



### Book title

**My son the Fanatic**

### Author

**Hanif Kureishi**



### Bibliographic information

My Son the Fanatic is a short story first published in The New Yorker in 1994. It was reprinted in Kureishi's 1997 collection of short stories, Love in a Blue Time, and also as a supplement to some editions of The Black Album.

Author: Hanif Kureishi  
Country: United Kingdom  
Language: English  
Genre: Short story  
Publisher: Faber and Faber  
Publication date: 1997  
Media type: Print (Paperback)  
ISBN 0-571-17739-5

### Links (adaptations, reviews, full texts etc.)

- <https://mseisinger.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/my-son-the-fanatic-by-hanif-kureishi.pdf>
- [http://www.academia.edu/4860226/Whos\\_the\\_Fanatic\\_now\\_Father-and-Son\\_Conflicts\\_in\\_My\\_Son\\_the\\_Fanatic\\_and\\_East\\_is\\_East](http://www.academia.edu/4860226/Whos_the_Fanatic_now_Father-and-Son_Conflicts_in_My_Son_the_Fanatic_and_East_is_East)
- <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1994/03/28/my-son-the-fanatic>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My\\_Son\\_the\\_Fanatic\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Son_the_Fanatic_(film))
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CK2zZpWNjA>



## **Theme**

The theme of *My Son the Fanatic* is culture clash. This first displays as intergenerational conflict between a father, Parvez, a Pakistani immigrant, and his son Ali. More significantly, it shows the deep divide in worldview between the secular west and fundamentalist Islam.

## **Short summary**

Parvez is a Pakistani immigrant living in England. He works as a taxi driver and has assimilated to Western ways of life. His son, Ali, seems to have embraced the lifestyle of his British peers. Parvez, however, is growing more and more suspicious of his son as he notices apparent changes in Ali's behavior. The taxi driver talks about his worries to his colleagues and to Bettina, a prostitute who has become Parvez's friend. All his "dreams of doing well in England" (which include a happy wedding and a safe job in accountancy for Ali) crumble when his son confesses that he is disgusted by his father's neglect for Muslim precepts about prayers and his father's disregard of the ban on alcohol and pork meat. Increasingly disturbed by his son's religious fundamentalism and contempt for assimilation, Parvez one night repeatedly hits Ali. The son reacts with only a question: "So who's the fanatic now?"

## **Why is the story appropriate for the targeted groups of RSP readers?**

1. Reflects political/historical moment.
2. Promotes understanding of cultural diversities and heritage
3. Refers to actual migrant situation

## **What are the distinguished readers interests reflected by this book/story?**

Even though published in 1994, Kurieshi's story speaks to a reality with which the world is struggling today. The issue of so-called "radicalized" youth concerns many people in our world today. "My Son, the Fanatic" insists that when we encounter that which is different, we must try to understand it. The particular generation, the one to which Ali belongs, is uniquely different from all others. They possess language and cultural skills that their parents did not. At the same time, they have become aware that the singular and surface based pursuits of their parents' generation.

## **Why is this story motivational for the pupils?**

As several binary oppositions are reversed, the story can be interpreted on several levels and students can learn that no reading can ever be complete or finished. They will be motivated to read it more than once.



**Is there a historical, political, multi/inter cultural, migrant or similar context recognized in this book/story?**

In the broadest terms, New Historicism uses literature to try to reconstruct or understand the social or intellectual history or "feel" of a particular period. This can be applied to this story in order to understand what it was like to be a Pakistani immigrant or child of immigrants in England in the 1980s and early 1990s.

**Is there a principle of inclusion reflected in this book/story and does it promotes understanding of cultural diversities and heritage?**

From the very first sentence, "Surreptitiously, the father began going into his son's room," readers become accomplices of the father and closely identify with his point of view and his bewilderment at his son's fundamentalism. Readers would normally expect to see the old generation tied to ethnic and religious traditions; second-generation immigrants would be more keen to assimilate. This process of subverting readers' expectations is carried to the extreme as Kureishi's short story ends with no immediate closure and no reassurance of any possible resolution in the future. Theories of hybridity aim at breaking open traditional, inadequate dependencies on binary pairs which are used to generate rigid ordering-systems. By contrast, Kureishi aim at constructing more fluid, flexible ordering system which reflects the individual's personality and is conducive to more openness, mutability, and tolerance. In his texts, the author constantly question the hierarchical binaries on which we base our assumptions about race, class, and gender.

