

BRADFORD MADE
Heritage Brought to Life
Stories from Bradford's Communities

KS 2/3 (AGE 9-14)
Activity Pack

FIGHTING TO BE HEARD

Calligraphy, Courage and Community



LOCAL STORIES

FOR LEARNERS



BRADFORD 2025
UK City of Culture

PACK AT A GLANCE

This pack explores surprising connections between the ancient art of calligraphy and the noble art of boxing through the stories of three British South Asian Muslim men living in Bradford today. Learners will hear about acclaimed calligrapher Razwan Ul-Haq, world champion boxer Tasif Khan, and Nissar Hussain, head coach at Tasif Khan Community Boxing Academy. Their stories were central to *Fighting to Be Heard*, a British Library co-production with Bradford District Museums and Galleries as part of Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture. The pack includes creative, hands-on activities that bring these stories to life in classrooms and other learning settings. Learners can explore Razwan Ul-Haq's calligraphy through a variety of imaginative, practical exercises.

It also features Razwan's original artwork for the exhibition, *Writing To Be Heard*, and offers the chance to view a 360° virtual tour of the exhibition and watch a short film about the making of the exhibition and project. Activities are flexible and can be adapted for individuals, pairs, or whole-class participation.

Recommended for: Ages 9-14 (Upper Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 Learners)

Includes: Discussion Prompts / Mindfulness / Art / Writing Activities

Links to: RE / English / Art / PSHE / History

Please note: some images in this pack feature sacred texts. While the pack is intended for online use, if you choose to print any of these materials, please handle them with care and respect. As good practice, avoid placing printed copies on the floor or disposing of them with general waste.

FIGHTING TO BE HEARD:

Calligraphy, Courage and Community

BRITISH LIBRARY

Why is the British Library working in Bradford?

The British Library is more than just a London institution. They have a site in Yorkshire at Boston Spa and plans to build a new British Library in Leeds. Ahead of this they are working with schools, museums, libraries, festivals and community groups to help people explore creativity, share stories and celebrate cultures by opening up their collections for everyone to enjoy.

The ancient art of calligraphy and the noble art of boxing are an unlikely pairing, but they share a surprising amount of common ground.

This pack explores connections between the two through sharing the stories of three British South Asian Muslim men living in Bradford today. They all played a key part in 'Fighting to Be Heard', a British Library co-production with Bradford District Museums and Galleries. Part of Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture.

Hear about the lives of acclaimed calligrapher Razwan Ul-Haq, world champion boxer and the founder of Bradford's Tasif Khan Community Boxing Academy, Tasif Khan, and the head coach at the Academy, Nissar Hussain.

Sparking questions about religion, artefacts, ancestry and communities, before you dive into their stories, we recommend watching the project video first:



Fighting to Be Heard Film by Pishdaad Modaressi Chahardehi:

<https://youtu.be/P2jhrlyu39M>

Fighting to Be Heard

Below we hear from Tasif, Razwan and Nissar. They all played a key part in the Fighting to Be Heard project and exhibition. They visited the British Library in London to select a range of rare items from the Arabic and Urdu collections, as well as from the collections of Bradford District Museums & Galleries. Many museums and libraries have large collections, stored safely behind the scenes, but not all are on public display. This project offered a unique opportunity to bring hidden objects into view and for local people to have a say in which items should be displayed.

The displays also held personal items alongside these precious collections, including Tasif's boxing belts, trophies and a photograph and biography of the people involved, including Tasif, Razwan and Nissar.





Tasif Khan

Tasif Khan

Tasif Khan is a world champion professional boxer from Girlington, Bradford, and co-founder of the Tasif Khan Community Boxing Academy.

Growing Up

Tasif discovered boxing at the Bradford Police Boys Club when he was ten years old. Drawn by the energy and discipline of the sport, he soon developed a passion for training. "I also loved a challenge," he recalls. "Even with a simple race, I wanted to come first." Guided by coach 'Pop Allan', Tasif balanced sport with his education, studying Sports Development and Physical Education at university while excelling as an amateur boxer.

