

Children's Poetry Archive Teaching Resource National Poetry Day 2021 – CHOICE

John Mole – 'Nothing Personal' : Suitable for Key Stages 3 and 4

Invite students to listen to the recording of the poem on the Children's Poetry Archive - childrens.poetryarchive.org/poem/nothing-personal/

We can't have you in here
But please understand
That we've nothing against you.
If it was up to us
But it isn't. It's our customers.
It isn't personal. If we let you in
Then word would get around.
We have to make a living
And times are hard.

We can't let you sit there
But please understand
That we don't make the rules.
If we did
It wouldn't be like this.
It isn't personal.
There's room at the back
And as things are
You'll feel much safer
If you know your place.

We can't let you join
But please understand
That if we could
We would. It's the other teams
We play against . . .
It isn't personal.
They think your kind
Are trouble
And that where you come from
It's a different game.

We can't say why
But please understand
It's how things are. They've always
been like this
Although it does seem wrong.
It's nothing personal
But what can we do?
Try to see it our way.
If it was up to us
We'd welcome you.

John Mole's poem 'Nothing Personal' takes the listener and reader into a world where someone is being excluded by a narrator who isn't identified.

TRY THIS:

This poem asks big questions about exclusion: whether the narrator is using the excuse that 'We don't make the rules..' to justify excluding the person being addressed in the poem, or if they are making a choice to avoid responsibility for the exclusion.

How does the poet's reading help convey the situation unfolding in the poem? Think about the pitch and pace of the reading.

How does the choice of language in the poem give permission for the exclusion taking place? In what way are these 'choices'?

How does the repetition of certain words and phrases work to explain and justify the exclusion - or not?

How does the fact that the narrator is not identified affect the sense of impersonality in the poem? How does it affect the person being addressed in the poem?

Students might want to consider times in their own lives when they have felt excluded and write a poem of their own on the theme of exclusion.

Visit childrens.poetryarchive.org/teach for lots of ideas about how to get started on writing poetry.