

The new statue in Trafalgar Square

Lead-in

Trafalgar Square is one of the most famous parts of London. How well do you know it? Which of the following can you find in Trafalgar Square?

- **Nelson's Column**
- **Pigeons**
- **Fountain**
- **Statues of famous people**
- **Big Ben**

In Trafalgar Square, there is an empty plinth* with no statue on it. If it was your choice, which of the following famous British people would you choose to put on the plinth, and why?

- **Winston Churchill**
- **Princess Diana**
- **David Beckham**
- **John Lennon**

*a plinth = a square piece of stone that forms the bottom of a statue.

Reading 1

You are going to read a newspaper article about a new statue in Trafalgar Square. Read and answer the questions.

Who or what does the new statue represent?
Why might some people think it is shocking?

Pregnant and proud among the pigeons

by **Maev Kennedy and Hadley Freeman**

The public may be surprised, shocked or embarrassed by the statue that will soon appear on the empty plinth in London's Trafalgar Square. But the model, Alison Lapper, is not shocked. Alison is disabled, and she was eight months pregnant when she modelled for the artist Marc Quinn. She says her portrait is "naked, pregnant and proud". The portrait was chosen recently by judges to be created on a monumental scale. It will be 4.5m high in white marble, and it will take its place among the bronze generals and grubby pigeons on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, which, despite more than 150 years of arguing, has been empty since the square was created.

The Disability Rights Commission welcomed the statue as a source of pride, and a blow against the cult of perfection. Bert Massie, the commission's chairman, said: "I'm extremely proud that one of the most popular tourist attractions in London will display a very powerful sculpture of a disabled woman . . . disabled bodies have a power and beauty rarely recognised in an age where youth and 'perfection' are idolised."

Ms Lapper said: "I regard it as a modern tribute to femininity, disability and motherhood. It is so rare to see disability in everyday life - let alone naked, pregnant and proud."

The sculpture has already caused difficulties for some. The newspaper *The Daily Mail*, for example, which had campaigned for a

more traditional statue, a memorial to the Queen Mother perhaps, found itself in the awkward position of having to criticise the commissioning group's choice without appearing to mock a disabled pregnant woman. It settled on quoting a Conservative MP, who claimed that "the politically correct lobby has prevailed".

Ms Lapper disagrees. "Any critic who says it can't be art should get out more. Art can be whatever you want it to be in this day and age. Disabled artists don't get exhibitions . . . Why aren't there any disabled newsreaders? Anything that we're uncomfortable with we avoid. But now I'm up there . . . you can't avoid me any more . . . People want things to be boring and safe, and that's why this sculpture is causing an uproar. I love it that people are talking about it."

The artist Quinn said of his choice of subject: "At first glance it would seem that there are few if any public sculptures of people with disabilities. However a closer look reveals that Trafalgar Square is one of the few public spaces where one exists. Nelson, on top of his column, has lost an arm - Nelson's Column is the epitome of a phallic male monument, and I felt that the square needed some femininity."

Alison should be installed next spring and will remain for up to 18 months.

The Guardian Weekly 20-4-0325, page 20

Presentation

A new statue is going to be erected in the centre of your home town.

Decide who or what you would like the statue to represent.

Tell people in the class what the statue will represent. Be prepared to explain why you have chosen this particular statue.

Teacher's notes - the new statue in Trafalgar Square

Lead-in

It is a good idea to find pictures of London monuments, particularly Nelson's Column, to help introduce the lesson and some of the vocabulary. You could put the pictures on the board, ask the students what they are pictures of, whether they have visited them and how they would describe them.

Read the introduction as a class, and find out what the students know about Trafalgar square.

Answers

They are all in Trafalgar Square except Big Ben.

Put the students in small groups to decide which person they would put on the plinth, and why?

Reading 1

Ask the students to read the text and answer the gist questions.

Answers

The new statue represents Alison Lapping, a disabled, naked, pregnant woman.

Some people think it is shocking because it is a representation of an unusual naked body, and not a traditional statue.

Reading 2

Ask students to read the passage again and write true or false next to the statements. Let students check in pairs before feedback.

Answers

- 1 T
- 2 F
- 3 F
- 4 T
- 5 T
- 6 T
- 7 F

Vocabulary in context

Ask the students to find the words in italics in the passage, then choose the best definition.

Answers

grubby	b.	dirty
idolise	a.	think it is perfect
awkward	a.	difficult
mock	b.	criticise (in a rude way)
prevail	b.	win an argument
cause an uproar	a.	make people angry and critical

Follow-up

What do you think?

Encourage a whole class discussion.

Presentation

Give students a few minutes to prepare what they are going to say. Encourage students to say why they have chosen a particular statue.