

Tattoos: Too cool for school or looking like a fool?

Imagine you've been told you've got a new teacher. You don't know anything about them: not their age, race, gender, even their name. All you know is that they're going to be teaching you for Physics.

Who are you expecting to walk through the door? And what are you hoping they'll be bringing to your lessons? Maybe you're expecting someone young; a smart, newly-qualified teacher just out of university, looking to 'make their mark' on your class (in other words, using your class as sacrificial lambs to make all their terrible new-teacher mistakes on). Or maybe you're thinking you'll get an old teacher: a seasoned old pro - an Albert Einstein or a Marie Curie. Maybe you're hoping they'll be relaxed, funny, clever, able to control the class. And hey, it wouldn't hurt if they were up for a bit of banter, too...

You sit at your desk, rocking back and forth on the long stool in idle anticipation. The lab smells of old splints and uncertainty. There's a buzz of indistinct chatter already in the air, as you and your classmates speculate about your chances of doing a runner before the teacher gets here. Just as you're about to shout your own witticism across the classroom, in walks your teacher. She's probably in her thirties, average height, dressed in a short-sleeved, white blouse and black trousers. Her hair is short and brown. Overall, she is dressed very smartly and professionally.

Oh, and every inch of flesh that you can see below the face is covered in tattoos.

What would your reaction be?

The truth is, it doesn't really matter what your reaction would be, because the chances of this happening are - bizarrely - infinitesimal. That's not because there aren't female Physics teachers, or because females don't get

heavily tattooed: it's because prejudice against tattoos in job interviews means someone with lots of visible tattoos is less likely to be appointed for 'respectable' professions like teaching.

What's behind this? Why are some people so uptight about tattoos, and where does their reputation come from? The answer, in a word, is prejudice.

Tattoos are, often by older generations, associated with the rough and ready. They are the hallmark of the ex-inmate, whose tears, inked down his face, number the murders for which he was committed. They are the proud artworks of the sailor who misses his mother, or the 'chav', with her eight children's names stained forever on her neck, with the long-gone ex's now disguised as a dragon, slightly further down her clavicle.



This is pure stereotyping, of course. Some of the greatest minds of our generation are tattoo lovers; Professor Sandeep Robert Datta, a neurobiologist at Harvard Medical School, proudly shows off a colourful strand of DNA. Justin Trudeau, the President of Canada has a completely

inked shoulder. Of course, every one of the Made in Chelsea lot seem to have them too... but we're talking about great minds here.

Like any kind of permanent body alteration, you need to be one hundred percent sure before you have a tattoo. Design trends come and go and can look dated very quickly (think Chinese symbols in the early 2000s). It all comes down to whether the 'you' you are now will be the same as the 'you' you will be in forty years' time. Will you still be into Skrillex so much in your sixties? Perhaps that's why so many people choose to have their children's names inked - chances are they won't go off them.



Probably best not to go to China, then no one will realise your ink says 'Farter' and not 'Father'.

Perhaps as the millennials become the employers rather than the employees the tide against tattoos will change. Until then, admire your cool new Physics teacher's tattoos from afar, but what's more of a marvel is the fact you're seeing an inked-up professional in the first place.

Questions

Challenging

1. Name two facts about tattoos that you learn from this article.
2. Write out an example of a) a simple sentence and b) a complex sentence from this article.
3. Name one language technique that the writer has used to try and interest the reader. Write a PEEL paragraph explaining the effect.

More Challenging

1. Describe three things about tattoos and prejudice that you learn from this article.
2. Find the word in this article which is a synonym for 'strangely'.
3. Name ONE structural technique that the writer has used in order to make the text interesting for the reader. Write a PEEL paragraph explaining the effect.

Mega Challenging

1. Name all of the techniques used in paragraph one. How effective is this as an opening?
2. Write out your own definitions for 'infinitesimal', 'witticism' and 'millennials'. Use each word in a sentence of your own.
3. To what extent do you think the writer presents a balanced point of view? Use at least THREE examples from the text in your answer.