

Session 2

A day in the life



‘Youth reveal their true natures by their actions, whether they do what is pure and right or not.’ (VOICE) Proverbs 20:11

Activity

Create a photo collage or draw a storyboard to identify the key points of your life. What would you share with someone from a different culture to your own?

Blessed (14) and her younger brother, Courage, came to the UK from Zimbabwe in 2022 with their mother and their father, who is a pastor. Their two elder brothers stayed behind in Zimbabwe to complete their university studies and develop their careers.

Blessed reflects on her life in Zimbabwe and the changes she has noticed since coming to the UK.

“In Zimbabwe, I would get up early before school to do house work. I am the only girl in the family. During weekends, my brothers would be working outside the house, getting fuel or food, and in the garden – so I didn’t mind so much. I would also help my mother, doing laundry, house cleaning and preparing the meals. Evenings would be spent doing homework.

“School is very different in Zimbabwe. I was surprised when I came to school in England because the students are more cheeky and disrespect the teachers much more than happens in Zimbabwe. This is not just because we respect the teachers more in Zimbabwe, but also because we can be physically punished if we don’t!

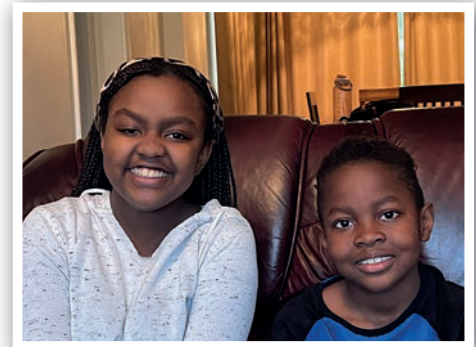
“There are three types of school in Zimbabwe: Private, Church and Government. Everybody has to pay to go to school. A private school can cost \$1,600 a term while a government school might cost \$40 per term. A church school will cost a little more than a government school but it is OK because if a parent can’t afford to pay for their child, they can often get help from a charity or grant – and the church schools are more generous to people who can’t afford it.

“We are able to study the same subjects in Zimbabwe as we do in England – but the big difference is that we are told what subjects we will learn and take exams for. It doesn’t matter what we like, it is all based on what we are good at. If you like drama but are good at geography – you will study geography.

“In England I am able to wear my hair in braids (which takes my mum about five hours to do!). In Zimbabwe schools we all have to wear our hair cut short like Courage’s hair (look at the photograph). It is also the law that all schools have to have a school uniform. If you do well at school you can go to university. Courage wanted to join the army but he has changed his mind now. I am not sure what I want to do yet.

“Zimbabwe can be a violent and dangerous place and many children have to walk to school along the road. Our parents try and organise so that we can walk with other children in groups to keep us safe.

“We had a big house in Zimbabwe with four bedrooms and it had a very big back yard. It was owned by the church. Many people do not have houses as nice as ours. Some people have a house in the city or town but also build a much cheaper house in the countryside where they grow crops or raise livestock that they can sell in the towns.



“Church is very important in Zimbabwe and we are all expected to go, especially if you are the children of the Pastor – but we want to go, anyway. Almost all my friends from school went to church – although they went to different churches, not all to the church I went to. The services are a bit different to the United Reformed Church. Lots of people take part: saying prayers, reading the Bible; the preacher just gives the sermon. Music is very important and churches usually have a choir. A service can last a long time – up to three hours and, after it is finished, there is often a chance to eat together.”

Discuss What are some of the similarities between Blessed’s life in Zimbabwe and your life in the UK?

Debate Think about the pros and cons of the Zimbabwean education system where young people study the subjects they are good at rather than the ones that they like, and discipline ensures they show respect to their teachers and work hard, compared with the UK education system where young people choose before GCSEs the subjects they want to study and there is no corporal punishment.

Activity

Many churches eat together as part of their worship. Can you think of examples in the Bible where people gather for a meal? John 21:1-17 describes one example. Prepare some food together as a group, maybe a breakfast or, if you have access to the outdoors, a picnic to share together. If you have people from different cultures in your group, why not each bring something to eat from your own culture.

Prayer

Thinking about the five hours Blessed’s mum spends braiding her hair, slowly plait together three strands of wool, one to represent the young people of Zimbabwe, one to represent yourself and one to represent God. As you plait the wool, thank God that we are all part of God’s family and interconnected. We all have things that bring us joy and things that challenge or upset us, but God is with us in all things. Say the words from Jeremiah 29:11, either out loud or in your heart as you plait. Finally tie the plait off. Make it into a bracelet, keyring or bookmark to remind you of God’s promises and of the people of Zimbabwe.

Blessed and Courage were able to go to school due to their family’s circumstances but this is not the case for all children and young people in Zimbabwe. Changes in the economy in Zimbabwe meant that the country experienced an economic crisis and now 72% of the population live in poverty. Only 14% of girls in Zimbabwe complete secondary education, and only 1% of girls from the poorest families do. This is often because families cannot afford to send all their children to school, so will just send the boys. Thirty four per cent of girls are married by the age of 18, 5% before they are 15 (UNICEF 2020). Children with disabilities are also marginalised and often unable to access education.

Period poverty can also affect girls’ education. If they are unable to afford proper sanitary protection, girls may skip school during their periods because they are embarrassed, especially as it is not really acceptable to talk about periods in Zimbabwe. This means they can miss on average 40 days a year, sometimes even more. Period poverty affects people in this country too and many schools take action to ensure that girls can access sanitary protection whenever they need it.

Activity

Research Tererai Trent (pictured right) and find out her story.



Action

Many young people in Zimbabwe do not have access to computers or mobile phones. In poorer areas, even the schools are unable to provide equipment for IT lessons. Try going for a whole day without using your mobile phone. If nothing else, it is good for the environment. Think about how often you use your phone and what different things you use it for. Discuss with your group the advantages and disadvantages of having 24/7 access to social media, the internet, games etc.