

ME + US

The purpose of Me + Us is to engage children in an exploration of what makes them unique and what connects them to others. Through their personal and group investigations, children will document their cultural identity, sense of belonging, and heritage and explore how we might work together to make Scotland an inclusive and respectful nation; the best place for children to grow up. The children will produce a self-portrait and an artist statement, which will reveal to an audience of peers and adults who they are and their views on the Me + Us themes.

You are invited to use this pack to facilitate your own Me + Us project.

Key things about Me + Us

Your Me + Us project will be very much about the stories and experiences of the children you work with, whether that be in a school or community setting. Your Me + Us project can be part of what you do in the classroom, after school club, youth club or a specialist group setting.

You will explore some familiar and some new words, concepts and ideas which include: identity, culture, nationality, individuality, discrimination, empathy, heritage, symbols, patriotism, stereotypes, racism, prejudice, respect, sectarianism, inclusion. Don't be put off by what might initially sound complex, the project is an exploration and children will engage with the principle ideas.

Each Me + Us project uses a contemporary spin on *portraiture*. Portraiture was once the realm of painting, but the concept of portraiture has expanded due to new technologies and mediums of expression. In Me + Us we employ photography and collage to construct self-portraits that explore who we are and who we want to be. It is an accessible process which draws on children's understanding of technology, communications, branding and iconic imagery. In their self-portraits children will choose to depict individual characteristics, signs and symbols, memories and memorabilia, surroundings and emotions. These images represent aspects of the children's cultural identity and heritage. Each artist statement enhances and informs the viewing of the self-portrait. Together the self-portrait and statement are powerful representations of the child's voice. The work lends itself to exhibition or publication, in hard copy or online.

Children's work can also inform and influence policy and practice of agencies in your locality. The children's work will point to the responsibilities we have as adults, in our families, communities and professional settings, to ensure children grow up safe, healthy and happy.

The Me + Us project sees children reflect on, discuss and clarify what culture and identity mean to them; they learn and articulate an understanding that 'who we are' changes over time and across settings; they understand that the way we portray who we are will usually be positive – but how we portray *others* might not be. Inevitably their insights will pose challenging questions for the viewer, who will be left to consider what we do about issues such as racism, religious bigotry and intolerance.

Part of the Me + Us project is reaching out and listening to other people's experiences and opinions, so this pack contains tools which the children can use to consult with others, extending the involvement of the core group to other children, family and community members. In doing so, children will develop their understanding of issues through the experiences of fellow citizens.

What you will need for your Me + Us project

These are the key ingredients of a successful Me + Us project:

- **An interested and committed adult(s):** be that a teacher, arts worker, children's worker or youth worker (whether paid or volunteer) your interest should be in children's views and perspectives. This means creating a space within which children are able to explore interesting and sometimes challenging concepts, ideas and experiences and to do so at their own pace.
- **Interested and committed children:** Me + Us asks children to reflect on matters which are at the heart of who they are and are connected to emotional wellbeing. To take part, their initial interest must be nurtured and a level of trust must be built so that they understand that the process will respect who they are, what they bring, and the aspirations they have.
- **Time and support:** the Me + Us guide we offer is just that, a guide. The work needs time for ideas to emerge and for understanding to grow. So, while there are skills to be learned and tasks to be completed, the children (both individually and collectively) need time and support to engage meaningfully.
- **Consider the importance of thinking and learning:** Me + Us is about encouraging children's curiosity; the purpose then is to ask and encourage questions and create a dialogue. Most of the time we do this intuitively, but we would ask that adults facilitating a Me + Us project reflect a bit more explicitly on this approach.
- **An opportunity to shine:** Children will produce great work, which needs to be shared, perhaps in exhibitions or publications in hard copy or online.
- **Resources and skills:** The workshop guide takes adult facilitators through key elements of what to do and when. This does require some level of confidence about the approach, but rest assured you do not need to consider yourself to be an artist. What we would say however is that a Me + Us project lends itself to co-working, where someone who knows the children well might benefit from the involvement of a colleague who brings more specialist knowledge or skills about the use of collage or photography. However, the focus of Me + Us is on skills and values we bring in our work with children.
- **Access to technology:** Me + Us asks the children to engage with technology to create their unique self-portraits. Access to a digital camera and a computer with photo editing software (e.g. Photoshop or a similar programme) is essential. Products are available at a reasonable cost or if your budget is limited, use your community network to see if someone might be willing to collaborate on this project and give you access to the software.

Thinking and learning

The Me + Us project is interested in thinking and in the deep learning which involves knowledge, understanding and the skills needed to apply knowledge in useful ways.

This is an important aspect of Curriculum for Excellence which draws on Blooms taxonomy of thinking skills to help adults who facilitate learning think about their approaches and the questions they ask; these are identified in the following 6 levels. To encourage each level of thinking (4, 5 and 6 are considered higher order skills), Me + Us facilitators might ask these kinds of questions, with an increasing focus on higher order skills:

1. **Knowledge:** *What happened...?*
2. **Comprehension:** *Can you tell me in your own words...?*
3. **Application:** *Do you know of another instance where...?*
4. **Analysis:** *Why does...?*
5. **Synthesis:** *What do you think would happen if...?*
6. **Evaluation:** *Is there a better solution to...? Why...?*

Thinking skills are developed by practice. This is how we have approached the Me + Us project:

- When we work with children we make them curious; we ask and encourage questions and we create a dialogue. This means that for a Me + Us project to be a positive experience for the children, we (as adult facilitators) need to create and manage groups where children can work collaboratively and safely whilst feeling able to be honest and to take risks.
- With Me + Us we create opportunities for experiential learning, making meaning from experience and reflection. Traditionally this might be encouraged by posing a problem, but the preferred approach of a project like Me + Us is to construct projects or investigations more positively. Then, within this positive framework (in Me + Us we use identity), we might look at an issue or a challenge children (or their school or community) face.
- In doing this, we can design programmes that are challenging and where all contributions are valued. The imaginative and inspiring approaches used in Me + Us motivate the children to learn, but the children also develop their own intrinsic motivation to participate and engage. Then we encourage children to learn from each other and from other community members (peer learning).
- Finally, we aspire to support children to become better thinkers by developing an ability to reflect upon, understand and control their learning (this is called metacognition).

