

Teacher's notes

Who is a writer? The Cage

Lesson aims

Students think critically about a poem in relation to their own life experience.

Students develop vocabulary to discuss poetic forms such as metaphor and repetition.

Easy definition of metaphor: A metaphor is a comparison which is not literally true. It suggests what something is like by comparing it with something else which resembles it in some (often hidden) way. A metaphor makes a strong image in **the reader's head** by describing something in an unusual way.

Lesson objectives

Students analyse a poem by a young Sri Lankan poet, paying attention to uses of metaphor, then use the poem as inspiration for discussing their own ideas about racism and prejudice.

Resources

Whiteboard

Flipchart paper

Whiteboard markers

Picture of Savitri Hensman, Eveline Marius and other Centerprise writers

Copy of '**The Cage**' by Savitri Hensman

Copy of '**If You Think**' by Lotte Moos

Starter activity:

Students should start building a basic profile of a writer before seeing the picture of Savitri Hensman and other Centerprise writers, pp.5-9. This will support their assessment and feedback in Activity 1.

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Activity 1:

Here tutors should encourage more advanced students to move beyond preconceptions about who a writer is, through questions such as:

- Why do these perceptions exist?
- How do we challenge them?
- Is it our job to challenge them?

Activity 2:

After posing the first question, 'Is it a literal cage?', check students understand what metaphor is.

Background: Savitri Hensman was 17 years old when Centerprise published her book of poetry **Flood at the Door**, in the 1970s. Her family came to Hackney from Sri Lanka when she was 2 years old. She won the Hackney Poetry Competition in 1976. She personally witnessed far-right National Front attacks on African-Caribbean and Asian people in Hackney. In her poem '**The Cage**' she explores how racists, with their 'cancer of fear and hate', make a cage for themselves as they 'sweat to build a cage for the Black'.

In the introduction to her book she writes: 'I have always enjoyed reading and hearing poetry, from folk ballads to Blake. I began to write poems in my spare time, sparked off by the place I lived in and things happening around me. I took some to (community publisher) Centerprise and they invited me to join the Hackney Writers' Workshop, which I did. We meet regularly to read, discuss and grow together. We are part of a wider movement of worker writers and community publishers.'

Activity 3:

