



## HFL Education Herts Voices

### Introducing "Talking Heads" – Inspiring Voices for Schools in 2025

As part of our *Herts Voices* initiative, we are excited to launch a new series of "**Talking Heads**" interviews designed specifically for schools. These 20–25-minute videos are perfect for assemblies, classroom lessons, or careers sessions, offering students a unique opportunity to hear from inspiring role models from racially diverse backgrounds. Each video delivers motivational, thought-provoking content aimed at broadening students' perspectives and encouraging them to dream big.

### Meet Shahidha Bari – Our First "Talking Heads" Speaker


Our first interview features **Shahidha Bari**, an accomplished academic, writer, and broadcaster, who grew up in Luton and is of Bangladeshi heritage. Shahidha's story is a testament to the power of resilience and ambition, making her an inspirational figure for children and young people.

Shahidha is a **Professor of Fashion Cultures and Histories** at the London College of Fashion. She began her academic journey studying English at King's College, Cambridge, where she earned a PhD in poetry and philosophy. Today, her research bridges literature, art, and film, with a focus on topics like feminism, global fashion, and the sensory experience of clothing.

Her first book, '**Dressed: The Secret Life of Clothes**', explores the hidden language and cultural power of clothing in our daily lives, inviting readers to see fashion as more than just what we wear.

Beyond her academic achievements, Shahidha is a seasoned broadcaster and presenter. She is a regular voice on **BBC Radio 3's *Free Thinking*** and **BBC Radio 4's *Front Row*** and has hosted TV programmes like **BBC2's *Inside Culture***.





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This "Talking Heads" video is an opportunity to introduce your students to a role model who not only excels in her field but also reflects the richness of diverse experiences. Whether you're sparking career aspirations, discussing culture and identity, or exploring the arts, Shahidha Bari's story is sure to leave a lasting impression on young minds.


**Bring Shahidha's journey into your school – and inspire the next generation of thinkers, dreamers, and changemakers.**

### Year 5 and 6 Questions

1. Where did Shahidha grow up, and what was unique about her neighbourhood?
2. What challenges did Shahidha face as one of the few Asian students in her school?
3. Why did Shahidha love learning so much, even when others teased her about it?
4. How did Shahidha's parents support her education?
5. What difference did attending Sixth Form College make for Shahidha?
6. What advice does Shahidha give to children about being a "geek" or "boffin"?
7. How did Shahidha's teachers inspire her academic journey?
8. What happened when Shahidha first applied to Cambridge University?
9. What is a PhD, and why did Shahidha decide to pursue one?
10. What connection does Shahidha see between clothes and identity?

### Year 10 and 11 Questions

1. How does Shahidha describe the cultural diversity and segregation in Luton?
2. What impact did racism and teasing have on Shahidha's school experience?
3. How did Shahidha's Sixth Form College experience differ from her earlier education?
4. Why does Shahidha believe teachers can change the course of a student's life?
5. What does Shahidha say about persistence after failing her first Cambridge application?
6. Why is understanding where clothes come from important, according to Shahidha?
7. How does Shahidha connect her personal history with her academic interests in fashion?
8. What skills does Shahidha think are valuable for students interested in design and fashion?

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9. How does Shahidha's story demonstrate the importance of embracing one's culture?
  10. What advice does Shahidha give to young people about overcoming limitations and seizing opportunities?

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### A-level Tasks for English Students

1. Essay Task: Analyse how Shahidha's experiences of cultural identity and belonging influence her academic and professional journey. Use examples from the interview to support your argument.
2. Research Task: Investigate how clothing reflects identity and culture in literature or society. Present your findings in a written or visual format, connecting them to Shahidha's insights.
3. Creative Writing Task: Write a reflective piece exploring the role of a teacher or mentor in your life. Consider Shahidha's relationships with her teachers as inspiration.
4. Discussion Task: Organise a class debate on whether the education system does enough to support students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Use Shahidha's story as a case study.
5. Analytical Task: Compare Shahidha's experiences with those of characters in novels about identity and assimilation, such as *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali or *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri.