

Reverence for Life

The Rana Plaza Disaster
A Price Worth Paying?

Lesson Resource

Reverence for Life

- For homework, find out about a man called Albert Schweitzer and his life story.
- Use your research to make a presentation about Schweitzer's life on at least one side of A4 and include writing and pictures.



Reverence for Life

- Search a little deeper into Albert Schweitzer's life and in particular the time he spent in Africa



- Your teacher will provide a resource about Schweitzer's life and some web links to help

Reverence for Life

- Find out what Schweitzer meant by **Reverence for Life**.



- Make some bullet points that help to explain **'Reverence for Life'**.

Reverence for Life

- It was in Africa that Schweitzer developed his philosophy of 'Reverence for Life'. He believed that:
- *We should value life in all its varied forms and the environment which supports it*
- *We should never destroy any form of life, unless it is unavoidable; always try to enhance and support life wherever possible*

Reverence for Life

- In other words, Schweitzer believed that **Reverence for Life** was about:

Regarding your life and all life with awe and respect and working to maximise life's full potential

This was his big idea that he shared with the world in his writing and, more importantly, in his actions.

Reverence for Life

- Schweitzer thought that if you are convinced of something, then you should put your conviction into action and set an example.

He once said:

‘Example is not the main way to influence others. It is the only way.’

Reverence for Life in action



Reverence for Life

- We are now going to look at the story of 19 year old Reshma Begum.



- Reshma is Bangladeshi and worked as a seamstress in the Rana Plaza garment (clothing) factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

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- The Rana Plaza building where Reshma worked housed a number of separate garment factories employing around 5,000 people, several shops and a bank.
- The factories manufactured clothing for well known brands including Benetton, Matalan, Primark and Wal-Mart.
- The head of the Bangladesh Fire Service said that the upper four floors had been built without a permit and that the building was planned for shops and offices – but not factories.
- Others stressed the risks involved in placing factories inside a building designed only for shops and offices, noting the structure was potentially not strong enough to bear the weight and vibration of heavy machinery.

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- Bangladeshi news media reported that inspectors had discovered cracks in the building and had requested evacuation and closure.
- The shops and the bank on the lower floors immediately closed.
- But garment workers like Reshma were forced to return the following day, their supervisors declaring the building to be safe. Managers threatened to withhold a month's pay from any worker who refused to come to work.

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On 24th April 2013, the Rana Plaza building collapsed



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- 1,129 people were killed.
- The search for the dead ended 3 weeks later on 13th May.
- Approximately 2,515 injured people were rescued from the building alive.
- Reshma was one of the survivors.

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Reshma survived in the rubble of the building for 17 days, until rescuers finally pulled her free.



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Speaking from her hospital bed, Reshma said:
'I never dreamed I'd see the daylight again.'



She had survived by drinking rainwater
and the food she found in other workers
lunchboxes.

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Reshma had begun work in the factory only 22 days before its collapse. She was to be paid 4,700 taka a month for her work there.



To us, that would be £38.

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- The wages for workers in such garment factories are very low because clothing companies want to keep the costs of the clothing down and keep their profits high.



- The clothes are then sold cheaply and in huge quantities in British shops and in other western countries.

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By late 2013, Reshma was campaigning on behalf of the victims of the disaster for compensation to be paid to their families.



Companies such as Benetton, Matalan, Primark and Wal-Mart have said they will help to pay this.

Reverence for Life

This BBC report looks at
Reshma's campaign.

www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24648809

She is calling on foreign companies which
buy their clothes in Bangladesh to honour
their promises.

Reverence for Life

- And yet compensation to families of the disaster victims is still under discussion, with many families struggling to survive after having lost a major wage earner.
- Families who had received the \$200 compensation from Primark were only those who were able to provide DNA evidence of their relative's death in the collapse.
- This proved extremely difficult to do according to the BBC reporter covering the story.

Reverence for Life

- The tragedy *has* caused some companies to re-examine the checks that they use to ensure workers are treated fairly and provided with safe working conditions in overseas factories.
- Yet few companies inspect for structural problems and inadequacies in the actual buildings where the factories operate.
- And the demand for cheap clothes in the west continues.

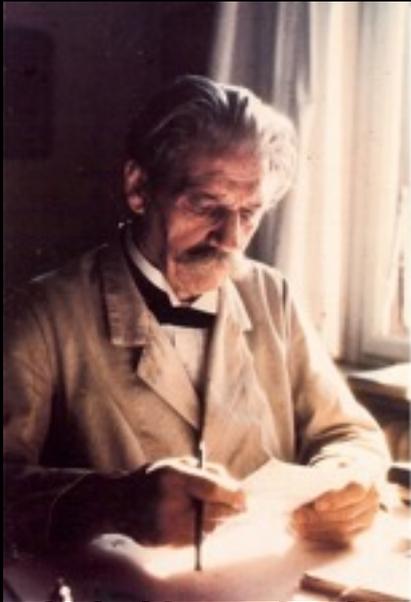
Reverence for Life

- Now think back to what you have learnt about Albert Schweitzer and his philosophy of **Reverence for Life**.
- How do you think Albert would have felt about the Rana Plaza disaster and the story of Reshma Begum?



Reverence for Life

- Write an imaginary letter from Albert Schweitzer to either the managers of the Rana Plaza building or to the clothing companies who used it.



- Try to express Albert's feelings in the letter and include ideas of how he might think that things could be improved.

Reverence for Life

- What do *you* think can be done to prevent another disaster like the Rana Plaza building collapse?
- Do you think that *we* can do anything in *our* lives to help prevent such tragedies happening in the future? Discuss this with a partner and come up with *three* ideas and put them in order of importance.

Reverence for Life

- With a partner, discuss how important you think the idea of **Reverence for Life** is for us today in the 21st century.
- To help you, choose one of the statements from the following slide and write down **three** reasons why you have chosen it.
- Then discuss as a whole class why you have made your choice.

Is **Reverence for Life** important for us today?

Very important indeed

Doesn't matter one way or the other

Quite important

Not very important

Not important at all

Reverence for Life



Write a word or a phrase that you think best describes Albert Schweitzer and a word or phrase that you think best describes Reshma Begum.

To finish, read these words out around the class.