You CAN Handle the Truth: How to Create a Caring Classroom Culture in which to Address Uncomfortable Topics

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You CAN Handle the Truth: How to Create a Caring Classroom Culture in which to Address Uncomfortable Topics

Delia Andalora
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Abstract

High school teachers have the job of equipping students with a set of skills and knowledge that will help them be successful, functioning members of society in this complex world. Unfortunately, public schools across the country are failing to adequately prepare young adults for the adversity that each of us must inevitably face in our lives. By avoiding topics such as race, sexuality, sexism, immigration, and other topics because they are uncomfortable, teachers are lying to their students about the world which can lead to a pervasive and damaging ignorance. Creating a caring classroom in which teachers and students respect themselves, each other, and other cultures opens the door to addressing these sensitive subjects. This paper outlines methods and techniques for creating a caring classroom in order to teach about touchy topics.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem statement: Many secondary ELA teachers cannot successfully teach about touchy topics encountered in literature, such as race relations because they have not facilitated a trusting, caring classroom culture with their students.

Significance of the Problem:

The mission of any high school is to give students the confidence, tools, skills, and knowledge necessary to live a successful adult life. While schools across America are ensuring that graduating students have passed their standardized tests, schools are not teaching students how to make meaningful connections with others and the world around them. A study shows that “among 148,000 middle and high school students, well under half felt they had developed social competencies, such as empathy, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills” (Darling-Hammond 137). Adolescent students are still in the process of developing their moral sense of right and wrong and teachers must help students practice social-emotional learning in a safe environment.

Students who do not care for themselves or others will grow into adults whose lives are void of meaningful relationships and filled with apathy. In our current political climate minorities continue to be oppressed with many citizens claiming they are “neutral” or “uninterested” in politics. Those watching hatred and bigotry occur without standing up for the oppressed were the same students who didn’t care in high school. By creating a culturally-responsive and caring classroom, the teacher can model genuine caring which students will replicate in their own interactions. Once students learn to care about themselves they can begin
to truly care about others and those around the world. A caring ELA teacher can end the cycle of apathy.

While apathy is a problem that can be addressed in any content area, the ELA teacher has a unique tool to create a caring classroom: literature. Literature, whether fiction or non-fiction, has endless potential for lessons in caring. Reading about different cultures, races, countries, lifestyles, and belief systems with the support of a caring teacher helps students develop an understanding of multiple perspectives as well as a better understanding of themselves. Without a caring teacher to facilitate constructive conversations students may not be able to identify or empathize with a multicultural text which leads them to believe that there is less value to stories written by authors who are different than them. This, in turn, encourages students to only read literature that reaffirms their preconceived beliefs and see other cultures as unrelatable, therefore, less valuable. Students need to learn more than to tolerate other cultures but to value each with an understanding of different people from different backgrounds.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this project is to better define what it means to be a caring secondary teacher as well as to demonstrate proper practices for creating a culturally-responsive, social-emotional centered classroom in which all students support each other and feel supported. I will examine how cultural differences affect our perspectives on caring as well as the tools teachers need to successfully utilize the care model. For the care model to work, “students need to feel cared about and cared for, and to experience culturally responsive, engaging, and empowering learning opportunities in contexts that provide supportive relationships and community” (Darling-Hammond 137). Once the caring classroom has been established, teachers can ease
their students into touchy topics that are often left out of the ELA classroom. I will introduce lesson plans which address how to open and facilitate conversations using literature which will encourage students to share their opinions and experiences in order to connect, learn, and grow. As students become more familiar with the experiences of their peers in the classroom, they will begin to connect with cultures and people all around the world. As students learn to care from the local to the global, the teacher cultivates a social justice-themed education in which students learn to identify and empathize with those around the world through literature. Using literature in the ELA classroom is great practice for students who are still developing their social-emotional thinking.