From this point of view, the development of the principle of inclusion and understanding of cultural differences and inheritances in today's students population is a priority.

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## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Title of Activity**

**Towards a Cosmopolitan Readership / Trojan Horse**

### **Description of educational activity**

**Duration:** 3 x 45 minutes

**Pupils' age:** 17-18

**Organization of the class of pupils:** group work



**The aim of the lesson:**

- Involving the students in the simple mechanics of creating meaning by means of binary oppositions
- Development of empathy, through re-creation of a character's voice and thoughts

**Support materials:**

- Internet
- Life-style magazines

**Handouts :**

- 3 text
- cue cards

**Activities:**

Reading, interpreting, and discussing text is preceded by

**1. Pre-reading activities**

which provide motivation and background information to facilitate reading and enable students to put Kureishi into a wider, non-literary as well as literary context.

1. The students are divided in groups (3). Each group, according to the interests of its members, takes on the task of collecting, selecting and evaluating information on a specific topic related to Kureishi.
2. Thus, as with the puzzle, each group adds its piece of information in order to gain more comprehensive view of the author and prepare the ground for an encounter with the text.

Suggestion of thematic angles:

**a) “Sex & Drugs & Rock ‘n’ Roll” approach:**

Students are provided (or find information on the Internet) with material on changes in rock music during 1980s and 1990s. A focus is on shift from glam rock (David Bowie) to punk rock (Sex Pistols). Additionally, depending on the class, changing in sexual mores, fashion, leisure activities etc. Since students tend to get side-tracked into presenting either pot-pourri of 1980s and 1990s pop phenomena or exhibiting encyclopaedic knowledge of this era, Teachers should make sure that the focus stays on music and a reflection of its age, especially of shifting social phenomena such as attitudes towards authority, material success, social issues, sexuality or gender constructions.



b) ***“The Pop Star Kureishi”*** approach:

Students learn about Kureishi as a ‘*cultural icon*’ and celebrity, about his views on literature, race, sex, family. The best source is his website (<http://www.hanifkureishi.com>). This fosters a true human interest angle, for Kureishi’s star quality is not to be underestimated in today’s ‘promotional’ culture. To make the most of it, students can embellish classroom walls with author’s posters.

c) ***The “Kureishi’s books as regions studie(s)”*** approach

Here students research the most important facts and figures about contemporary Britain’s ethnic minority groups. This provides the factual background to Kureishi’s fictions. Teacher should encourage students to go beyond enumerating statistics and research how minority groups actually experience life in Great Britain.

d) ***The “If a Man is Tired of London...”*** approach

Since most of Kureishi’s novels and short stories are set in London, students are given the task of doing research about London – with special emphases on matters of class, ethnic minority groups, and ‘in places’. In developing their own ‘mental maps’, students learn about one of the main categories of recent cultural-studies interests: the construction of ‘space’ (urban vs. rural space; suburbia vs. the city) as means of fashioning identity.

After preparatory activities, students will be able to connect their reading of story with various strands of ‘cultural knowledge’, thus creating a more lasting and increasingly tightly woven ‘web of knowledge’. Their involvement with Kureishi will not take place in mental vacuum; rather they will be able constantly to link literature, film, music art etc. with previously acquired knowledge.

This task aims at more cognitive objectives.

## 2. Reading activity

1. The groups are given the handouts – they are going to read:

- the “restaurant episode” narrated by Parvez in retrospect.
- the episode with Betina
- the episode with mother



### 3. Post- reading activities

Designed to introduce students to some of the mechanisms of othering (theories of postcolonialism), alterity or discourse analysis. As some of the arguments are only reported in indirect speech and some issues of the debate are just hinted at in the passage, students are asked to fill in the arguments in this 'standoff' between fundamentalist son and westernized father revolving around Ali's accusation of his father: "You are too implicated in Western civilisation".

