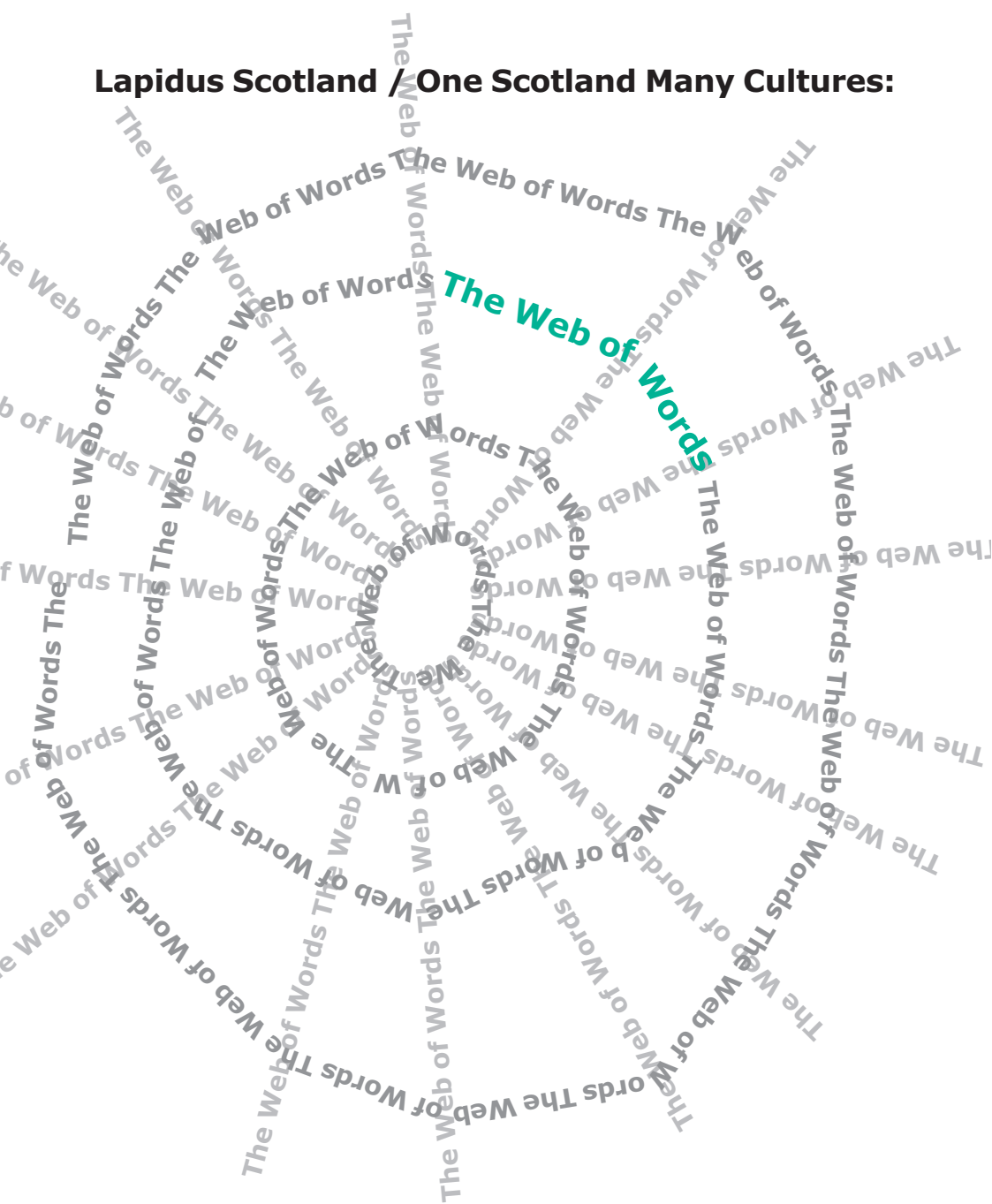


Lapidus Scotland / One Scotland Many Cultures:



Helen Boden and Anita Govan

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Lapidus is a membership organisation that exists to promote the literary arts in personal development contexts and 'creative words for health and wellbeing.' The Web of Words is a collaborative writing and performance exercise, devised by founder member Graham Hartill as a way of celebrating every person's right to speak, and be listened to, regardless of their confidence or experience as a writer. Individual responses to a given theme are encouraged through a series of writing, reading, and listening exercises: everyone produces their own 'verse.' The verses are then threaded together using a chorus and variations devised by the teacher/facilitator to echo the participants' own words and ideas. Graham's technique can be fitted to any timeframe, and is suitable for groups of up to about 20 people.

At the closing session of the Lapidus Scotland conference in 2006, it was adapted by Liza Greig and Helen Boden for use by larger numbers of adults. Participants here formed themselves into units of 6 people. Each group pooled words from all its members to create a verse that summed up their take on the conference theme, 'Hidden Voices.'

ONE SCOTLAND MANY CULTURES WEB OF WORDS FOR SCHOOLS

This schools' resource shows how to create a Web of Words on the anti-racist theme 'One Scotland Many Cultures.' Everything about it is adjustable and variable, and the suggested timings are only guidelines, but an absolute minimum of one hour is required. If a double period of at least 80 minutes is not available, we recommend making the Web over two separate sessions. This allows for a natural break between the writing and performance stages, which can be beneficial, especially with senior students. With primary-age children, compressing into a shorter timeframe produces good results.