I will also suggest and demonstrate topics to be addressed in the caring classroom curriculum such as racial inequity, prejudice, and privilege. Teachers in this day and age need to tread carefully when addressing taboo topics; this project will help caring teachers educate students about real-life issues without crossing any inappropriate boundaries. The detailed lesson plans will give teachers a way in, or an avenue for discussing otherwise uncomfortable or difficult topics with their students in a trusting classroom. Ultimately, I plan to give teachers the resources necessary to open an honest dialogue with their students about problems that matter to them, as well as offer a safe, constructive way to practice caring in the classroom through modeling and literature.

**Rationale:**

The caring classroom model is the beginning of an educated, informed, and understanding society. Students must be taught to care about each other and about sensitive issues. In a time when people are being denied equal rights based on their ethnicity or race, we
need a generation of students who care for others and value our cultural differences. When students are taught to care about others within the classroom they can begin to care about others around the world. Being able to see from a new perspective allows students to empathize with others’ struggles. Caring about world issues such as climate change, human rights violations, and access to clean water motivates students to action in order to help those around the globe. While many initiatives advocate for adding multicultural texts to the curriculum to create a culturally responsive classroom, this is not enough. Teachers must change the structure of the class and encourage students to share their opinions and experiences in order to create real change.

Definition of Terms:

Culturally-Responsive Teaching: a pedagogy which encourages the inclusion of cultural perspectives in every aspect of teaching

Ego-Protecting Strategy: an action in which the student is avoiding classwork because they are embarrassed that they do not understand, I.E. putting their head down or pretending to do work

ELA: English Language Arts

Empathy: the act of considering and understanding another person’s perspective, or “walking a mile in their shoes”

Multicultural: relating to, or including multiple cultural perspectives within an organization or school

Prejudice: a preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.

Privilege: a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.
**Puberty**: the process of physical and mental changes through which a child's body matures into an adult body capable of sexual reproduction.

**Young Adult (YA) Literature**: fictional books which are written for a target audience of 12 to 18-year-olds

**Summary Statement:**

Teachers across the country need a way to fill in the gaps left by our current education system. Creating a caring classroom model that encourages and rewards open discussion and the sharing of experiences allows the high school ELA teacher to fill those gaps as she sees fit. Adolescents are developing their minds as they grow into adults and without guidance on how to handle difficult topics, they may be unable to cope appropriately in the real world. All students deserve the freedom to ask questions about themselves and others in a non-judgmental environment while they still have the motivation to learn. If students leave high school knowing only their own perspective then we as teachers have failed them. If students continue to learn only half-truths about the world around them, they will enter the world unprotected and unaware. The caring classroom model is necessary to bridge the gap between what is taught in school and what should be. Although this project only addresses a couple of under-taught key issues, in the caring classroom any topic can and should be brought into the ELA curriculum safely.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Ask any public school teacher why they continue to teach despite being underpaid, underappreciated, and overworked; many will tell you the truth, it is because they care. Teachers don’t spend thousands of dollars and hours, take multiple difficult tests, and continue to be disrespected by parents and students alike, just for the job. We do it because we care. We care about our students, their successes and failures, their pasts and their futures, and their happiness. Studies show that students who feel their teachers care are more likely to follow rules, complete assignments, and participate in class (Cabello and Terrell 17). Students are able to tell when a teacher cares, citing examples such as providing academic support, teacher’s personality, personal interest in student, equity, and use of rewards (Garret et al 509). Although students can identify caring traits in teachers it is much harder to teach someone to care. What does it mean to care? How do we show our students we care, and why does it matter?