**Two methods** of working with literary text are suggested by taking the students off the page, responding to them by turning them into **performance and role play**.

Here not only oral skills, reading skills, skills in extemporising and improvising are promoted, but also awareness of the role of non-verbal features such as gestures and body language in communication. Drama work (holistic in its scope) aims at fostering a stronger sense of involvement, thus helping to motivate students and encourage them to learn through active participation.

The staging of the following activities encourages students to get involved in the controversial debate about opposing value systems.

#### Activity 1: Turning the restaurant scene into a *tableau*

Frozen tableaux or sculpting scenes enhance students' understanding of literary text. Students can visualize the scene depicted by taking on the roles of the characters and can create character constellations by interpreting the relationships between the protagonists involved; in order to create a composite picture expressing all the features and relations of the characters.

A number of *frozen tableau* activities can be put into practice. All exercises should avoid contortions, as students must be able to hold their pose for a minute or so.

##### *a) Frozen tableau involving one sculptor*

The teacher asks his students. "We need someone to shape us into a picture". A volunteer comes forward. "Right, you may bring the characters into your sculpture in any order." The volunteer decides who will represent Ali and Parvez, Bettina, and Parvez's nameless wife (Ali's mother). No one may speak and the characters must be physically loose and pliable. The sculptor moduls them into the image by placing them in the group, curling a little finger

here, tilting a head there, turning the corner of ones character's mouth, etc. Then students discuss what this sculpture reveals about the individual character's personality and the relationship between the characters.

b) ..... *involving more sculptors*

No sculptor is chosen, but the students enter the tableau, one at the time. They themselves decide which character from the tekst they represent. They may 'sculpt' any alterations they may wish to those already assembled. Again, there must be no spoken instructions or requests; everything must be sculpted.

c) *Using tableaux based on quotations*

Students are sent off in pairs (Ali, Parvez) or in groups of four (including Bettina and mother/wife) with their texts to choose a significant quotation from the text scene (for instance, when Ali rejects alcohol, "But it is forbidden"). After carefull discussin of the line, students must find a physical way of presenting it to the rest of the group, who will try to guess the actual quotation.

d) *Speaking tableau*

After activities one and/or two the students describe how they feel towards the other characters of the tableau.

## Activity 2: Re-enacting the restaurant scene with the help of cue cards

Using cue cards as a useful method of furthering students' skills in improvisation and impromptu speech. It is a sort of 'guided task' during which students respond to stimuli and create, as in this case, an exchange of opinions and ideas. The restaurant scene would seem to be an ideal scenario for such an exercise, as father and son confront each other with conflicting opinions, ranging from concrete things (drink, pork etc.) to abstract ideas (attitudes towards women, religion etc.). Students may be asked to make a list of the 'bones of contention' which are bound to come up during such confrontation – apart from the matters mentioned in the text. Then they act out the confrontation. Two students sit down at the table; other students may remain standing behind them, providing them with cues and prompts or acting as Bettina and mother/wife. Then the 'waiter' hands the actors cue cards – each time *Ali* or *Parvez* voices his or her opinion on the subject-matter presented to them. To help students slip into their roles, it is advisable to start with tangible, actual things first and then go on to more abstract matters. The goal is to make students 'slip into a role' and present opinions on a range of issues in consistent manner. Here we



have a debating society of sorts, but with a difference. Cue cards could first prompt responses on alcohol, pork, cigarettes, Western movies, whores, or amenities of Western life-styles. Then they could elicit responses to the father's plans for his son: school, stereo equipment, VCR, computers, girlfriend, sports, or college. Increasingly, the conversation could turn to general issues such as assimilation vs. separation, or fitting in vs. fundamentalism. Students should also be encouraged to find an ending to this performance, culminating in reconciliation or separation. After the performance, students should discuss not only the pros and cons of the arguments presented, but also how *they* felt about this performance.

Did it create more tolerance? Did it reconfirm existing prejudices? They might also go on to speculate about Ali's reasons for becoming a fundamentalist (only hinted in the text).