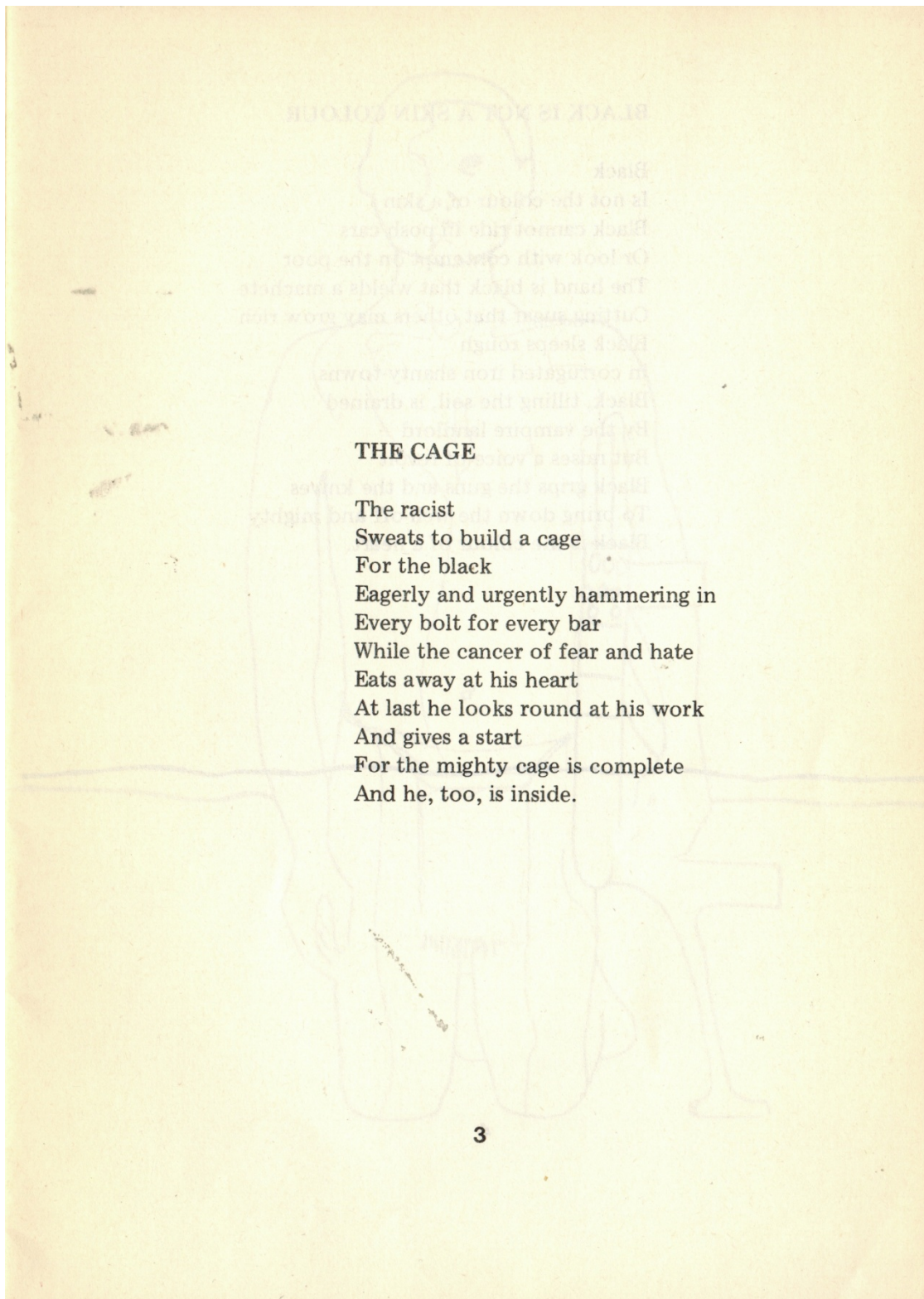
For those who complete the task before the majority of the class, here is another polemical poem by Lotte Moos, a refugee from Nazi Germany who belonged to the same writers' workshop as Savitri. Like '**The Cage**', it shows how racism strikes at the "heart" of society. It makes the broader claim that racism hurts those who witness it but do nothing to stop it. It also considers other kinds of violence against subjugated people, such as those in psychiatric hospitals. Unlike '**The Cage**', it uses repetition.

Plenary

Students should recap and evaluate the session through a set of questions and written responses.