When we think of caring teachers, we may picture a primary teacher comforting a crying child, speaking softly with them, or even giving out hugs to those who need it. While these are aspects of a caring teacher, that image changes as those children age into adolescents and reach high school. Many students no longer wish to be hugged or cuddled but still need to feel cared about. How do we as teachers show each student that they are valued, respected, and cared for, without crossing any inappropriate boundaries? Many teachers used to be taught that the best classroom management model was through a series of calculated punishments and rewards (Garret et al 505). This behavioral model worked like so: when students show a good behavior, they are rewarded with verbal praise or “teacher bucks” that can be redeemed for rewards. When students show a bad behavior, they are punished in some way, whether it be a demerit, or a talking to. This model was believed to work until
recently when studies began to show that this model fails in multiple ways. Although some middle school students still value physical rewards, high school students are less likely to list “use of rewards” in their description of a caring teacher (Garret et al 513). Not only do the rewards begin to fail, but the punishments can actively discourage students and humiliate them into not participating again. Jane Bluestein, an award-winning author for teachers and parents suggests “holding kids accountable for their behavior without violating their dignity or sense of self-worth” (“Create a Caring Classroom”). Holding students accountable is not the same as punishment and should not include humiliation.

Since the tried and true method proves to be failing, what is the best classroom management model? Caring. Today, more than ever, students need to be cared for especially with “peer cruelty on the rise: approximately 160,000 children miss classes every day due to peer teasing” (Lundeen 559). Many children do not receive the care they crave at home, and when they see school as a hostile environment full of bullies where else do they have to turn? To their teachers. Not only do students work better and more efficiently when they’re cared about, but a caring classroom also cuts down on students’ “ego-protecting” activities (Cabello and Terrell 17). An ego-protecting activity happens when a student feels threatened by a teacher or activity, and could manifest as slouching in a chair and refusing to do work or pretending to work in order to avoid embarrassing failure. These self-protecting strategies often take away from active learning time and discourages classroom participation. In a caring classroom, the student will not be afraid of failure and will feel secure in participating in class.

Caring Cultivates Caring

Not only has caring been proven to improve student engagement, comfortability, and success, it also cultivates a caring attitude within the students. When we model moral and
socially responsible behavior the students are likely to follow (Noddings 168). We can teach them to care by showing them how it feels to be cared about. We need to teach our students to care, especially in today’s world, where American students are “10 times more likely to commit murder than their Canadian counterparts” (Lundeen 559). A lack of caring also means a lack of empathy, and when students don’t have empathy for each other they are less likely to reach out to help a classmate and less likely to care about global issues in their future.

Teaching someone to care is a huge moral responsibility and finding time to do so amongst the dozens of other responsibilities teachers juggle daily is daunting. However, studies show that “an important component of positive classroom climate is positive and supportive peer interaction” (Cabello and Terrell 17). It is not enough for us to care about our students, they must care about each other as well in order for the care model to succeed. When students care about their classmates there will be no more self-protecting strategies because they will feel comfortable and protected already. Students will feel more comfortable answering questions because even if they fail they know their classmates will not make fun of them for doing so. It’s necessary that teachers “create situations in which caring can be encouraged and monitored” in order to develop necessary moral skills such as empathy. (Noddings 171)

As students go through puberty, they begin to develop their own sense of morals and question those that they have followed as children (Caskey and Anfara). As they reject their childhood teachings, students begin to follow examples set both by peers and other adult influences making the classroom the perfect place to learn morality (Caskey and Anfara). Including activities which ask students to examine moral dilemmas and consider the “right” solution can help to hone their social awareness with each other, as well as their relationship with
the world. By practicing empathy in the ELA classroom, students can practice social skills in a low-risk environment, one that involves fictional characters and hypothetical situations.

**Racial and Ethnic Differences in the Definition of Caring**

While teaching students empathy, it is important to keep in mind culturally responsive teaching and the different ways we interpret caring actions. In a study on the perceptions of caring in the classroom, Garrett, Barr, and Rothman asked if perspectives on caring varied with age and race, which, of course, it does. Their study found five major categories that students identify as caring teacher traits: academic support, teacher’s personality, personal interest in student, equity, and use of rewards (509). Because my focus is on cultivating a caring high school classroom, I will only be looking at the 9th grade answers within the study.

