



World Words

Double Cross

Malorie Blackman

Teacher's Notes

The Extract

This extract from Malorie Blackman's novel, *Double Cross*, is a dialogue between two people engaged in criminal activities. One, the narrator, seems to have been driven by a need for money to carry something illegal (in this extract we don't know what) and is asking his acquaintance, Dan, some questions before he delivers his mysterious package. To the narrator's alarm, Dan suggests he arms himself with a knife and the ensuing dialogue highlights escalation in weapon carrying. The extract ends with an open ended situation ideal for classroom speculation.

Method

It is important that the students do some creative thinking before they engage with the text, either by listening or by reading. Use the Pre-listening 1 activity first. As the text will be heard as part of a longer broadcast, prepare students for the interview part as well before they listen to it – Pre-Listening Activity 2.

When they have had the opportunity to explore the theme of the text and have contributed some of their own ideas, then they are ready to listen. There is no 'best' way to do this, but the authors would suggest the following method:

1. Students listen to the whole broadcast, checking their activity 2 charts while doing so. Ask them to recall, orally, any words or phrases from the extract after the listening has finished. Write these on the board.
2. Use the words on the board to orally reconstruct the story, as a class activity.
3. Hand out the text and read through. Interrupt with questions if appropriate.
4. Allow the students to listen again, this time with the text in front of them.

Now the students are ready to move onto the final part of the activities. These consist of following through ideas or themes.

Pre-Listening Activity 1

A. The two short extracts (abridged and adapted from newspaper reports) highlight what is acknowledged as a growing problem in the UK. While the extracts are provided as sources of information rather than as reading activities per se, you may check understanding verbally. For example:

(Text 1) By the context, what is meant by 'knife crime blackspot'?
Rank these countries (most dangerous first): Scotland, Portugal, Estonia, England
(*Portugal, England, Scotland, Estonia*)

(Text 2) On average, how many teenagers die through knife attacks every month? (2)
What, from the context, are 'stitches'?

Questions 1, 2 and 3 are designed for open discussion. This might be done by best by working first in small groups and then leading into open class discussion. Invite comparison with experiences in student's own country.

B. Most likely answers (but accept well argued alternatives):

'D'you want some protection' *in favour*

What's with all the armour? *against*

Are you off your nut? *against*

The streets aren't safe. *in favour*

Tossers like you can't set foot outside your house without tooling up. *against*

Carry one of these and no one will mess with you *in favour*

No frickin' way *against*

I have knives for every occasion *in favour*

Pre-listening Activity 2

1. Give students the second pre-listening activity. Ask them to read through the quotations from the radio broadcast and decide who is saying what - writer or student. Then they must choose which category the quotation comes from and to write the appropriate letter in the appropriate square (see answer key below). They then listen to the broadcast to check their answers. The listening activity will have been made easier by this process of identification first.

a. "When I write....I try to use teenage-speak, not too much because I don't want it to get dated."

b. "In our country we don't have really strong gangs. I think that in developed countries there are more gangs and a higher crime rate."

c. "I can describe Dan as a naughty boy, wearing dirty clothes - maybe just a gangster!"

d. "When the guy refuses to take one of the knives he says he's got something better or stronger, which obviously should be a gun."

e. "When I lived in inner city London I came across people like them who were into dodgy deals and, of course, things I've seen on TV or read in newspapers - they all inspired me as well."

f. "I do try to make the dialogue authentic to the character who is speaking."

g. "Dan sees himself as a survivor. He does what he needs to do to survive and make a living- And because he doesn't have Toby's intelligence he can't get a regular job so the only way he can make a lining is to do things that are a bit dodgy."

h. "I could tell you what is in (that second box), but I'm not going to. You're going to have to read the book, I'm afraid!"

i. "...he's got his jeans hanging down, his sneakers, he's got a lot of jewellery, obviously robbed from an old lady or a rich man ...he's got a tattoo on his arm."

j. "In this particular book I did want to discuss knife crime and gang culture and that fact that when you become a teenager, peer pressure is always going to be stronger than the pressure you get from your parents."

| | influence | language | characters | weapons |
|--------------|-----------|----------|------------|---------|
| The author | j | a, f | e, g | h |
| The students | b | | c, i | d |

2. If you were Toby, wanting money to buy something for your girlfriends birthday, what do you think your options would be? (*open discussion*)

During Listening

1. Play the recording of the text being read by the author to the students. Students to listen quietly.
2. Ask them to feed back any words or phrases they remember. It doesn't matter how disjointed they are. As a class activity they will try to rebuild the text from collective memory. Some students will remember parts that others didn't.