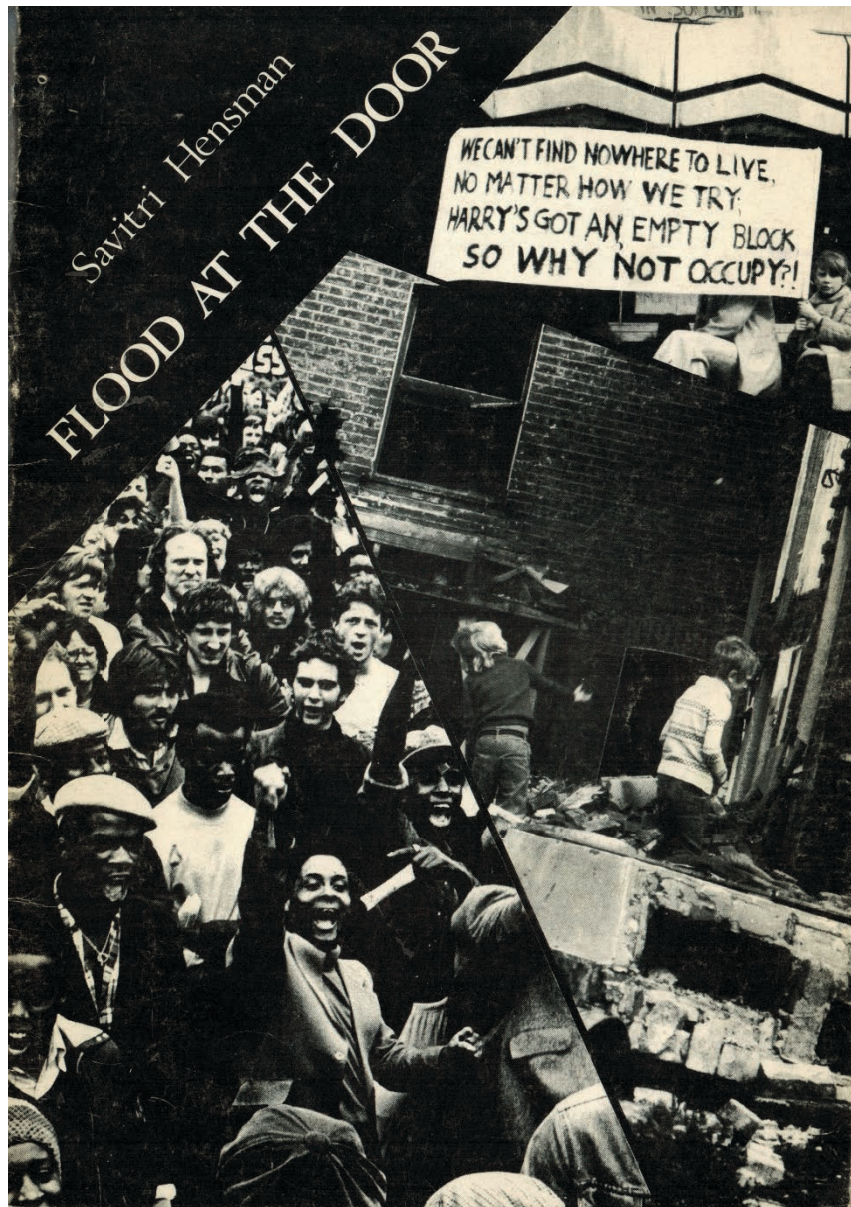
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'The Cage' by Savitri Hensman, 1979, Centerprise Trust



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Cover of Flood at the Door by Savitri Hensman, 1979 © Centerprise Trust