Choosing a Path

Coming from a Muslim home where faith was important, Tasif faced his parents' concerns about boxing's dangers, but his father's support and his mother's prayers gave him strength. His eldest brother persuaded his parents to let him compete, and Tasif soon represented England. After working as a primary school teacher, he realised that professional boxing required total dedication. "You need to train two or three times a day and be mentally focused on just boxing," he said. He made the big decision to turn professional and went on to become a multiple world champion.

Giving Thanks

For Tasif, boxing offered focus and kept him away from negative influences. He established and now co-runs the Tasif Khan Community Boxing Academy, aiming to inspire young people: "We are passing on the knowledge we learnt... to give young people the opportunity to be better versions of themselves." He met Razwan in the academy, was inspired by his work as a calligrapher, and invited Razwan to share his craft with the boxers and their families at the gym. He is proud to have created a place at the heart of the community where everyone can share their passions, be that boxing or calligraphy, and celebrate what can be achieved when you are disciplined and dedicated. Reflecting on his journey, he says: "I've always been proud to say I am from Bradford. Working on this project brought us closer together and made a bond between the boxing academy and the British Library, and Bradford Museums. The collectiveness, the creativity, the collaboration of the community, the mosques, the faith centres, the schools. Bradford is a small place on the map, but what we can do is massive in creating projects like this, that are so important, bringing so many different people and places together."

Razwan Ul-Haq

Razwan Ul-Haq is a calligrapher who has lived in Bradford for 15 years and trained under master calligraphers in the UK and abroad. He has been boxing at the Tasif Khan Academy for over six years.



Razwan Ul-Haq



Chinese Qur'an, China 19CE. © British Library Board.
Photographer David Lindsay

What is Calligraphy?

Calligraphy is the art of beautiful writing. Letters are drawn carefully so they look artistic. It has been practised for thousands of years in many parts of the world. In China, artists used brushes to create graceful characters. In the Middle East, letters were shaped into flowing decorative patterns, and in Europe, monks copied and decorated books by hand before the invention of printing.

Growing Up

Razwan was inspired by his uncle, a scribe, and encouraged by his mother, who bought him bamboo pens and boards. As a teenager, he sought out every calligraphy lesson he could find. "Calligraphy takes you into your own world," he says, but it wasn't his only hobby. "I've always been interested in sports, I played a lot of football, cricket and have done boxing and martial arts since I was young."

Choosing a Path

In the early 2000s, Razwan decided to devote himself entirely to calligraphy. He learned ancient traditional methods to make inks by hand, combining gum Arabic, soot and rainwater, preserving knowledge that is now rare. More recently, he trained under an Iranian Master through a prestigious scholarship, specialising in the elegant Nastaliq known for its flowing, graceful letters, and Shikaste, a faster, cursive version of the same style. Inspired by traditional masters, he travelled to the Middle East to collect books, tools and inks that were unavailable in the UK. He always kept fighting fit alongside his craft, and has been a regular in Tasif's boxing academy for the past six years. He was the first to have the spark of an idea to bring the two disciplines together.

← Razwan's story continues

Giving Thanks

Razwan sees strong parallels between calligraphy and boxing. Both demand patience, humility, balance, and relentless practice. “The master calligrapher and apprentice relationship is like that of a coach training his boxer,” he said. He and Tasif agree that both arts bring about the same mental state of harmony and focus: “It is a feeling of being ‘in the zone.’”

The project showed that important stories aren’t just in old books or artworks—they’re also in the lives of people around us. What we do every day can become part of history, too. Showing these stories together was what made Razwan most proud. “It was fabulous for people whose voices are not normally heard, to be placed front and centre—rather than division and extremes, it shows how close we all really are.”

“I’ve always been impressed by the discipline Tasif shows. When I first met him, I immediately noticed the parallels between our practices:

- 1. Coaching:** Both the calligrapher and the boxer share a deep connection with their teachers – one that goes far beyond the art or sport itself.
- 2. Commitment:** The serious boxer and Calligrapher must work daily at their sport”





Nissar Hussain

Nissar Hussain

Nissar Hussain is a senior coach and co-founder of the Tasif Khan Community Boxing Academy in Bradford.

