The Other Side of Truth

INTRODUCTION
In The Other Side of Truth, Beverly Naidoo skillfully introduces young readers to the serious topics of political terror and political asylum through the wanderings of two young African refugees. Life for Sade and Femi radically changes when their mother is assassinated following their father’s writing against the Nigerian regime. The two children are smuggled to England, where they have to cope with the police, social and immigration services, foster families, ordinary racism and schoolyard bullies, together with their own pain and suffering and worry for their father. This is a novel whose language is easy enough – because it is intended for children — and written in clear English, however complex its subject is.

OBJECTIVES
■ Culture: Introducing pupils to a prominent South African contemporary writer – political refugees and asylum seekers – bullying

FINAL PROJECT
In groups, after considering a book review or an interview with the author as a preliminary approach, pupils will read and study a few selected chapters of the novel, corresponding to some of the key themes and events of the book. The final task will encourage them to recap those and develop more autonomous presentations for their final oral examination.

PROCEDURE

ACTIVITY 1. A FIRST APPROACH TO THE NOVEL – GROUP WORK
In order to help pupils acquire a global view on the story, and to ensure their general understanding of the plot, provide them with a book review of the novel and an extract from an interview with the author. This should make them aware of the main themes of the novel and reassure less confident pupils, by giving them an insight into the story and get an understanding of the plot prior to their reading.

Divide the class into two groups. Group A reads the book review from The New York Times dating from when The Other Side of Truth was first published (go to www.nytimes.com then type “The Other Side of Truth” — with quotation marks — on the search engine; click on the “all results since 1851” option to access the page; click on the headline). You can print out copies for pupils, or send them to read it online. Meanwhile, Group B focuses on three questions from an interview with Beverley Naidoo available on her website (www.beverleynaidoo.com/theother_interview.html). Both groups complete TASK 1 (A or B accordingly) and get ready to report on what they have done.

ACTIVITY 2. READING SOME KEY PASSAGES
Three passages have been selected. TASK 2 refers to Chapters 4 and 8, when Sade (pronounced Sha-day) and Femi are smuggled to England and then abandoned by Mrs Bankole. TASK 3 refers to Chapters 11 and 18, when the two children face the police and immigration services. Based on Chapters 21 and 25, TASK 4 focuses on how Sade copes with bullies in her new school.

FINAL TASK
The final activities suggested here aim at boosting pupils’ confidence by giving them an opportunity to re-use what they have learnt throughout the narrative. It must be considered a step towards autonomy and an opportunity to orally recap many elements from the novel, bearing in mind the format of their Baccalauréat oral exam.

TASK 5 A provides some complementary information about refugees and asylum seekers, with official data and figures to be commented upon.

In Chapter 32, Sade and Femi manage to meet “Mr Seven O’Clock” and convince him to talk about their father’s situation on his news programme. In TASK 5 B pupils will role-play the three characters for the interview. They should first read Chapter 31 to be fully aware of “Sade’s plan.”

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A South African Writer

WORKSHEET

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PUPIL WORKSHEET

TASK 1

A. Group A: Work on The New York Times book review (your teacher will give it to you, or tell you where to find it on line.)

Answer on a separate piece of paper when necessary.

1. Focus on the first paragraph of the review.
   a. List all six characters mentioned in the passage.
   b. Explain how they are related.
   c. Say who the main character in the story must be, giving your reasons.
   d. Identify the two countries in which the action is set and explain why the characters move from one to the other.
   e. Get ready to verbally explain the initial situation of the novel using a few notes.

2. Focus on the next two paragraphs.
   a. Find synonyms for the adjectives in the list below, say who these adjectives refer to and be prepared to explain why.
      - eager (to + V)
      - uncommunicative
      - courageous
      - unaccompanied
      - distant
      - mean
      - worried
      - scared
      - kind
      - resourceful
   b. Complete the following table about the different places and people the children come across once in London.
      Customs and Immigration - ____________________ - ____________________
      The police station - ____________________ - ____________________ - ____________________
   c. Using the elements found in b., get ready to explain and expand on what happened to Sade and Femi in England. Use:
      - first
      - so
      - as a consequence
      - after V-ing
      - eventually

3. Read the first two sentences of the review and the final paragraph and give the reviewer’s opinion about the book.

B. Group B – An Interview with Beverley Naidoo (your teacher will give it to you, or tell you where to find it on line.)

Answer on a separate piece of paper when necessary.

1. “Where did the inspiration come from for The Other Side of Truth? Why did you choose the refugee experience as your subject?”
   a. Why write The Other Side of truth?
   b. Why Nigeria?
   c. Plot, characters?