White 9th grade students feel that teachers providing academic support is equally as important as the teacher’s personality, while African American and Latino students feel that providing academic support is the sole, number one trait in a caring teacher (Garrett et al 514). Many Latino students are bilingual, and English often isn’t their first language meaning they value extra academic support in the classroom. Although white students also value academic support, Latino students cited academic support as a caring trait 20% more than their white peers (514). Defining caring is a tricky business, and it becomes more complicated when considering the many different cultures and preferences within your classroom. The most important thing to remember is worded eloquently by Robin Haskell McBee: “to care deeply and to demonstrate that care, teachers must know their students’ needs and interests” (34). Every student, regardless of race or ethnicity, is unique and diverse in their needs and perspectives on caring. The best way to understand your students’ needs is to ask. Recognizing and validating these differences daily is necessary for each student to feel proud of themselves and their culture.
In her article “Do No Harm: Strategies for Culturally Relevant Caring in Middle Level Classrooms,” Williams writes that teachers have a responsibility to counter racial stereotypes within our classrooms (7). Not only must each student be represented in the curriculum, but so too must they continue to learn more about their own culture as well as others. By forming a close relationship with students early on, the teacher can create class-specific lessons which incorporate different cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds within the classroom. By utilizing culturally responsive teaching, in which the classroom structure, lessons, and environment are uniquely tailored to the diverse needs within the classroom, the caring teacher can open up a discussion about the value of our cultural differences in a safe and respectful classroom.

**Caring Opens Locked Doors**

Once a caring classroom culture has been established for all students, the teacher can begin to address touchy topics that may not regularly be addressed in the curriculum. In Maia Sheppard’s article “Creating a Caring Classroom in which to Teach Difficult Histories,” she suggests embracing your students’ experiences and allowing them to share with each other to create a closer classroom bond in which difficult topics can be addressed. With students it is always best to begin with topics they can grasp, or the concrete, before moving on to more complicated or far off topics, the abstract. Sheppard suggests encouraging the sharing of student experiences for three reasons: 1) To give the teacher an opportunity to show she cares by listening attentively and modeling a good listener 2) To allow students to bond through shared experiences, as well as learn about new ones 3) To learn about the local community, as a starting point to learning about the global community (Sheppard). Sheppard’s last point, of moving from the local to the global is the same as moving from the concrete to the abstract, and as adolescents
are still developing their abstract thinking skills (Caskey and Anfara) this method is best for teaching emotionally challenging topics.

In a caring classroom the teacher has facilitated a bond between the students which allows for safe, open discussion about subjects that may be hard to talk about. In their article “Making Students Feel Like Family: How Teachers Create Warm and Caring Classroom Climates,” Cabello and Terrell list strategies for making a classroom feel safe and secure. The authors write that “students who feel emotionally secure with classmates and teachers are more likely to be active participants in class and… exert more effort in their work thus maintaining or enhancing their academic achievement” (17). In a classroom where students respect each other and their opinions the teacher can begin to ease the students into potentially complex subjects.

Once the students in your class are comfortable with each other as one unit, it becomes possible to explore and discuss our differences in a meaningful and educational way. High school students are already aware of cultural and racial differences, but many students, white students specifically, may not understand the complexity and importance of those cultures. Regardless of classroom makeup, “students will benefit from a broad education that includes many diverse points of view and incorporates diverse cultural understanding” (Anton-Oldenburg).

**Racial Relations in American Public Schools**

The United States of America has become polarized by the 2016 election. No matter how politically unaware high school students may be, they know of Trump and the controversial policies he has supported. Many students, especially those from marginalized minorities can be targeted in schools because of the current culture in America right now: “kids in Queens, New
York, told children of color to sit in the back of the bus because Trump is now president” (Darling-Hammond 133). In 2015, a 14-year-old student named Ahmed Mohamed was put in handcuffs at school after his homemade clock was mistaken for a bomb (Williams 1). A High school student in California “handed out deportation letters to students of color in his school and videotaped himself doing it to post on YouTube” (Darling-Hammond 133). Racist incidents like these are still taking place at public schools and universities around the country, and for many students these incidents can seem like a precautionary tale. Too often, students feel pressure to assimilate to American culture instead of celebrating their cultural differences. Telling any student to change themselves in order to fit in is a cultural crime and a devastating blow to that student’s self-esteem.

**Defining Multicultural Literature**

Some teachers believe that by including texts written by a diverse set of authors, they are facilitating culturally responsive learning. This is not true! It is not enough for these texts to be included; the structure of the class must change in order for true multicultural learning to take place (Morrell and Morrell 11). Some experts suggest supplying class literature in students’ native languages and including bilingual courses to encourage cultural pride (Casbon and Schirmer). In her article “Celebrate Diversity! How to Create a Caring Classroom That Honors Your Students’ Cultural Backgrounds,” Mary Anton-Oldenburg writes that “multicultural content must be seen as a way of life, not an add-on” (Anton-Oldenburg). Celebrating Black History Month is important, but February should not be the only time students are reading African American stories and authors. Incorporating diverse texts and multicultural conversations into the curriculum is necessary. It is beneficial to all learners and will change students’ perspectives for life.
The first step to integrating culturally diverse texts is to analyze each text to determine how it portrays different ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds:

Ask Yourself: Does this book present this group/person in a sensitive manner? Are the illustrations appropriate, or do they include exaggeration of cultural features or images? If I were a member of this culture, would I feel positive about my image in this book? Are the setting and illustrations appropriate to the time and place in which this story occurs? (Anton-Oldenburg).

Ensuring that each text is perpetuating positive and accurate information is necessary before including it in the classroom. Some texts may be filed under multicultural, but are actually propagating negative stereotypes, or oversimplification of a culture. Once each text is checked for accuracy, message, and representation, the teacher may begin to think about how she will use that book in her classroom.

Reading multicultural texts without the necessary support and discussion does little to actually create a multicultural classroom. In one school’s case, a class titled “African-American Literature” only had one African American student, and she dropped the course because she felt she did not have an authentic voice within the classroom (Morrell and Morrell 11). Diverse texts were being read, but “the literature didn't make her feel any more connection to the course because the structures didn't change” (11). Reading without interpreting or talking about deeper meaning is barely reading at all. As Morrell and Morrell write, “students not only need access to diverse texts, but a set of reading skills that allow them to bring multiple cultural and critical perspectives to any texts they read.” (10) Students need to be taught how to appropriately share their experiences and opinions in a way that adds to the educational conversation.
Concrete to Abstract

Because a caring classroom culture has already been established students should feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with each other. When discussing literature with students, the teacher should offer many opportunities for students to share experiences with each other, whether it is class-wide, or in small group projects. All students carry “multiple cultural perspectives with them wherever they go” which allows them to view any text through their own perspective (Morrell and Morrell 12). Unfortunately, reading from one perspective can lead to students reading books that reinforce their preconceived beliefs while avoiding new cultures or ideas. This is why discussion and sharing are so important. Under the safety of an empathetic and caring classroom, students can share their experiences and opinions which allows an opportunity to practice empathy, as well as the incorporation of other perspectives into each students’ reading of the text. Reading through a multicultural lens means making connections to our own lives, connections to other’s lives, and a connection to the world (Morrell and Morrell 12).

By reading multicultural texts every individual student is able to gain a deeper understanding of themselves. No matter what students’ backgrounds are, they will be able to identify with at least one aspect of the text, whether it is a shared experience, personality trait, or fear (Morrell and Morrell 12). For students who find themselves or their culture represented in the text, they learn that they are not alone in their experiences and that there is a great diversity among each demographic. There is no one “black” experience, and there are a multitude of perspectives and stories within each culture, which allows the student to find and define their own life story as well as share those experiences with their classmates.