Growing Up

Nissar describes his childhood in Girlington as happy but limited by a lack of opportunity. He joined the Police Boys Youth Club with his brother, where boxing helped him manage his temper. "I loved punching the bag and the buzz you get from it," he recalled. Boxing gave him confidence and a sense of purpose.

Choosing a Path

As a teenager, Nissar faced racism and the challenges of growing up in an area where life wasn't always easy. This came to a head in the summer of 2001, when Nissar took part in the Bradford Riots, after which he - and 296 other people - were arrested. After serving his time in prison, he rebuilt his life through education, eventually earning a degree and starting a family business. But boxing always remained central to his identity: "It is rooted in me. It is who I am."

Giving Thanks

Alongside Tasif, Nissar co-founded the Tasif Khan Community Boxing Academy during the COVID pandemic. The academy allows them to mentor young people, just as their coach, Pop Allan once guided them. Reflecting on his journey, Nissar said: "I want to say to my grandad - 'Look! Things are different now, look at what we did.'" He was in awe at how Fighting to Be Heard brought people together, "Bengali, Gujarati boys, English lads - it is surprising that even though we were talking about manuscripts, everyone engaged. Somehow, the Sacredness of what we were dealing with came across." Nissar remembers the powerful moment of being in the presence of a Quran manuscript on his memorable visit to see sacred texts at the British Library, "Can you imagine reading today something that your great-great-great-great-great grandparent might have seen? It was incredible to be able to touch something that was over a thousand years old and be that close."

Nissar's story continues: →

For Nissar, seeing his story and artefacts displayed in the exhibition was a deeply emotional experience — a moment of recognition and pride. “It felt unreal,” he said. “What right do we have to be in a museum?” He described how it changed the way his family, friends and even he himself saw his life and achievements, “It was strange because my family know what I do, day in and day out, but they hadn’t seen me before in this way. I realised, I’ve been boxing most of my life like Tasif, but then I chose a criminal path. I put my trophies away for a whole decade really. After the exhibition, I put my trophies up again...”

Fighting to Be Heard was about making the hidden visible and not just the rare manuscripts or artworks, but also the people. It showed that what we do and create today also matters and quite quickly becomes part of our collective history. Recognising our achievements, whether a trophy, a piece of art, or a commitment to choose a different path, helps us take pride in who we are and the impact we all have in the world, every single day.



Exhibition photographs © David Lindsay



Time to investigate: →



INVESTIGATE



Prompts and questions to spark discussion, reflection, writing, worksheets, or other follow-up activities after hearing the story.

You could also choose to:

- Show the virtual tour of the exhibition: [View here](#)
- Watch the short film about the project by Pishdaad Modaressi Chahardehi: [Watch here](#) (also featured in the Get Inspired section)

Boxing and Calligraphy

- Why do you think boxing and calligraphy were linked together in this project?
- What do you think the similarities and differences are between boxing and calligraphy?
- How do you think the men felt when they went to London to find examples of calligraphy?
- Would you like to try boxing or calligraphy after hearing these stories? Why/why not?
- The men talk about being thankful for things in their life. What are they thankful for? What are you thankful for?

Culture and Community

- Lots of the men speak about the importance of their faith and seeing the Qu'rans in the British Library. Why do you think religion is important to people?
- How does religion link to the boxing and calligraphy the men practice?
- "Bengali, Gujarati boys, English lads - it is surprising that even though we were talking about manuscripts, everyone engaged." How have boxing and calligraphy brought people together?
- How is boxing important for these men to connect with other people?
- What helped Nissar rebuild his life after he went to prison? How do you think boxing helped with this?

Discipline and Commitment

- Why do you think discipline and commitment are important to the men in the video? How have boxing and calligraphy helped them to develop this?
- What is an example from your life of when you needed discipline and dedication to achieve something? How did you commit to making it happen?
- Nissar says boxing gives him confidence. Is there something that gives you confidence?
- Razwan says "when you have art, what's important is your own way of doing it". What is your way of doing art?
- For some of these men, boxing is a hobby, but for Tasif it has become his career (he runs a boxing academy in Bradford). How do you know if something should be a hobby or a job? What would be the positives and negatives of your hobby becoming your career?