2. “How did you research the book?”
   a. Give examples of documentation.
   b. Extra information about the plot and the choice of the point of view: who is the story focused on?
   c. Beverley Naidoo’s opinion on the way the British government treats asylum seekers? (Give practical details.)

3. “Have you ever felt, or had any criticism lodged, that you are unqualified, as a white South African, to write from a black perspective?”
   a. What do you learn about Beverley Naidoo in the journalist’s question.
   b. What is Beverley Naidoo’s point of view on this issue?
   c. Do you agree with her? Why/why not?

TASK 2

SMUGGLED TO ENGLAND

A. Chapter 4: from the beginning, to p. 27 “the plane that was going to carry her and Femi far away from home” – the drive to the airport.

1. State precisely where Sade and Femi are at the beginning of the chapter: specify when and why.
2. Say what the street scenes correspond to: a description of what Sade sees, an evocation of well-known scenes, memories of the past? (Page 23-24)
3. Read the whole chapter.
   The narrator uses various devices to convey Sade’s feelings: metaphors, questions Sade asks herself, physical sensations and body language. Pick out examples.
4. Concentrate on Sade’s father and mother.
   “The bully only gets away with it because others let him.” p. 26.
   a. Explain Sade’s father’s point of view.
   b. What was her mother’s opinion?
   c. What do you think? How relevant is Beverley Naidoo’s sentence here? “We as parents make choices that our children inherit.”
5. Find quotes to illustrate the following statements.
   a. Sade is aware they might be away for a long time.
   b. They have a narrow escape with the second police check.
   c. The trip to the airport, which Sade would usually enjoy, is nothing like before.

B. Chapter 4: from “Even at night” p. 27, to the end – “Mrs Peacock/Bankole”

1. Show how Sade plays the role of big sister towards her younger brother.
2. A Portrayal of Mrs Bankole and Mr Fix-it.
   Give examples of the various characterisation devices used by
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the narrator for both characters: behaviour, body language and inanimate identifiers (ways a narrator relates a character or a place to repeated objects or references: for example, meals, mirrors, gold, darkness...)

3. Read the whole chapter again and sum up what we learn.
   a. The two children are left with... ________________________
   b. Mrs Bankole: her purpose (supposed to... but actually...)
   c. Mr Fix-it: his function (supposed to... but actually...)

4. Reading the scene from Sade’s point of view, list everything implying there’s something shady about the trip to London.

C. Chapter 8 – abandoned in London.

1. Throughout this chapter, the narrator gradually indicates that Mrs Bankole is going to leave the children behind. What are the signs and stages of this betrayal?

2. Choose the adjectives applying first to Mrs Bankole then to Mr Bankole. Explain your choices.

   weak ● insensitive ● selfish ● self-centred/self-interested ● vulgar ● harsh ● brutal ● wicked/vicious ● unscrupulous ● corrupt

TASK 3

POLICE AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES

A. Chapter 11 – The Police

1. What do the passages in italics correspond to?

2. Contrast the attitudes of the Nigerian and British police.

3. Focus on what the Nigerian police forces say and the way they behave and compare them to “Video Man”.

4. Focus on the way the different characters speak: Sade’s parents, the Nigerian police, the British police, Video Man. What does their manner of speaking reflect?

B. Chapter 18 – The Immigration Office

1. Read the chapter and analyse how Naidoo has used her research to describe place, and create atmosphere.

2. Pick out examples of Mr Nathan voicing Beverley Naidoo’s own feelings.

3. Does the description of the scene from a child’s point of view make it more stressful or does it soften its harshness? Pick out quotes and explain.

4. How are the immigration officers depicted? Choose adjectives and explain.

   inhumane ● humane ● neutral ● harsh ● understanding ● considerate ● tactful ● strict ● efficient...

TASK 4

SCHOOL BULLIES — CHAPTERS 21 AND 25

A. Use the definition below to show that Sade is bullied by Donna and Marcia and their friends. Use some elements from the text to prove your point.

“Bullying is repeated abuse that can take three forms: physical (hitting, spitting...), verbal (threats, name-calling...) and psychological (exclusion, intimidation, spreading rumours...)”

B. Sade’s Dilemma

1. Show that Sade is torn between giving in or acting as her father would ("The bully only gets away with it because others let him.")