### **Evaluation and assessment method:**

Teacher's role – provide materials and and act as mediator or facilitator

In order to evaluate and assess the effective impact of the previous activities upon the students, they are asked to finish reading the story and elaborate a short paper in no more than 5 minutes bringing the final conclusions about its end.

Students are assessed on their ability to demonstrate:

- knowledge of the content and form of literary text from different countries and cultures
- engagement with writers' ideas and treatment of themes
- appreciation of how texts relate to wider contexts
- recognition and appreciation of how writers create and shape meanings and effects
- empathy, through re-creation of a character's voice and thoughts

**Effect of the activity on RSP reading:** Practices initiate thought-processes in the students' minds leading to what could be called greater cultural sensitivity, a heightened awareness of both cultural differences and cultural commonalities – and this applies not just to race, but also to gender, class etc.

### **Connection to curriculum**

**Grade:** 4

**Curriculum:**

**World Literature:** postcolonial theories vs. theories of hybridity



**Civic education** – developing conflict resolution strategies (Building Civic Literacy through Talking Points and Writing Prompts)

**History & Geography** – Pakistan culture and religion; Migrations and Intercultural permeation

**English language and literature**

**Architecture in Art** - the construction of 'space' (urban vs. rural space; suburbia vs. the city) as means of fashioning identity.

### **Knowledge:**

- Wider and universal issues
- Better understanding of themselves and of the world around them
- Enjoy the experience of reading world literature
- Understand and respond to literary texts in different forms and from different countries and cultures
- Different ways in which writers achieve their effects
- Literature's contribution to aesthetic, imaginative and intellectual growth
- Contribution of literature to an understanding of areas of human concern
- Critical thinking about the world, interdependency between people from different continents

### **Skills:**

- Collecting, selecting and evaluating background informations
- Read, interpret and evaluate literary texts from different countries and cultures
- Develop an understanding of literal and implicit meaning, relevant contexts and of the deeper themes or attitudes that may be expressed
- Present an informed, personal response to literary text
- Communicate an informed personal response appropriately and effectively
- Practice and reinforce prosocial behaviors
- Work/cooperate effectively in groups
- Skills of empathy
- Performance and role play skills
- Skills in improvisation and impromptu speech
- Learning through active participation
- Debating

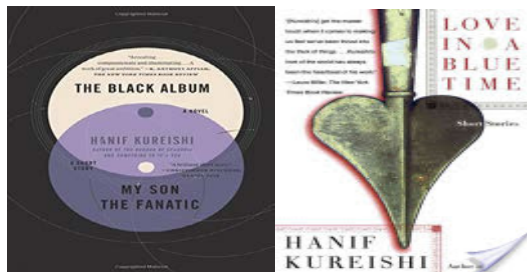


### Competences:

- Intercultural communicative competences
- Understanding of cultures as comprehensive literacy approach.
- Appreciating distinct modes of thinking/praying/dressing or behaving, in an open-minded and tolerant way

### Bibliographic reference to be used during the activity

Author Hanif Kureishi  
Country United Kingdom  
Language English  
Genre Short story  
Publisher Faber and Faber  
Publication date  
1997  
Media type Print (Paperback)  
ISBN 0-571-17739-5



### Digital sources

- <http://www.hanifkureishi.com>
- <http://www.toondoo.com/cartoon/8039082>
- [http://www.clrep.org/uploads/1/7/7/6/17760533/talking\\_points.pdf](http://www.clrep.org/uploads/1/7/7/6/17760533/talking_points.pdf)

### Results

The expected outcomes of the lesson:

The students will be able to demonstrate:

- clear critical/analytical understanding of the authors' intentions and the texts' deeper implications and the attitudes it displays
- make much well-selected reference to the text
- respond sensitively and in detail to the way language works in the text
- communicate a considered and reflective personal response to the text.



- sustain a perceptive and convincing response with well-chosen detail of narrative and situation

### **Recommendations**

Both the teaching method and the text can help in increasing RSP readers interest in reading; enhance their...

Mechanics of creating meaning by means of binary oppositions can be applied later on whole story to achieve new skills in unravelling meanings in text.