



## Introduction

For centuries, brightly painted Russian 'nesting dolls' have served as exotic decorations and souvenirs of foreign travel. However, they can also serve as fascinating teaching aids to symbolise the wide range of (buried?) emotions that exist in everybody. Any lessons dealing with 'Who am I?' or 'What makes me special?' should find this activity valuable for increasing emotional literacy, enabling pupils to discuss, value and artistically express their feelings with greater confidence. It is important to allow time and space for this, and to remind everyone to be sensitive to the feelings of others, whatever their artistic ability.

It is not intended that pupils be encouraged to discuss their home life. However, if conversation leads to a disclosure revealing a child safeguarding issue, deal with it according to your school's normal policies.

## Preparation

Pupils will need to be able to see (and possibly handle) some sort of Russian 'nesting' doll, preferably one with a range of different faces or personas inside. If you have the traditional type of nesting doll where all the dolls inside share the same design, place rounded stickers on the face of each one so each shows a different but easily recognised emotional 'face' (similar to emoticons of sadness, anger, and so on).

For follow-up, choose an art activity that allows the pupils a great deal of personal expression - for example, simply drawing on to a blank template of a Russian doll. However, some teachers might prefer to purchase sets of blank Russian nesting dolls for individual decoration, or make them in class using recycled food or drinks containers - these are first decorated on the outside, then symbolic items are placed inside. Whatever you choose, ensure that each child has the opportunity to explain what their different feelings might be, and why they chose to express them as they did. This could be written, or dictated to an adult 'amanuensis' (a person employed to write what another dictates).

## Development

Show images or examples of nesting Russian dolls, drawing out the idea that although the ones 'inside' can all look the same, they can also be very different. Explain that people can have all sorts of feelings inside them, too.

At this point, you could sing together 'If you're happy and you know it clap your hands', but then ask for suggestions for words to describe other feelings for the next verses - for example, 'If you're grumpy and you know it say I am, I AM!'

Next, using a child-friendly version, tell the Bible story of one of those parables that includes a range of feelings, such as:



- The good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- The two sons (Luke 15:11-32)
- The lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7)

You could ask the pupils (at a given signal) to act out a range of possible feelings experienced in each story, as 'frozen faces' or 'freeze-frame' statues, and then discuss and list the feelings (as simple cartoon face images) experienced by the characters in the story. Explain that we can carry all sorts of feelings around inside us at the same time, and these might surprise us by suddenly bubbling up so we change our moods very quickly, which can be frightening if we are not aware of them. So, it's better to try and make friends with the different feelings inside. There's nothing wrong with having all sorts of feelings as long as we don't let them hurt us or anyone else. Our feelings might be related to things that happened in the past - or they could be telling us about something important that needs attention. Let's explore what those feelings might look like.

Set the task of designing (and then making?) a large Russian doll that shows how we are feeling right now, as well as some other smaller dolls to convey some of our other feelings, perhaps wearing clothes suited to those feelings. (If using a recycled container, place symbols or drawn faces inside it to represent some of the other emotions.)

Then, as a class, discuss the following:

- Which feelings do we have most of the time?
- When do the other feelings come out and show themselves? Encourage the pupils to talk about this comfortably with a partner, emphasising the need to respect other people's feelings.
- Which feeling would we like to have on display most of all?

At this point, emphasise that all our feelings are real, and are part of what makes us who we are. There may be some feelings we're a little unsure about, but if they worry us, we should talk about them with an adult we can trust. Be careful to praise any pupil responses that show a willingness to recognise and express feelings.