An outline of Me + Us: session by session

We have organised the Me +Us project into six parts, you can think of these as session plans or a framework you can adapt to suit your group.

We would suggest each session (as we describe it) would take about a half day to deliver, but again this is a guide and how long you spend might vary depending on characteristics of the group, the number of children you are working with, or the time you normally have with them. Sessions can be split, or indeed run together to form a full day of work.

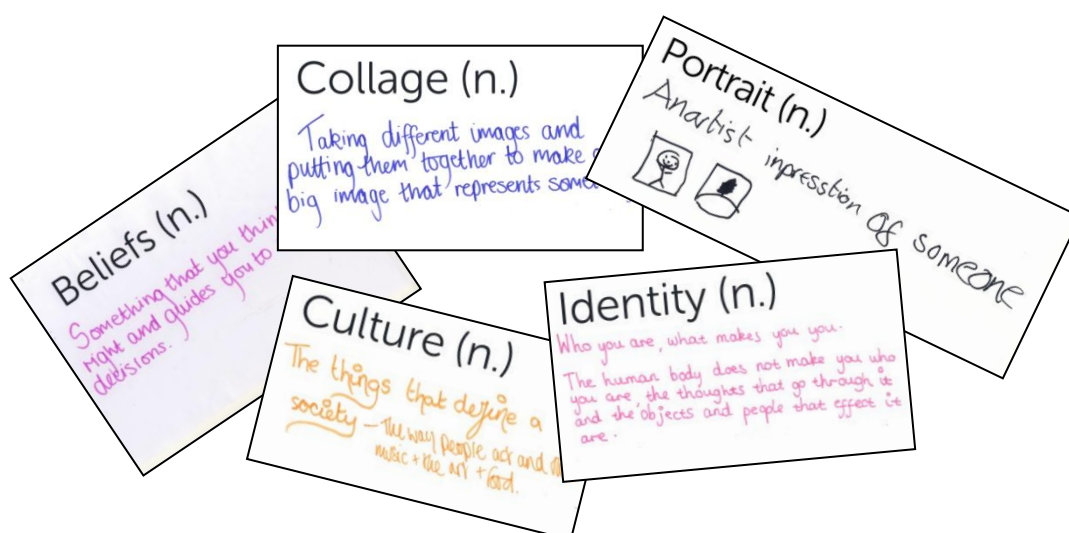
However you do it you need to start at the beginning and work through the sessions and activities in order. As with all packs, there is a need to remember that *you know the children*, so please make Me + Us work for them.

Click thorough to find:

- Preliminary session: Introducing human dignity and children's human rights
- Part 1: Who am I?
- Part 2: Me + my family
- Part 3: How do people see me? How do people see us?
- Part 4: My Scotland/Our Scotland
- Part 5: Creating our Portraits

Note about the Word Wall:

With each session, there are a handful of key words that will be important to the tasks and discussions in Me + Us. We recommend that when you speak about a word, have the children agree on a definition and write it down on an A4 sheet of paper to make a Word Wall that can be referred to as your Me + Us project progresses. The Word Wall is especially helpful when the children are writing their artist statements at the end of the project.



Extending your Me + Us project

Newsletter

Between Me + Us sessions, it's important to keep children (and families) up-to-date with what's going on in the project. This can be done with a simple newsletter that details what was done in the previous session, examples of work created during the session, and any tasks to be completed for the next session.

Blogs and videos

Alternatively, use a blog to keep track of progress and updates on your Me + Us project. This could also be something the children maintain and where they can share their thoughts, examples of their work, and upload any photos and videos that are created during the sessions.

Exhibition

Exhibitions of the children's work are wonderful opportunities to bring the children together with adults to discuss the project and the work that has been created. We suggest finding a community space – community centre, art gallery, library, etc. – to host an exhibition of the children's work and have a launch event to get people along.

Publications: hard copy and online

Compiling the children's work into a book or newspaper is a great way to get their thoughts and ideas out into the public. It also is a nice way to mark the children's involvement in the project and leaves them with something to remember their experience. Depending on your budget, the quality, size and number of copies will vary.

If a hard copy publication is not a possibility, we recommend uploading a PDF of the document onto your website so that the children and the public can access the results of your Me + Us project.

Support for your Me + Us project

Examples from Me + Us

Examples of the activities outlined in this pack, newsletters, and final self-portraits and artist statements can be found on the Children's Parliament website:

www.childrensparliament.org.uk.

Hosting a Me + Us project?

If you are hosting a Me + Us project, please let us know and we can help promote the project and link to your work via our dedicated Me + Us website.

Questions?

If you have any questions regarding the Me + Us project and this pack, please contact:

Chelsea Stinson
Children's Voices Programme Manager
0131 558 9030
Chelsea@childrensparliament.org.uk