Writing Activity 1

Choosing a goal and making a plan

Working in pairs, think of something you would like to do that would take discipline and commitment. It could be a sport you'd like to get better at, a language you'd like to learn, a musical instrument to master, or a creative skill you'd like to improve – such as drawing, painting, or writing.

Pick a specific goal in your chosen activity, for example, it could be to bake a cake for your family, or to score a goal in a match.

Can you think of 5 different things you would need to learn or practice to make your goal happen? (for example, if your goal is to score a football goal, you might need to practice your shooting, increase your fitness, practice with a couple of different goalies, etc)

How often would you need to work on it?

When would you do it?

Where would you do it?

Who would you do it with (it could be by yourself, but is there anyone who might want to do it with you or could help you?)

Finally, how would you feel when you achieved your goal?

Now you have a plan of how to achieve your goal! Share it with your partner.

Writing Activity 2

What does it mean to be heard?

Learners to discuss with their partners – what does it mean to be heard?
Who listens to you?

Then either

- Create a shared poem – everyone completes the sentence
“To be heard means...” and answers are compiled to create a whole class poem
- Or
- Learners write their own individual poem beginning with “To be heard means...”.

Think about including

- Who listens to you
- Where you feel heard
- How it feels when people listen to you
- Times when you have felt heard

For example

- To be heard means others try to imagine how I feel.
- To be heard means people pay attention with their ears, their eyes, and their whole body.
- To be heard means the room is mine.
- To be heard means people listen before they speak.
- To be heard means I can share my ideas without being interrupted.



GET INSPIRED



Fighting to Be Heard Film By Pishdaad Modaresi Chahardehi:

<https://youtu.be/P2jhrlyu39M>

Writing To Be Heard 2024

Razwan designed this image 'Writing to be Heard' using both traditional materials and digital art, for the exhibition. The item label read: The black colour represents ink, personified. The red gloves swim on the page as if they are large Arabic vowel marks. The large red Nuqta (rhombic dot as used in Arabic Nastaliq) is indicating the start position for calligraphy and boxing. Both disciplines are about perfecting one's movement. Notice a push stroke of the Qalam (pen) with the one push punch. The movement of the body corresponds here with the stroke. The Arabic word for patience 'Sabr' is written below the boxer. Although boxing is a contact sport, note the subtle ballet type movement in the figure; both the glove and the pen must be restrained. This is a rare piece of calligraphy showing both traditional materials and digital art made on a computer.

The saying on the figure is 'Actions Speak Louder than Words.'

الأفعال أبلغ من الأقوال

(al-af'aal ablagh min alaqwal)

Materials: Black soot carbon based hand mixed ink, gouache with acrylic binder, and synthetic dyes, on glossy paper.



Writing To Be Heard © Razwan Ul-Haq

LEARN AND CREATE

Calligraphy Activity by Razwan: thankfulness/ash-shukr

The Fighting to Be Heard exhibition displayed various different Arabic pieces. One of the most popular exhibits was of a *Kufic Qur'an*. This manuscript has now returned to the British Library. This book is over a thousand years old! The Arabic script in the manuscript is known as *Kufic*. It is widely believed that this script was developed in the city of *Kufa* in Southern Iraq.

I was inspired by the *Kufic* script to write the Arabic word, 'Ash-shukr'. This word can mean 'gratefulness' or 'thankfulness.' It is repeated three times.

الشكر

الشكر

الشكر

Begin by asking learners to close their eyes and relax. If they wish they can visualise a beautiful sunny day.



Exhibition photographs © David Lindsay



9th century Kufic Qur'an. © British Library Board. Photographer David Lindsay



Miniature Qur'an, Iran, 728 AH/1328 CE. © British Library Board. Photographer David Lindsay

Task continues:

Now your learners are relaxed, ask them to:

- 1) Breathe gently and easily.
- 2) Choose something that they are grateful for.
- 3) Continue to keep their eyes closed and really try to be thankful as much as possible.

