A student hands in a report in which he wrote that Mohammed Bouyeri, the man who murdered Theo van Gogh, is a hero and that he admires him. I'm shocked and think to myself, 'This boy needs to be locked up before he kills someone himself! Should I call the police? Should I report this? What if I do and he attacks me? I'm tempted to cancel class tomorrow and talk to my colleagues about this first, because I don't dare to tackle this alone. Where is this boy headed? He's not the most motivated student in the class, but he doesn't cause trouble either... But wait... Why does he think Bouyeri is a hero? What did he have against Theo van Gogh? Does he even know who Theo van Gogh was?'

I speak to the student and ask him to stay after class. I tell him that I read his report and was shocked by one sentence. He laughs and says, 'Yeah, I bet. But that's freedom of expression, isn't it? I can write whatever I want, can't I? Maybe you are a Geert Wilders fan.' I continue questioning him. Why do you think he's a hero? What do you think about murder? Why did Van Gogh deserve to die, in your opinion?

During the conversation I ask him about his own ideas, what his friends and family think of this and whether he has expressed this opinion before. The student was raised in a Muslim household and he regularly goes to mosque with his father. I ask him, 'What would you think if your father were to be killed by a right-wing extremist while he was praying at the mosque? After all, the extremist considers your father to be an intruder, a satanist and a threat to democracy. He might hate your father just like you hate Theo van Gogh.'

I frequently find that turning the situation around and teaching students to look beyond their own world works well. Yes, they have the freedom to believe whatever they want, but a teacher cannot ignore it if a student expresses approval of a murder or other crime. In this way you as a teacher can split up these two components – freedom of expression and acts of violence – and discuss them separately.