2. What do you think she will do in the end and why?

TASK 5

A. Go to: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/ and click on “Immigration and Asylum statistics”, then “Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 2008” and be ready to present the chart about asylum seekers (p. 20) and pie chart on asylum-seeking children (p. 23). Be prepared to explain what the Immigration Office does in a few words.

B. Use all you have learned so far to prepare Sade and Femi’s interview with “Mr Seven O’Clock”. Work in threes.

Pupil A:
As the news presenter, Mr Seven O’Clock, you will have to:
● welcome your audience
● introduce the topic of the programme and your guests
● ask them questions about their family, their experiences in Nigeria, their experiences in England, their hopes for the future

Don’t forget Sade and Femi are children and have been through a terrible ordeal. You must make them feel comfortable, help them whenever needed and give extra information to your audience whenever you think it would be relevant.

Pupil B:
You are Sade, you must get ready to:
● introduce yourself and answer the presenter’s questions
● explain who your father is and what happened to your mother
● say what happened to you in England and why you lied about your identity
● expand on your feelings and hopes

Keep in mind you are a child and try to present what you know of Sade’s personality.

Pupil C:
You are Femi, you must get ready to:
● explain you miss your country and father
● say you didn’t want to go to England in the first place
● expand on your feelings of anger, fear and resentment
● explain why you felt estranged from your sister at one point

Keep in mind you are a young child and try to present what you know of Femi’s personality.
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Solutions

Task 1

A. Group A: 1.a. and b. The six characters are Sade, a 12-year-old Nigerian girl; her younger brother Femi; her father, a journalist; her mother, who has just been assassinated; Uncle Dele, Sade and Femi’s uncle who works in England as a professor at the London College of Art; and “a woman” the children are entrusted to, in order to be smuggled to England.

b. c. The main character in the story must be Sade since she is central and since nearly all the characters are referred to through her (“Sade's father”, “Sade's mother”, “her younger brother”). It gives the impression the story revolves around her.

d. The action is set in Nigeria, then in England. Sade and Femi have to flee Nigeria after the assassination of their mother, who has been killed in retaliation against articles written by their father, an “outspoken” journalist, hostile to the Nigerian government. The two children are being smuggled to England for their safety. They are given false passports and entrusted to a woman who must bring them to their Uncle Dele in London.

2. a. The two children are eager to/desperate to see their father again and be reunited.

Femi is more and more uncommunicative/taciturn. Sade is courageous/brave probably because, as the “big sister”, she takes care of her brother and tries to cope with the situation. The two children, once abandoned, are unaccompanied/alone in the streets of London. They didn’t find their uncle, who seems to have disappeared.

Femi is increasingly distant/remote. All these troubles are probably too much for him, he is younger than Sade and has just lost his mother.

The bullies at school are mean/petty. Sade grows worried/concerned about the attitude of her brother who progressively becomes more and more distant.

Sade and Femi are scared/afraid to tell the truth and give their real names to the police or social services, because their father is still in Nigeria and they don’t want him to get into further trouble.

Social services workers are kind/sympathetic towards Sade and Femi. They are aware these two young children must have faced tragic events.

Sade is resourceful/resilient, because she is the one in charge and she has to look after her younger brother and try to protect him.

b. and c. First the two children are abandoned by “the woman” once they passed through Customs. So they go to the London College of Arts where their uncle works, but he seems to have disappeared. They are alone, wandering in the streets of London. A shopkeeper notices them and calls the police. After being interviewed by the police, the children are sent to the social services, who find a foster home to take them in and look after them. Life seems to be “normal” again and the children are finally sent to school.

3. The reviewer seems to be enthusiastic. She uses positive terms such as “engaging”, “deftly”, “engrossing”, “absorbing” and says people will easily identify with the characters.

B. Group B – 1.a. Beverley Naidoo decided to write a story about refugees because she considers herself a kind of refugee. She left South Africa, because of the apartheid policy, several years ago. So the theme was very close to her.

b. She chose Nigeria as the starting point of her story because she feels close to that country, which helped South Africa in the late 1960s and which afterwards underwent the harsh dictatorship of Abacha. The situation in the novel was prompted by the 1995 assassination of a Nigerian writer who was an opponent to the regime: Ken Saro-Wiwa.

c. We understand that the story will deal with the family of an opponent to the regime. It will include the opponent’s children, who might play an important role.

