

**Lesson
Twenty-
One**

Introduction to *The Other Side of Truth*

Aims

By the end of this lesson you should know more about:

- Beverley Naidoo
- the Nigerian setting of the novel
- the London setting of the novel
- what 'asylum seekers' are
- the opening of *The Other Side of Truth*.

Context

In Module 2 you studied a novel set several thousand years ago. *The Other Side of Truth* is very much a modern novel, set against a background of political assassination, asylum seekers and racial prejudice.



Oxford Home Schooling

Lesson Starter: Standard English

Standard English, sometimes called Queen's English, is the kind spoken by newsreaders and anybody who wants to be understood by as wide an audience as possible. You can speak standard English in any accent. Standard English has a generally accepted range of **vocabulary** (the actual words used) and a set **grammar** (rules for how these words are used together).

Non-standard English is spoken by particular social groups or in certain places. For example, some people might say –

I seen him nick some fags from my mate's shop.

This is not exactly bad English, but it is not suitable for a formal situation – for example in court. Here it would be better to say –

I saw him steal some cigarettes from my friend's shop.

In this example we see standard and non-standard vocabulary:

nick steal

fags cigarettes

mate friend

There is also an example of standard and non-standard grammar:

I seen him I saw him

Activity One

Rewrite the sentences below in standard English.

He come out of the shop and legged it up the street.

She says to him, 'Ere, give I one of them ones you got.'

If you want to hang with me, you don't go dissin my family. You read me?

That geezer's a right nasty piece of work. He ought be banged up for a good long time – not going around putting the frighteners on the likes of you and me.

Beverley Naidoo and the Background to *The Other Side of Truth*

The Author

As you will know if you have read the reverse of the page just inside the novel, Beverley Naidoo was born in South Africa. During the time when she was growing up, South Africa was still ruled by an all-white government which enforced the apartheid system. Under this system, black people and white people were kept separate. For example, they would not go to the same schools, eat in the same restaurants, or travel on the same buses. Only white people could vote, and they had most of the power and wealth. Aware of this, Naidoo developed a strong sense of social justice.

The Settings

The Other Side of Truth begins in Nigeria, not South Africa, but it does begin with an assassination – an example of the kind of political violence with which Naidoo was familiar in South Africa.

In the novel, the person who dies is the wife of a journalist who has repeatedly dared to criticise the government. He has his children taken to London so that they will be safe. However, they are shocked to find that injustices exist there too. What's more, their father's plans to rejoin them in Britain are put at risk because immigration authorities there do not believe that he is a genuine asylum seeker.

What is an asylum seeker?

The word *asylum* means 'a safe place'. Britain, like many countries, allows people who arrive here from abroad to live here permanently if their lives would be in danger if they had to return to their own countries. Unfortunately, many people whose lives are not in real danger also want to live in Britain, and some claim that they are in danger in order to be allowed to stay here. British immigration officials therefore have to investigate each asylum seeker to see if their case is genuine. While this is happening, they have to stay in a detention centre, which is in some ways like a prison. There is also the problem of families. Someone who is granted asylum will be allowed to bring their husband or wife, and children – but should they be allowed to bring uncles, aunts, grandparents, even friends?

Many asylum seekers are put on planes back to the countries they came from. Almost certainly, some are returning to danger.

Activity Two

Read about the situation of the family below. Write a diary of one family member as they make the difficult decision to flee their country and seek asylum in somewhere like Britain. Make up names if you wish.

Dad is a journalist working for a national newspaper. He has often criticised the government in his articles. It is a military government, run by generals. Mum believes that her husband is right, but often worries about his outspokenness leading to him being forced out of his job, or worse.

They have a boy aged 10 and a girl aged 12. They are happy living where they are, and have friends there. They have read about Britain, and would like to visit, but would not want to leave their home and friends permanently.

Dad has been receiving anonymous death threats by phone and letter. He has recently heard from a friend who works in a government ministry that the generals intend to arrest him and charge him with treason – an offence that carries the death sentence.

Chapter 1

When you start to read a novel, you need to make a special effort to concentrate. Later you will find that the story just carries you along, but now you need to focus on –

- who the characters are and what we learn about them
- what their situation is and what problems they have
- what kind of novel this seems to be – for example, a comedy, a thriller, a fantasy ...

The novel begins with a tense, gripping account of Mama being shot. It is in *italic* and in the present tense. It is from Sade's viewpoint: the details recorded are the one's she sees and later remembers over and over again. The use of the present tense makes it like a bad dream.

The next section, not in *italic*, and in the past tense, begins a short time later, after the shooting. Uncle Tunde (a lawyer) arrives with the doctor, who pronounces Mama dead. Mama's sister, Mama

Buki, weeps. Sade is in shock. We learn that Mama was a nurse (by her uniform), and that Papa is a journalist on *Speak*, a weekly newspaper in English.

The awful anonymous phone call that Sade hears on page 4 makes it clear that her father was the target, and that therefore his life is in danger. We learn that the family are Christian (from the hymn-singing). The mourners speak a mixture of English and Yoruba (a Nigerian language). On page 6 Uncle Tunde warns Papa (Folarin) that the people who shot Mama will come for him too. Uncle Tunde reads out part of his brother's newspaper article (pages 6–7), so we know what kind of writing has angered the generals. He says that Papa is brave, but asks if he is also wise (page 7). What do you think? Should Papa have avoided angering powerful men?

Tunde tells Papa that even internationally known critics of the government, like Ken Saro-Wiwa, have been executed, so the generals may do the same to him if he is not murdered first. He encourages Papa to flee to London. Do you agree with him?

Activity Three	Below is a list of characters met so far in <i>The Other Side of Truth</i> . Fill in what we know about them. Try to include some evidence in the form of references to the text or short quotations.
Sade	
Femi	
Papa (Folarin)	
Uncle Tunde	
Mama Buki	

Mama	
Joseph	

**Self-
Assessment
Test**

This test is on standard English, and on the opening chapter of *The Other Side of Truth*.

1. What sort of English do newsreaders use?
2. In what sort of situations should standard English be used?
3. Standard English differs from non-standard English in *vocabulary* and *grammar*. What do these two words mean?
4. You cannot speak standard English in a Welsh accent. True or false?
5. What is Papa's job?
6. What is Uncle Tunde's job?
7. What was Mama's job?
8. Who is older, Sade or Femi?
9. What relation is Mama Buki to the family?