Teacher's notes

Back cover of Savitri Hensman's Flood at the Door, 1979 © Centerprise Trust



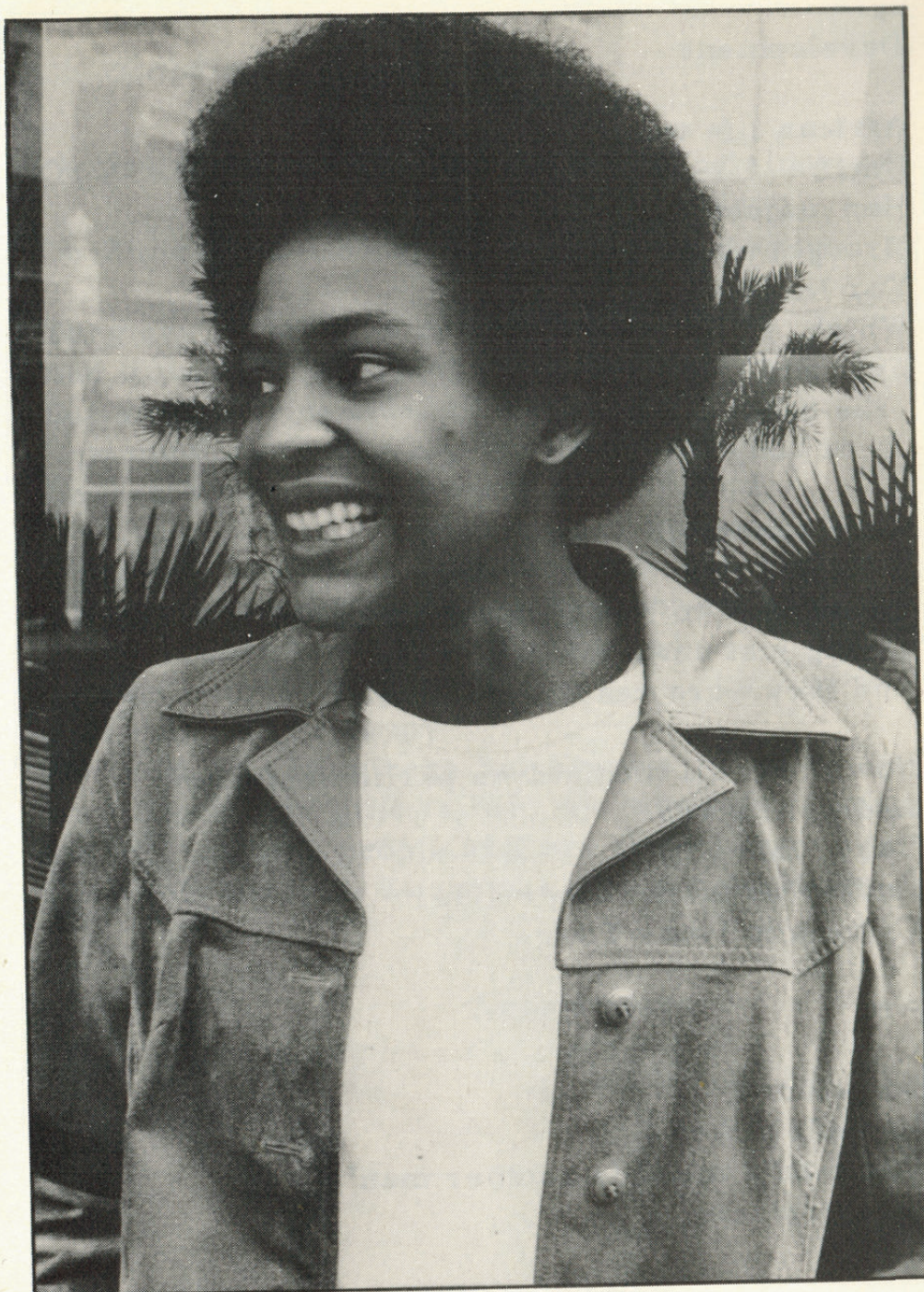
This collection of poetry and pictures is by two people who are still at school. Yet it reflects many of the serious issues in our present society, like racism, or survival in cities, as well as its complexities.

The poems are powerful images of life today in varying moods, some angry, others lyrical or with a surrealist sense of fun. Savi, who wrote the poems, won the Hackney Poetry Competition in 1976. Sarah, who did the illustrations, studied for 'A' Level Art in one year on her own, and is at present studying science.

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Eveline Marius, 1982 © Centerprise Young Photographers Group