As students learn more about themselves and their own culture they also begin to learn more about their classmates. As the teacher offers many opportunities to share and compare their
cultures and experiences, students can start to do more than just tolerate other cultures. In a caring classroom, students can empathize with other classmates’ experiences and develop a real understanding and appreciation for different lifestyles and cultures. Herbeck, author of “Creating a Safe Learning Environment” writes that “knowledge of alternative lifestyles needs to begin early and to continue into adolescence in order to help children accept and understand their peers and their families” (30). Accepting other cultures and values is not a lesson that can wait until adulthood, because unfortunately many adults have still not learned how to do so. Understanding multiple perspectives is necessary to reading multicultural literature, as it is a “multiperspectival approach that allows students to consider issues of oppression, marginalization, and resistance in all texts that they read that allows them to draw both on their own cultural reservoirs of knowledge, but also from empathy and solidarity with the experiences of others” (Morrell and Morrell 12). Teaching our students to respect and understand those in their immediate, “concrete” surroundings, opens their minds to the more abstract, or far-off global issues that they are entering in to as adults.

Students who have learned the way of caring are more likely to be concerned with global issues (Morrell and Morrell 12). If, for example, students are reading a book about a water crisis in Africa, they will most likely empathize with those affected, and wish to help in the same way they would reach out to help a classmate. It is important that the teacher offers ways in which students can help through raising awareness, writing letters to those in charge, or even actively fundraising for the cause. Not only does this take the caring classroom to a new level, but it also promotes social justice and action, something our world needs more of. According to Maia Sheppard, an ideal multicultural classroom “create[s] a place where the local and the global, the abstract and the particular, are in constant communication as students are encouraged to
construct new images and understandings about each other” (413). Students in a caring classroom have the unique opportunity to safely explore themselves, others, and the world around them in a non-hostile environment guided by the caring teacher.

**Teacher as Facilitator**

By facilitating conversations in the safe classroom teens can discover more about themselves and their peers. Pattee writes that “frank adolescent literature provides readers with a language they can use to label and understand their experiences” (34). Just by opening a discussion, the caring teacher is encouraging students to explore their identity in a positive, non-shameful way. Many students may already be questioning their relation to the world and these discussions can help each student comprehend and cope with their emotions. The caring teacher can be a useful resource for finding information. The teacher can point the students to more YA resources for class discussion, and remind students that her door is always open for discussion.

The goal of high school is to prepare students for the “real world”, yet many schools fail to properly do so. Students are leaving high school knowing how to solve math problems without knowing how to solve their own problems. When a teacher takes the necessary steps to create a caring classroom, students can develop the social-emotional skills necessary to create lasting, meaningful relationships in their lives. Once the caring classroom culture is cultivated, the teacher can teach valuable lessons about race relations and other difficult topics. By creating a diverse, multiculturally competent learning experience, students will learn to not just tolerate other cultures and perspectives but also to see the value in multiple perspectives and beliefs around the world. Without teachers guiding students’ interpretations of history and literature, teens could repress or become ashamed of themselves as well as make harmful choices without
knowing it. When students and teachers trust each other there is no topic that cannot be safely navigated in the ELA classroom.

Chapter 3: Application

Too many students today are leaving high school without a realistic perception of the world around them. Students may learn how to complete a quadratic equation, but they often don’t learn how to effectively communicate with others, strategies for facing racism, or what a healthy adult relationship looks like. Students are not getting the information they need to be successful adults because teachers do not know how to address these difficult topics. In a caring, social-emotional focused, culturally responsive classroom, these topics and more become accessible to you and your students because of the trusting bond you have created. Adolescents need to feel safe and secure in your classroom before you can begin to have these important yet difficult conversations with them. By creating a caring classroom, students will be emotionally mature and secure enough to discuss topics such as prejudice, equality, and privilege without judgment. In a caring classroom, the teacher can facilitate a respectful teacher-student and student-student bond in order to create a safe environment in which these real-life topics can be addressed.