2.a. The author visited the different places her characters go to. She observed people sharing her characters’ situation, tried to be as close as possible to their experience and to share their feelings. She also met and interviewed a series of people working with asylum seekers, for instance social workers and a child psychotherapist.

b. According to the passage, the novel deals with the family of an opponent to the Nigerian regime, more precisely with the children who have to flee the country in order to avoid retaliation from the authorities and be safe abroad. The focus will probably be on the children. The story might be told from their point of view.

c. Beverley Naidoo is appalled at the treatment inflicted on asylum seekers in England. She describes humiliating situations and mentions a building where people have to queue up for hours in the cold because there is no decent waiting room. All this reminds her of what black people had to undergo under the apartheid regime in South Africa.

3.a. In this passage, we understand that Beverley Naidoo is a white South African writer, which may seem rather surprising because as a refugee and opponent to the apartheid regime, you might have thought she was black. In addition, the main characters in her novel are black, and therefore some people questioned her legitimacy to write about the topic.

b. She believes literature deals with human beings, and as human beings, writers can deal with any topic, provided they do it with talent and imagination. (For example, male authors frequently write from a female point of view.) It’s the role of literature to help us expand beyond our own personal experiences and identities.

Task 2

A. 1. Sade and Femi are in the back of their uncle’s car. It’s evening. They are hiding under a blanket. They are on their way to the airport to be smuggled to England following the assassination of their mother.

2. The street scenes are an evocation of well-known places. Sade cannot see the townscape outside, so she imagines all these
places as a kind of farewell list. The marketplace with Mama Lola and her pyramid of oranges or Mr. Abiona’s grocery evoke images of happiness and a feeling of loss.

3. Metaphors: she and Femi were like two pebbles rattling in a tin...
p.24 (They are tossed about, small objects lost in the world.)

Questions about her grandmother; “Did she know yet? Who would tell her”; “Sade could just imagine their grandmother’s eyes mist over: distress...Whenever would they see grandmother again?” p.24

These questions express her deep worries about the future.

Physical sensations: “her heart pumping rapidly” p. 27, “her stomach twisted and knotted”. p.27

Body language: Sade pressed her face against her knees, p. 24

prostration expressing despair; Sade winced at the thought of touching... p. 30

4.a. Sade’s father believes you should never yield to bullies. According to him, if everyone decided to resist, there would be no bullies, dictators or tyrants.

b. She probably agreed with him, but was worried anyway. She never tried to stop him from writing, though. So she supported his point of view.


b. “That could have been nasty! If he insisted on looking, we would have been in big, big trouble.” p. 27.

c. “Usually it was exciting coming to the airport (…) But tonight Sade felt none of that excitement.” p. 27.

B. 1. Femi intends to run away because he doesn’t want to board the plane and leave his country and family (p. 27) but Sade manages to convince him not to do it, making him understand this would put their father in great danger (p. 28). Even if she shares her brother’s feelings, as the elder sister, she has to be reasonable and comfort her brother.

2. Identification with inanimate objects: her green headscarf and dress glinted; lips that glistened a deep purple, her wrists jingled with gold bangles, her chubby fingers were ringed, her nails polished; yet fake gold — shows how greedy and vulgar she is.

Body language: The children cringe at her chubby fingers, her damp and sweaty hands. Her plump body evokes greed, not generosity.

On several occasions, Sade contrasts her mother with Mrs Bankole, which indicates an element of distrust or at least suspicion: “The lady formed a little smile with lips that glistened a deep purple. Mama never wore lipstick.” p. 28, “Mama only wore a simple wedding ring.” p. 30. Both children’s attitudes betray uneasiness towards Mrs Bankole: “Both children held back as Mrs Bankole stretched out her hands,” p. 28, “This time, reluctantly, Sade and Femi each took a hand.” p. 30, “Femi looked as if he wanted to worm himself away. He glared at his feet.” p. 30.

Mr Fix-it: he is associated to something pointed, with a cutting edge: “his eyes narrowed, he spoke briskly and his words carried the jagged edge of warning” and later he’s compared to a fox. He wears fancy clothes: a pink handkerchief, a pale suit, which shows he pays attention to appearance. p. 29.

3. a. b. and c. The two children are left with Mrs Bankole, who will pretend to be their mother and smuggle them to England. She is supposed to help them, along with Mr Fix-it, who has masterminded the operation, but they are actually taking advantage of the situation and making money. They are part of a shady network and can’t really be trusted.

4. Right from the beginning, Sade doesn’t like Mrs Bankole or Mr Fix-it. She expresses it through a series of details (Mrs Bankole’s garish make-up and her jewellery, for instance) and when she realizes her Uncle is giving an envelope full of banknotes to Mr Fix-it.

