



[The politics of fiction](#)

Elif Shafak, 2010, 19.46

★**ESSENTIAL TALK**★



BQ4 Perspectives



The arts, human sciences, language

Elif Shafak is a writer whose books draw on a whole range of different themes and cultures, but for which one thing is vital: the imaginative story. She argues against pigeonholing artists and people due to race, culture, and identity, and asserts that fiction allows us to connect with others.

Why is this talk worth watching? This is a fascinating approach to the arts and imagination, and what an important role it plays in helping us to empathize and understand other people. Some of her quotes – particularly the one in question 2 – are brilliantly effective and evocative.

Links to TOK The talk thinks about how we can overcome the problems associated with having radically different perspectives, via links to the arts, human sciences, and language. We use this talk as the basis of our lesson, [Punching holes in mental walls](#).

1	What warning does ES give us about society?	She argues that we live in self-enclosed cultural cocoons, surrounded only by people who resemble ourselves. This leads to stereotyping of other people because we do not know them.	3.00
2	In what way does ES say imagination can overcome this?	By telling and listening to stories we can “punch holes through our mental walls”.	4.05
3	What did writing allow ES to begin	Rather than write a journal describing herself, her writing let her enter other lives and possibilities, and different perspectives.	5.00

doing when she was young?

4	Why does ES write in different languages?	She feels Turkish and English both have their own inherent traits: the former, poetic and emotional; the latter, mathematical and cerebral.	8.45
5	How important is the element of the story within a book for ES?	She believes that stories lose their 'magic' the moment they are seen as more than stories (ie when they are deconstructed and more meaning is ascribed to it).	10.30
6	What problem does ES identify within the world of literature today?	Writers are increasingly being seen not as individuals, but as representatives of their cultures – something she experienced as an international student. This is particularly true of non-Western writers.	12.10
7	For ES, how do identity politics and fiction differ?	The former divides us; the latter connects us. She passionately believes stories transcend borders.	14.55
8	What role does imagination seem to play in ES's work?	Her way of writing embraces uncertainty and surprise, and she seems not to know where her stories are going. She suggests that perhaps we should not write what we know, but what we feel and imagine.	17.55

Further exploration

- Do the arts make us 'better' people?
- How important is imagination in empathizing with other people?
- What defines us as human beings – and does that question disconnect us from others?