PREPARATION

It is useful to have on display some visual material related to the racism theme. One Scotland Many Cultures posters are available from the Scottish Executive (see address below).

INTRODUCTION

Introduce the Web of Words: explain how everyone will participate in writing, reading and listening exercises related to the subject of racism. Meanwhile, you will be composing a chorus made up from ideas and phrases you hear at this stage. Then the class will form into groups, each of which will produce and perform a verse of the Web, using the words of every group member. Stress how this is about both individuality and collaboration; how listening is as important as speaking.

FINDING THE THREAD 1: WARMING UP (10 mins)

These provide an important foundation: the apparently playful work done at this stage can have considerable bearing on the quality and impact of the completed Web.

First get the class warmed up **physically** by standing up and doing a few breath, stretching or movement exercises.

Then get them thinking more **poetically** at the same time as gently introducing the racism theme. Here is an example of a possible approach:

- Play a **word association** game: ask 'what is the first thing that comes into your mind associated with the word *car*?' Then *colour*, followed by *bullying*, and, finally, *racism*. Write up some of the responses on the board.
- Now introduce a **metaphorical** dimension. Ask 'if racism were an animal, what kind of animal would it be ... and why?' Again, write up some responses.
- Finally incorporate some **rhythm**. Clap out a rhythm – simple or complex, depending on the level of student

ability – and ask the them to imitate it. When they are able to sustain this in unison, fit some words to it – if possible, a phrase that has been generated in the previous stages. Repeat a few times.

FINDING THE THREAD 2: STIMULUS (15 mins)

The class sits down for this stage, which involves the presentation of audiovisual and poetic material related to the racism theme. You could draw attention to the posters; show a short dvd (the One Scotland TV adverts are available in this format from the Scottish Executive – see address at end), and read some poetry, for example Jackie Kay's poem about acceptance and belonging, 'In My Country.'

Next, chair a short discussion on the issues raised so far – or you might prefer to split the class into smaller autonomous discussion groups. If there isn't time for a full discussion, ask students to give examples of racist language or behaviour, and how they might answer it; or conclude by writing up key words generated so far.

SPINNING THE STRANDS: GENERATION OF MATERIAL (25 mins)

Creating Material Everyone writes down their thoughts, feelings, impressions or opinions on the subject of racism. Ask them to write continuously for three to five minutes, keeping the pen moving, to generate as much material as possible. At the end they form into pairs. Everyone reads, and listens to his or her partner, then points out what they think is the most important or interesting aspect of their work – a word or phrase they could go on to develop.

Developing Material Students use the key word or phrase suggested by their partner as the starting point for a further three minutes' writing, before sharing this with a different partner. This time the feedback could draw attention to any particularly poetic qualities in the writing: lyrical phrasing,

interesting sound patterns, etc., and highlight any metaphors or other figures of poetic speech.

Poetic Development A final three minutes, in which they begin to break up continuous prose into shorter lines of verse, and to accentuate the poetic qualities of their writing, making it as rhythmic or resonant as possible. They can share and discuss with another student once more if time allows.

Chorus During the writing stage you will create a chorus for the Web by picking out suitable words and phrases from the student work.

Examples of Choruses:

Don't be racist
Respect each other
Racism's sour as a ripened lime
You are different
So be different
You have the power to change the world

(P6, St John's RC Primary, Portobello, Edinburgh)

Sectarian swearing, racist abuse
It's sick, it's sad, it hurts
It's sad, it's bad, we should be one

Black is just a colour
White is just a colour
Scotland is just a country

STOP FIGHTING, SCOTLAND!

(S1, Hillpark High School, Glasgow)

If the Web is to be made over two sessions, set aside a few minutes for a closing discussion or summary, and collect in the student work.

2. Black white black white black white
Don't say bad stuff back
Think to yourself
You're doing the right thing
We are all the same
Show racism the red card.

Performance (10 mins) The whole class speaks the chorus, then Group 1 performs their verse, everyone joins in the chorus again, then Group 2's verse follows, and so on. Repeat with the verses in reverse order, then in random order (e.g. chorus – Group 4 – chorus – Group 2 – chorus – Group 5 etc.) It may be possible to make further refinements or incorporate suggestions for improvement at this stage, as the Web finally comes together. A shortened version, say two key lines, of the chorus, may be used between the verses if there is a lot of material to get through. Conclude with the whole class speaking the full chorus in unison.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES

Liza Greig, 'One Scotland Web of Words' in *Hidden Voices* (Lapidus Scotland, 2007), pp. 86–89. Available on .pdf at www.lapidus.org.uk

Graham Hartill, 'The Web of Words: Collaborative Writing and Mental Health', in *The Self On The Page*, ed. Celia Hunt and Fiona Sampson (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1998) pp. 47–61

Jackie Kay *Other Lovers* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1993), p.24

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Trials of this method took place in schools in Edinburgh and Glasgow in the summer term of 2007, led by Anita Govan, performance poet and community drama worker; and Helen Boden, poet, literary arts facilitator and member of Lapidus Scotland management committee. With thanks to all the teachers and pupils who participated.