Write what they feedback (and is collectively agreed on) on the board - writing the words or phrases in more or less the position on the board to correspond with where it occurred in the text. Gradually a patchwork of remembered phrases will appear. When the ideas stop flowing, prompt the class to paraphrase the story, using what they see on the board as notes.

Now play the recording again and then repeat the activity to see how many more of the gaps can be filled in.

3. Hand out a copy of the text. Allow a few minutes for the students to check what they have recalled with what is on the page.
4. Read through the text (this can be done individually). At appropriately timed spaces ask these questions:
 - What do the words in italics indicate (*what the narrator is thinking to himself*)
 - The use of adjectives to describe the knives indicates the narrators discomfort. Which words are negative? (*mean-looking; big-arsed; wicked-looking; eviscerating - the rest are neutrally descriptive*)
 - The line 'tossers like you can't set foot outside ...without tooling up' needs explanation, perhaps. (*'Tossers'* is common contemporary expression of contempt for a person; *'tooling up'* refers top carrying weapons); the line requires development because it presents a key idea: that those who carry weapons, even for 'defence', cause the problem in the first place
 - What does the narrator want from Dan? (*names and addresses - to deliver 'goods' to?*)

5. Play the recording again. This time the students have the text in front of them.

After Listening Activities

A. This activity is open ended and is intended to allow the students to develop the story further in their own way. It is suggested that they work in small groups to explore ideas and either work up a suitable scenario to tell the rest of the class, or to work on a written paragraph for homework.

B. The result should be that students will realise that the reported speech version lacks the urgency and immediacy of the direct speech version - it is less exciting. This could lead to a discussion about the difference between descriptive passages and 'action' passages.

Example:

I asked Dan if he was mad and he said that he had to arm himself because the streets weren't safe. I replied that the reason for this was because idiots like Dan couldn't go outside without arming themselves. I asked him why he had so many weapons as he only had two hands! Dan said that if you carried one of those weapons then no one would cause you any trouble, and he looked annoyed because I wasn't interested in his knives.

Double Cross, Malorie Blackman

'I still don't know,' Dan said, a hint of exasperation in his voice. 'And asking too many questions in this line of work can get you into a whole heap of trouble.'

So whatever I was carrying, it wasn't something you'd pick up in the local supermarket. It was illegal and that meant dangerous, and dangerous meant I could end up in a youth detention centre or in prison. Or worse still, dead.

Just this once. Just this once and no more, I promise.

Please let me get away with it just this once.

Dan contemplated me.

'What?' I asked, irritated.

'D'you want some protection?' Dan asked slowly. 'Something to calm your nerves?'

'Like what?'

After giving me a scrutinizing look, Dan struggled to pick up one of the closed boxes off the floor, before dumping it on the only clear space on the table. I peered inside, before recoiling. The box was filled with mean-looking knives. I mean, double-edged, big-arsed, wicked-looking, eviscerating combat knives, switchblades, kitchen knives. In fact, every knife know to man was represented in that box.

'Godsake, Dan. What's with all the armour?'

'They're for protection.'

'Protection from which invading army?'

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. There had to be at least twenty blades in that box, maybe more. Probably more.

'Dan, are you off your nut?' I asked.

'I have to arm myself. The streets aren't safe,' he told me.

'Yeah, 'cause tossers like you can't set foot outside your house without tooling up,' I replied.

'Godsake! Why d'you need so many knives? You've only got two hands.'

'Carry one of these and no one will mess with you. D'you want one or not?' asked Dan, peeved at my lack of appreciation for his hardware.

'One what?'

'A knife? I have knives for every occasion.' Dan launched into a pseudo sales pitch. He picked up a knife at random. 'For example, this fine specimen is phosphate-treated and comes with a polymer sheath which is available in olive, camouflage and black.'

'Hell, no.'

'Tobey, I promise you, with one of these in your pocket, you'll—'

My response was heartfelt. 'No frickin' way.'

'Suit yourself.' Dan eyed me speculatively as he closed the box. 'I've got a couple of items even more effective than these knives...'

'Dan, don't even go there,' I warned. 'I'm not interested.'

'Suit yourself.'

'Thank you. I will,' I replied. I ran a shaky hand over my sweaty forehead. *Stop the world, I want to get off.* 'I need to get out of here. Just give me the relevant names and addresses before I see sense and change my mind,' I said.

Walk away. Walk away now, I told myself.

The answer? Not without my money. I was already thinking of it as *my* money.