Open eyes and in that state of thankfulness use watercolours and small paintbrushes, to begin to fill in the words on [the worksheet](#) with colours. Whilst calligraphers use bamboo pens and hand mixed inks, paint brushes and paints can work just as well. Some learners may like to paint each word in a different style.

Razwan's top tips for calligraphy artists

- 1) Always try to approach a new piece of work with fresh eyes
- 2) Have confidence!
- 3) Enjoy what you do!

Calligraphy Activity: Paint your own word

Razwan chose the word thankfulness because this is important to him in everything he does in life. Think of a word that sums up one of your personal values (examples could be courage, resilience, kindness).

Using your new calligraphy skills:

1. Write your chosen word three times in pencil.
2. Then use paint to decorate your words. You can:
 - a. Outline the letters and decorate the inside, like in the activity you just did, or
 - b. Decorate them in any other way you like.

Have fun making your word your own and show what makes it special to you!

Activity: Explore Writing To Be Heard

Learners to explore the question: What makes someone strong
– physically, emotionally or mentally?

Create a class mindmap on the board which includes different ideas of what strength means.

Display Razwan's image, Writing to be Heard (find it in this pack under Get Inspired)

What does this image make you think of? Why do you think Razwan chose these colours and symbols? What does the stance of the figure suggest?

Read Razwan's blurb describing how he designed the image.

Learners can create their own 'strength profile' using words or symbols to describe values that matter to them. They can draw around their hand or draw a silhouette and fill it with their ideas. Consider how to use colour, stance, shape, symbols and words.



DIG DEEPER

Boxing

Boxing is not just for men!

Learn about Leeds' amazing boxing champion Nicola Adams, the first woman to win Olympic gold in boxing:

- Read an Olympic Team GB Article about Nicola Adams:
<https://www.teamgb.com/article/black-history-month-the-story-of-nicola-adams/4sucSI6TJ7O5x16IZV2YIs>
- Watch an interview with Nicola Adams, including questions about being the first LGBTQ boxing champion:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvOU2PTZ86Y>
- Twinkl also has lots of Nicola Adams resources for learners:
<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/uks2-nicola-adams-black-history-month-powerpoint-and-activity-pack-t-tp-1690298424>

Explore videos, photos, and information about the 2014 play by Common Wealth Theatre, No Guts, No Heart, No Glory. The production was based on interviews with Muslim female boxers in Bradford, including two National Muslim Female Champions, Saira Tabasum and coach Ambreen Sadiq: <https://commonwealththeatre.co.uk/shows/no-guts-no-heart-no-glory/>

Muhammad Ali was an African American boxer who stood up for what he believed in. Learn more about his life here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=py-yVyi47Vc>

He once fought against Bradford's very own star boxer, Richard Dunn. Richard Dunn is a former English heavyweight boxer, born in Halifax and later living in Bradford. He was the British, European, and Commonwealth champion. Notably, he fought against Muhammad Ali in 1976 for the World Heavyweight title. The fight was stopped after four rounds, with Dunn being knocked down three times.

Richard Dunn was a well-known figure in Bradford, with the Richard Dunn Sports Centre named in his honour. He is now living in Scarborough and is the honorary president of the town's amateur boxing club. You can watch their fight here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxj63c5AXsg>

Calligraphy

Learn more about the importance of calligraphy in Islamic art in this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nx6Cm1DdW0>



NOTES FOR EDUCATORS

This pack includes mention of the Bradford riots and someone going to prison.

Be mindful that learners may have lived experience of family members or other people in their community going to prison. Learners may also have experience of racialised violence, or bring their own knowledge and personal connections to the Bradford riots with them.



BRADFORD 2025

UK City of Culture



This resource was co-created by the Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture Cultural Learning Team and Lily MacTaggart. The artwork was created by Razwan Ul-Haq and Pishdaad Modaressi Chahardehi.

With thanks to the British Library and Bradford District Museums and Galleries.



**Bradford
District
Museums
& Galleries**

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