

Jane Eades re Mathematics in Context MT188

Fifty years ago my sister was confused by an 11+ essay question which started "When I went upstairs to bed... Continue". She didn't understand that she had to lie because, after all, she went downstairs to bed because we lived on a boat.

Over thirty years ago (in a previous existence) I was peripherally involved in a project which needed to train a white graphic artist to draw black characters for a leaflet because he didn't have the skills.

About five years later, when I had started teaching I did an analysis of CSE and 'O' Level papers, which showed that 100 per cent of the questions were either context free or about middle class (my interpretation), white boys doing things boyish like going for a bike ride in the country or camping.

Yet later, at a SMILE conference, a group of us protested again at the white, male bias in the materials. The only female images were 'Crafty Kate', as opposed to 'Amazing Albert' and a Mata Hari in a slinky, low cut dress as opposed to a hunky, action man spy. My memory (poor as it is) tells me that all the male characters were identifiably white British. This led to a complete overhaul of the materials so that they truly represented the depth and range of the students who would use them.

So why all of this?

In Janine Blinko's article about 'Mathematics in Context' (MT 188) we seem to have turned the clock back over thirty years. Whose is the context? I am disturbed that, in considering the context, there has not been thought given to whether the context is actually appropriate. It doesn't take much to make mathematics inclusive - so why don't we do it?

I know it's taken me time to actually get down to read last month's MT but, somehow, it does seem to be ironic that I am reading it in Black History Month.

01332 346599

© ATM and others

copyright@atm.org.uk