



## KS3 Character Comparison Activity

This lesson includes:

- Two contrasting extracts from *The Runaway Children of Chennai*
- Character comparison questions with evidence prompts
- Creative writing task with stretch challenge
- Graphic organiser for structured analysis

*The Runaway Children of Chennai* is a story inspired by a real-life charity called Railway Children. It follows the lives of siblings, Rish and Mariam as they deal with the harsh realities of life on the streets in India. The main themes for today are:

- survival vs aspiration
- temptation vs integrity

**1.** Which matters more: survival or ambition?  
(Quick think-pair-share)

**2.** Read the extracts taken from *The Runaway Children of Chennai* by Caroline Boxall

**Rish: A boy trying to survive on the streets** (Survival and Temptation)

Soon, we upgraded from polishing to selling. “Rish and Shaur’s Shoe Shop.” No sign, because neither of us could write, but it sounded good in our heads.

Shaur had spotted some shoes behind a factory on the way to the temple. His bapa was a fisherman too, but at least he didn’t hit him. One day Shaur and I went to check it out.

The shoes he’d seen were gone, but the bin was huge. I gave him a leg-up, then he dropped back down with a shiny black pair of men’s shoes.

We played with them, tried walking in them - uncomfortable! We sold them to a man in a ragged suit. We went straight to the market and bought a stack of samosas.

The next day, we both jumped in the bin and found three pairs - no idea why they’d been thrown out - they looked fine. We sold them again, and this time we had extra money, so we bought kebabs, two straw hats (with brims—we thought we looked like rich uncles), a big bag for the shoes and a smaller one for the cash.

Five days it worked, then, on the sixth, the bin was locked.

Annoyed, we wandered off. I’d never been inside a temple, so we went that way.

At the door, everyone leaves their shoes behind. So many nice shoes... just sitting there.

We told ourselves we were experts now. Shoe specialists.

Too easy. Too tempting.

We started filling the bag.

Then a man stepped out from behind a pillar and grabbed us both by the scruff of the neck.

Bapa went berserk when he found out. He beat me, then told me I wasn’t allowed to see Shaur again. Said he was a bad influence.

No way was I going to obey. Shaur was my best friend.

I wish he was still here.



## **Mariam: A girl determined to escape slum life** (Hope and Ambition)

Living in a slum was not something Mariam intended to do for the rest of her life. Maa might have resigned herself to a life of washing, cooking and generally being miserable, but Mariam wasn't going to accept it. She was going to have a proper job, buy her own house, and be respected. She would be a doctor or a teacher or someone who could help people like her to get out of the slum.

She'd seized a chance three years earlier when she was ten and a new school opened nearby. Old Nalima, the wise woman, told her all about it.

Nalima had been sitting outside her door as usual with her peacock, Peetu who was strutting and showing off his feathers. Mariam had stopped to admire him, captivated by the shimmering greens, purples and golds. As she watched, one of the feathers fell to the ground.

"Take it," said Nalima in her croaky voice. "Fasten it to the wall next to your bed; a peacock feather brings joy and prosperity. But you must look out for opportunities too, grasp them when they appear, and that is why you must go to this school, Mariam. It's time to make something of yourself. It's your chance to break free." Mariam didn't need persuading, knowing how important an education would be if she wanted to get out of the slum. Nalima had given her a head start by teaching her to read and write, how to mix herbs to make medicines, and how to heal wounds.

### **Character Comparison – Questions**

1. Answer in full sentences where possible. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.
2. What is your first impression of Rish? Find one piece of evidence to support your answer.
3. What is your first impression of Mariam? Find one piece of evidence to support your answer.
4. Why does Rish make the choices he does? What does this suggest about his life?
5. What motivates Mariam to think differently about her future?
6. How are Rish and Mariam different in their attitudes to life?
7. Which character do you admire more? Explain your answer using evidence from the extracts.



## Challenge Questions (Optional Extension)

What do these extracts suggest about life for children living in a slum?

How does the writer make each character interesting or engaging for the reader?

## Creative Writing Task

Choose ONE of the following:

### Option 1: Diary Entry

Write a diary entry from the point of view of Rish or Mariam after the events in the extract.

What are they thinking and feeling?

What do they want next?

### Option 2: Character Meeting

Rish and Mariam are brother and sister. Write a conversation between them.

Imagine what would they say to each other?

Would they agree or disagree about their choices?

## Challenge (Stretch Task)

Try to include: ambitious vocabulary, varied sentence structures, thoughts and feelings, a clear sense of the character's voice.

Use the extracts to complete the T-chart. Find at least 3 pieces of evidence for each character.

## Character Comparison T-Chart

<b>Mariam</b>	<b>Rish</b>
What does he do?	What does she want?
What kind of person is he?	What kind of person is she?
Evidence:	Evidence:

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