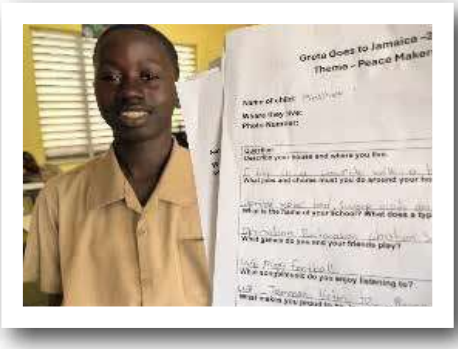
Session 2
Growing up in Jamaica

The United Reformed Church Youth



The Jamaican education system is very similar to the UK, and lessons are taught in English. The system is divided into several levels: early childhood education (one-to six-year-olds), primary education, (six- to twelve-year-olds) secondary education, (12- to 17-year-olds) and higher education (17–19-year-olds). Education is compulsory for children between the ages of six and 17. Students study a wide range of subjects including English, Mathematics, Science, Religious Education, Physical Education, Art, and often Spanish, have lots of homework and are tested regularly, with many having extra tuition if affordable. Rather than GCSEs which are taken in UK schools in Secondary education, those in Jamaica take CSEC exams, Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate. Extra-curricular activities are offered in many schools. Although almost all children in Jamaica now attend school many families struggle to afford uniforms, books, transportation, lunches and examination fees and not all have access to IT resources and are able to afford extra tuition which puts them at a disadvantage. Thankfully there are charities and organisations which help to meet this need.

Food For The Poor - **https://www.foodforthepoorja.org/** Jamaica supports vulnerable families, schools, and children with educational materials and meals. UNICEF Jamaica - **https://www.unicef.org/jamaica/** works alongside the Jamaican government to improve education, child welfare, and access to opportunities for disadvantaged children and many local churches run feeding programmes, homework clubs, and school-support schemes for children in their communities.

In February 2026, Kevin Snyman (Head of World Justice) visited Kingston in Jamaica and the Operation Restoration Christian School (ORCS). He interviewed the children asking them about their home life and schooling. Those interviewed were between the ages of 13 and 16 and so would have been in secondary education.

Home Life
The students that were interviewed lived in Kingston and in nearby Trench Town and Waterhouse. Kevin learned from them that their homes are typically built of concrete and that family life is important and central to the children's identity.

He learnt that many families struggle financially, and access to water can sometimes be an issue, showing how climate with an increase in heat affects daily life.



Many of the children contribute to family life through chores in the home such as washing dishes and clothes, sweeping, cleaning, cooking and helping with siblings.

The children described their school as supportive and encouraging, and where students build each other up.

Game - PUNCHINELLO
Recess circle game

Played mainly by girls (sometimes boys joined in)

Form a circle: Children stand in a circle holding hands, one person stands in the middle, they are Punchinello.

Sing the opening lines: The circle sings the first two lines while circling or clapping.

Perform an action: Punchinello performs any action they like, such as hopping or spinning.

Copy the action: The circle sings the “we can do it too” lines and copies the action exactly.

Swap places: On the last verse, Punchinello points to or taps another child, swapping places with them.

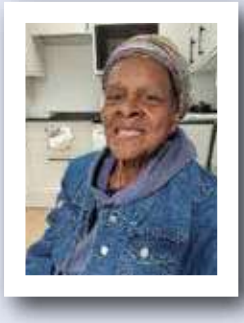
These are the song words:

What can you do
Punchinello little fellow
What can you do
Punchinello little dear

We can do it too
Punchinello little fellow
We can do it too
Punchinello little fellow

We can do it too
Punchinello little dear
Who does it best
Punchinello little fellow
Who does it best
PUNCHINELLO Little Dear!

Discussion: What kind of experiences have you had from people you encounter? Have you ever considered yourself to have been bullied or discriminated against?



Rose who was born in Abuka, St Ann, Jamaica remembers a childhood shaped by family, faith, discipline and the natural beauty of the island. She grew up in a large family and described life as simple: walking long distances to school, going to church several times each Sunday, and living on land full of fruit trees such as mangoes, breadfruit, oranges, and tangerines. Just before her 18th birthday in 1960, Rose came to live in England. Rose faced serious challenges after arriving in England. She experienced racism and discrimination, especially in housing, where signs openly said, “No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs.” Living conditions were cramped and difficult, and she often had to share overcrowded accommodation. She also found the cold weather and snow difficult, especially without proper heating or clothing. Despite these challenges, Rose proved resilient: she found office work, built a career, studied hard, and kept pushing back against being underestimated.

You can find out more about Roses story here:**LINK**

Leisure Interests
The most popular sport played by the group of children spoken to was football, although other games included tag, hopscotch, Roblox, and Free Fire. Dominoes is also a very popular game that is played.

Listening to music such as Reggae, or dancehall after school helps children and young people to relax and feel connected to friends and family.

What makes you proud to be Jamaican?
When questioned about what makes them proud to be Jamaican, responses included, culture, food, music, creativity and family. Jamaicans are described as being strong, talented and resilient.

Action Point - What can you or your church actively do to help with bullying or discrimination in your community? If you have a church window, notice board or similar then it can be used to display posters, slogans, bible verses showing that your church is for all. Have some fun creating something colourful.

Activity 1 - Recycled Jamaican Cup Drum
What you need:

- paper or plastic cups (or clean plastic tubs work too)
- strong balloons (one per drum)
- rubber bands or tape
- craft supplies for decorating: construction paper, markers, or paints. Ideas for colours include black, green, yellow, and red.





What you do:
Decorate the Base. Invite the young people to cover the outside of the cup with paper or paint with either the Jamaican Flag or vibrant geometric patterns.

To make the Drum Skin, take a balloon and use scissors to cut off the narrow neck part, leaving the wide bowl of the balloon. Assemble the Drum by

Prayer – Dear God, help our hearts and ears be open to your voice Lord. Thank you for those people you that you have placed in my life, parents, grandparents, teachers and other caregivers that help and guide me. Thank you for teaching me how to be loving, kind and to follow you. Encourage me to be the best I can be, compassionate, loving and courageous – willing to stand up for others when it is needed. Amen.

gently stretching the remaining wide piece of balloon tightly over the open top of the cup.

Use a rubber band or strong tape around the rim to make sure the balloon stays firmly in place. Young people can use their fingers, hands, or unsharpened pencils as drumsticks to practice making traditional Jamaican beats.

Bible Link - Proverbs 22:6
Easy-to-read

Teach children in a way that fits their needs, and even when they are old, they will not leave the right path.

There are many loud voices in our community, the internet, youtubers, tv, books, other people and even our own doubt. The Bible can teach us a lot about how we can live together in harmony, how we can be the sort of person in the world that makes God smile.

Activity 2 - Fruit punch
The recipe serves 10

You will need:

- 10 strawberries sliced
- ½ orange sliced
- ½ lemon sliced
- handful of mint leaves
- ice
- 500ml pineapple juice
- 300ml orange juice
- 300ml lemonade

What you do:
Put the fruit, ice and mint leaves in a jug. Pour in the juices – stir and then add the lemonade. Enjoy.



You can find out about a young person's experience of living in Jamaica here: **LINK**