“Uncle Tunde’s voice was different from his ordinary voice... Did she detect uncertainty — even a hint of desperation...?” p. 29 “He turned away, almost brusquely as if not to let them see the concern in his eyes.” p. 29

C.1. We see that the children have become a real burden to Mrs Bankole and gradually understand she is going to abandon them through a series of remarks throughout the chapter. “She was also clearly annoyed not to find their uncle at the airport.” p. 48. “[She] began to grouse about having to drag all her baggage around London. It seemed that she meant the children too.” pp. 48-49, “She threatened that if they ever mentioned her name (...) Papa would not be able to join them.” p. 49, “Sade noticed that Mrs Bankole no longer called them ‘Yemi’ and ‘Ade’.” p. 49.

2. Mrs Bankole is weak since she is talked into abandoning the children. We can say she is corrupt, self-centred and self-interested because she has done all this only for money. The only thing she seems to worry about is that she might get into trouble because of the children, that’s why she threatens them. All the description in the previous chapter (make-up and behaviour) shows she is vulgar too. The man is harsh and brutal: Sade nicknames the man Mr Bad Temper (p. 52). He looks and sounds fierce and angry (p. 50) and isn’t pleased at all to see Mrs Bankole with the children (p. 50). He keeps arguing with her (p. 51) and probably is the one who decides to abandon the two children with no further notice. Both of them are unscrupulous and corrupt.

Task 3

A. 1. The passages in italics correspond to Sade’s memories of what happened back in Nigeria when she and her family were confronted with the Nigerian (military) police.

2. Nigerian police forces are described as brutal and scary. They are threatening and act as rogues. On the contrary, the two British police officers seem somehow reassuring. They remain calm and composed, are polite and considerate.

3. In both cases, they are rather aggressive and brutish. They threaten people and try to intimidate them.

4. They don’t speak proper English (“Open am! Or we go break dis gate o!” or “You think I dey play!” p. 67 for the Nigerian police forces; “And three of ‘em was black as these two.” p. 68, “Oh they speak English all right. I heard ‘em.” p. 69 for “Video Man”), which strongly contrasts with Sade, her father and the British police: people who speak politely and in a correct English. This conveys an...
element of threat and brutishness that is confirmed by the way they behave: the Nigerian police threaten to break the door and act brutally. “Video Man” has “tiny bubbles of froth […] at the edge of [his] lips” p. 68 and vehemently protests and tells the two police officers off “Useless lot! Video Man muttered loudly, turning his back.” p. 70. Their language betrays their inner selves.

B.1. The passage clearly corresponds to what Beverley Naidoo said in her interview. In both cases, reference is made to the building, the lines of people waiting in the cold outside because of the lack of a waiting room. Naidoo spent time in those waiting lines. It has clearly helped her recreate this atmosphere and make it seem more real to the reader.

2. Pp. 99 and 100. Mr Nathan expresses Beverley Naidoo’s indignation about the office and the absence of a waiting room. She has him use the very same words she uses in her interview: “This place only gets worse! All this – twenty floors of office space – and not a decent waiting room! (…) It really is a disgrace! No other government department makes people wait outside like this.” pp. 99-100. He also protests when Femi faces the two officers: “This is ridiculous declared Mr Nathan (…) ‘You are causing the child unnecessary distress (…) I cannot see the point of putting him through this.’” p. 103, “Mr Nathan replied that the children were still very frightened.” p. 105.

3. The children’s point of view increases the feeling of stress. “The way she inspected everyone made her feel nervous” p.101. It is the second time the children have been confronted with the authorities and they more easily let themselves be impressed. The immigration officer looks like a witch: “Hawk Lady clutching her fingers in the awful place” p. 102. But Sade’s characterisations of the people and her tendency to give nicknames like “Hawk man” and “Hawk Lady” convey some humorous distancing that softens the scene.

4. The people of the office are not very friendly or understanding and Femi feels humiliated to have to go through the fingerprints procedure he believes is reserved to thieves and criminals. “Hawk Lady and Hawk Man” make no efforts to comfort the children and even show impatience if not exasperation. They are not really inhumane but they aren’t humane either. They are neutral, strict and efficient. You have the impression of robots or unsympathetic machines that don’t have any feelings towards the children. However, they do their job in a neutral way. They are not brutal unlike the Nigerian police.

Task 4

A. Sade is definitely bullied by the group of girls led by Donna and Marcia. They repeatedly attack Sade, laugh at her and her name (“Can’t spell her own name” p. 119, “Sha-day-aday what? (…) What kind of name is that then?” p. 124, “Sha-day-aday” pp. 142 and 144) and threaten her