyeka used to describe how she usually felt about braiding her hair. Compare these to the words she used to describe her experience with Adanna. What made the difference when Adanna braided Onyeka's hair?

LESSON 3

Learning Objective: To understand a character's growth in confidence and towards self-acceptance over time.

Extract 1 (Pages 1–2)

*'I'm not coming out,' I mutter at the thick, wooden door separating us.
A quick shuffle of feet, followed by a sharp knock. 'The pool's gonna close at this rate,'
Cheyenne replies without any sympathy. 'Have you got it on?'
I stare at the swimming cap Mum insisted I wear, resting on the floor where I threw it. I
knew it was going to cause me problems.
'It won't fit,' I say. 'I tried already. My hair's too big.'
Cheyenne makes a noise that sounds both like a sigh and grunt . . . a
srunt. 'Can't you just ditch it?'
I snort back. 'You know what Mum will do if my hair gets loose or wet.'
'She won't find out,' Cheyenne replies. But we both hear the lie in her voice.
Mum always finds out. It's her superpower.
'I'm not coming out,' I repeat, but there's a wobble in my voice that gives
me away. I'm no match for Cheyenne.*



Extract 2 (Pages 122–123)

Professor Sàlàkó coughs to get everyone's attention, then he turns in my direction. 'I see you've joined us properly, Ms Uduike.'

It's strange hearing my real surname used for the first time. Then I realize why the room is laid out the way it is. I can see everyone in the classroom. But what's worse, they can see me too. Too many eyes zero in on me and I struggle not to fidget in my seat.

'Do you think you could introduce yourself now?' the professor asks.

My voice is frozen, as if Niyì used his lke on it, and I shake my head. A few students gasp and even Niyì sucks in a breath next to me.

Professor Sàlàkó stares at me for a long moment and I hold my breath too.

'We're discussing the history of Nigeria's Unity Councils,' he finally begins, and I release my breath on a sigh.

Extract 3 (Pages 155–156)

Their laughter flows like acid, burning a hole in my stomach. The sound is very familiar. I've heard it too many times before. But usually, I'm on the other end of it. I totally shouldn't have come to Eni's table.

'I know, right?' says Fa'idah as she pushes a piece of moinmoin around her plate. 'I can't wait for Ìdánwò. Then we can put her back in her place.'

I'm not sure what she means by that, but it doesn't sound good for Adanna.

'What are you going to do?' I ask with a frown.

The whole table goes quiet.

'Make things fair,' Eni says with a smirk. 'Adanna had better watch her back during the trials. It's not right that she has more than one lke, even if they're pretty useless.'

A bitter smile twists Eni's face . . . she's jealous! She's probably the one who started the rumour in the first place about Adanna being a Rogue spy. I think of each time Adanna has helped me. First in HOME when she showed me how to connect with my lke, then later, offering to help me learn to use it properly. Even after I accidentally hurt her. My chair scrapes loudly across the floor as I stand up quickly.

'That's just wrong,' I snap. 'Adanna might be rude, but at least she isn't nasty and jealous like you lot!'

Extract 4 (Page 190)

Adanna is up to her thighs in sand now and Eni is almost at the oasis. Even if I ran super fast, I don't think I'd catch up with Eni. I stare at Adanna helplessly as guilt claws at me. She's going to lose because of me.

I can't let that happen.

The thought booms through my mind and anger at the unfairness of it all flares to life. I grab a memory of Cheyenne and then another one joins it . . . Adanna doing my hair. They wrap around each other, like the braids in my hair, anchoring my lke. My scalp prickles to life as the braids uncoil from their knots with ease, erupting around me.

Extract 5 (Page 195)

'Ada, where did you go . . . ?'

My voice trails off. The room is empty. Where is she? I was one of the last to leave HOME and I fully thought she'd be back by now. Then a worrying thought flashes through my mind. What if Òré was right? What if it is another



SIMON & SCHUSTER

Rogue attack and Adanna is caught up in it? What if she needs my help?

I swallow hard, pushing down the panic trying to crawl out of my skin. It's the same one I felt when Cheyenne disappeared under the water. I try to focus, but my worry won't let me.

I should tell someone Adanna is missing . . . Dr Dòyinbó or even DAMI. I start to activate my Second Sight when something stops me. What if I'm wrong and Adanna is fine? I don't want to get her in trouble, but I can't just sit here and do nothing either. I only have one option left. I have to find her myself.

The hallways are deserted as I dash back out of my dorm. Probably because everyone else is where they're supposed to be. I move quickly across the quad, hurrying through a set of double doors and down a long hallway. My legs feel heavy. They know I shouldn't there.

The thought of Adanna in trouble keeps me moving though.

Extract 6 (Page 226)

I don't move. I'm paralyzed by the sight of Niyi, pinned beneath Zahrah's flames. This is all my fault!

I was so busy trying to prove a point that never even mattered, so desperate to show him I wasn't useless . . . that I belong. It's why I was so hurt by his words, because I thought I'd finally found my place at AOS.

This last thought focuses me. The memory of Niyi stopping the fireball before it hit me and Hassan blasts through my mind. He didn't abandon me then . . . I won't abandon him now.

With a suddenness that leaves me breathless, a wave of fury rushes through me. I grab on to it gratefully, using the memories to anchor it. The man holding me grunts as one of my chunky twists headbutts him in the face. He lets me go so he can cup his nose and I push him away.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Read the extracts above.

1. What adjectives would you use to describe the kind of person Onyeka was at the beginning of the story? Give your reasons.
2. By the time Onyeka engages in the Idanwo (Chapter 22), how has she changed? What evidence do you have of this?
3. In Chapter 28, Onyeka unwittingly walks into a trap that puts her and Niyi in grave danger. What does the situation make her realise about herself?
4. By the end of the book, what does Onyeka realise about family and belonging (check page 290 for clues)?

Activity Suggestion 1:

Review the road map you created under Theme 1 Lesson 5 that plots how Onyeka learns to manage her emotions throughout the book. Now add to this road map the key adjectives to describe Onyeka's personality growth over time.

Activity Suggestion 2: (Cross-curriculum link with literacy)

At the end of the book, Onyeka and Adanna decide to ring Cheyenne together to tell her what has happened. Imagine you are Cheyenne. Write a text message to Adanna telling her about the amazing growth you've seen in Onyeka since she left England.