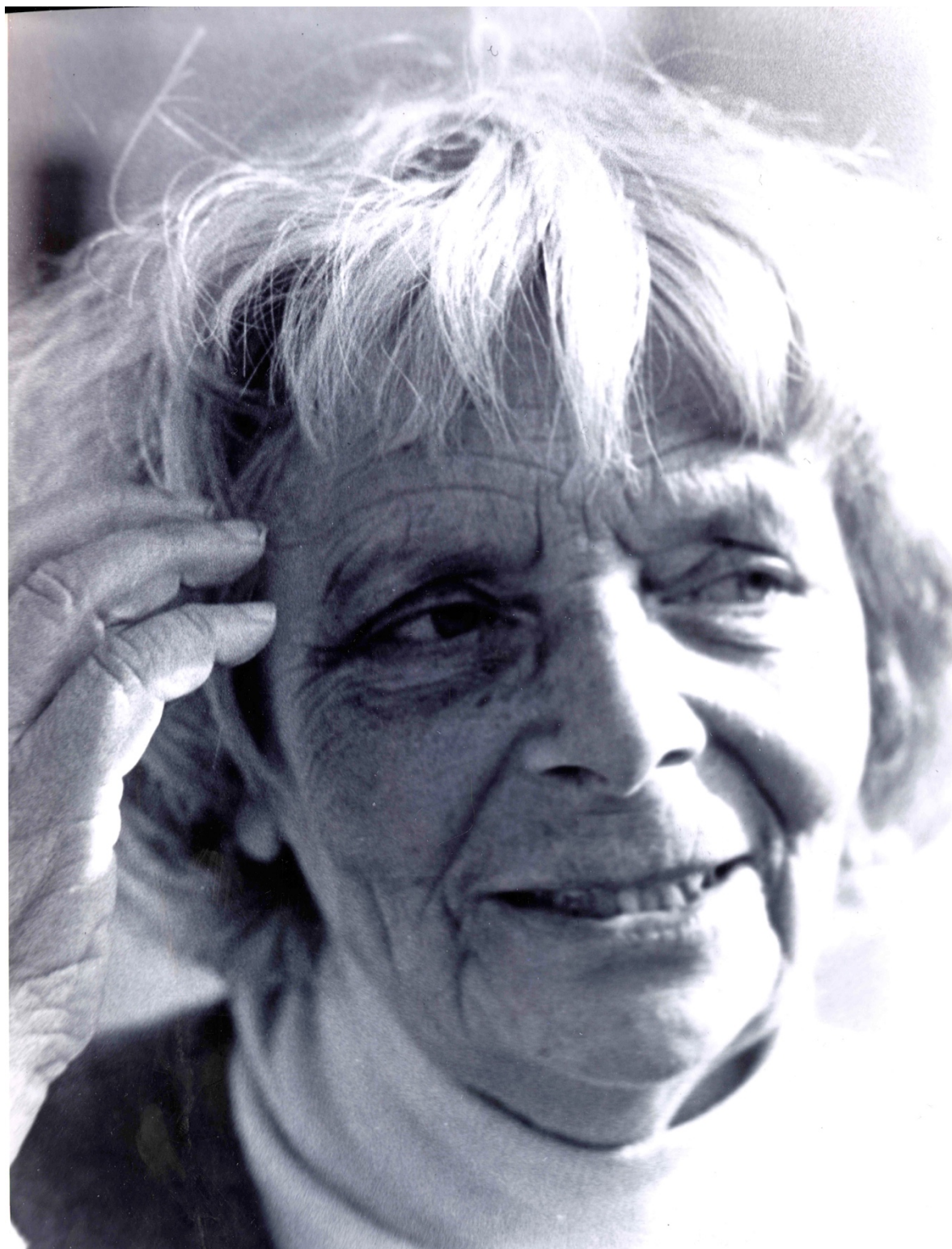
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Centerprise young writers, 1982 © Centerprise Young Photographers Group



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Lotte Moos, 1980s © Maggie Hewitt



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'If You Think', Lotte Moos, 1981 © Centerprise Trust Ltd

IF YOU THINK

If you think
Blows
Struck in Ireland
Won't hurt you
Think again
They will hurt you
If you think
The knife
Slid between the ribs of a Pakistani
Will glance off your lighter skin
Think again

If you think
Bullets hissing towards beating hearts
In some country we know nothing about
Will miss you
Think again
They will not miss your beating heart

If you think
Needles
Jabbed into veins
To make the blood run docile
Won't prick you
Think again

They will hurt you, hit you, prick you
And they will not miss you
We are all one
One trembling human flesh