

What is radicalisation? How does a person become 'radical'? The aim of many attacks is to sow fear in society and by doing so amass power. Most teachers have faced questions from their students, or overheard students talking among themselves, about questions such as: Why do Muslims and others do this, and why is there relatively more conflict, distress and destruction in 'their' countries? as a teacher, do you delve into the topic and organise a discussion, or avoid it altogether? Students might have strong and divided opinions, but they often also lack basic knowledge that would help inform their opinions.

Instead of the regular lesson, I've decided to devote today's class to radicalisation. I'll be taking the attack on Charlie Hebdo as my starting point. I write the following on the board: 'People are willing to die for love. When death seems to be the only way out, you look for a reason to die.' I tell the class a story about two brothers growing up in the outskirts of Paris. Poverty, poor education, deprivation, and a run-down neighbourhood ignored by government and public institutions. Your life revolves around street culture; your father is an addict and your mother suffers from depression. You wonder what kind of future you have. What are you capable of? What opportunities will be open to you?

I have the students look at the world through the eyes of the two Algerian young men who are angry and frustrated, and obsessed with France's colonisation of the Maghreb countries. They abhor France for the atrocities it committed at the time. Their desperation, their sense of victimhood and their own circumstances make them feel excluded from French life and alienated from France. They feel a growing bond with their country of origin, though they do not speak the language and know very little about the culture. 'But we are considered Algerians and so that's what we are,' they say.

The two young men come into contact with 'brothers', who tell them that origin, socioeconomic status and education don't matter in Islam. That they are 'brothers' who can count on one another in difficult times. The two young men soon feel like they have become part of a family – the family they never had growing up. They feel valued and loved, and are open to all kinds of ideas. Even to the idea of killing someone. After all, those other people never loved them, and made sure they knew it. With this story as the point of departure, I discuss with the class what radicalisation really is and challenge my students to respond.