There are multiple benefits to creating a caring classroom environment in which all students feel safe, supported, understood, and valued. Not only will a caring classroom encourage active participation, but when students feel secure in their academic setting they are more open to accepting themselves, understanding others, and appreciating the world around them. Although this is an ideal classroom climate for tackling complex topics, supporting social-emotional growth, and creating a generation of caring students, too many teachers lack the
resources and knowledge necessary to cultivate such a classroom culture. This thesis is meant to provide teachers with everything they need to change their classroom and, in turn, change the world.

Because there are so many facets to creating this classroom environment and utilizing it to its fullest potential, I have broken my application into seven distinct sections:

1. Characteristics of the Caring Teacher
2. Culturally-responsive, Social-emotional Centered Classroom
3. Cultural Perspectives on Caring
4. Literature-based Conversations
5. Prejudice, Equality, and Privilege
6. Discussing Uncomfortable Topics
7. Resources for Further Practice

These sections offer my own personal narrative and advice, as well as guidelines for implementing a caring classroom culture and lesson resources which will help teachers introduce and discuss difficult topics in a culturally responsible and conscious way. These sections are each necessary in creating a caring, trusting classroom environment.

**Characteristics of the Caring Secondary Teacher**

When children are entering primary school, they are often met by their teachers with hugs and the promise of more physical, maternal connection as the year goes on. Students entering
school are only 4 or 5 years old, and physical affection is still appropriate for the students’ stage of development. However, as students mature, physical affection between teachers and students becomes inappropriate. While primary teachers can show their students they care by being affectionate, secondary teachers are often left wondering how to manifest their care for their students in a school-appropriate and age-appropriate way.

The most important thing a teacher can do is listen. While we spend most of our days getting students to listen to us, it is just as important to sit back and listen to your students. Whether it is about an academic problem, an issue with friends or family, their weekend plans, or just about how their day went, listening to students is the key to making them feel valued. Adolescent students are developing in every way possible, and it can be nice, if not necessary, to have a non-parental adult to share these experiences with. While listening strengthens the teacher-student bond, it is important to identify the distinction between caring teacher and friend. For example, if students begin sharing stories that are borderline inappropriate such as underage drinking, experimenting with drugs, or participating in illegal activity, then you may want to reestablish that you are a caring adult, NOT a friend. We want to help and advise our students, not hear them brag about a crazy night they had. However, when a student approaches with a concern or problem regarding those or other activities, the caring teacher listens without judging, and the student trusts that the teacher will offer assistance, as well as keep the conversation confidential. Students must feel comfortable enough to trust the teacher, but not so close that classroom rules and respect are forgotten.

Listening takes forms other than just asking about students’ days; listening also means forming an understanding of each student’s personal, academic, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds. Because this information will not be revealed immediately, it will take some
diligent listening and inferencing to truly understand the specific needs each student has. Noddings’ care model offers three steps to be a caring listener: first, the listener will listen attentively by nodding and showing receptive interest. Second, the listener’s energy should be focused on the needs of the student and how to meet those needs. Finally, the listener should act in order to satisfy or aid the student’s needs (163). If listening helps students feel cared about, then any act to assist in their needs will truly show students they are valued. For example, if a student with disabilities is feeling stress about an upcoming science exam, the caring teacher, no matter the content area, can take time to help that student study or offer test-taking tips. This small act not only makes the student feel cared about, but it also gives the teacher insight on that student’s academic needs and proficiencies. If a Hispanic student complains of feeling out-of-place or bullied, the caring ELA teacher can open a classroom discussion on prejudice in schools. Addressing cultural concerns is a major part of the caring classroom, and all cultures should be valued and taught about. If a student complains of peer pressure, the teacher can work a mini-lesson on individualism and the downsides of peer pressure into her next ELA lesson. Putting in the extra work to address student needs is the final step to active listening and the most important one to cultivating a caring classroom culture.

Listening is more than a one-time occurrence; once the teacher enters a cycle of listening and acting, the entire curriculum will start to represent the specific needs of her students. As you get to know your students through active listening, your lessons can become more directed towards your students’ needs and backgrounds and become a meaningful class period for every individual. Some secondary teachers worry that their personalities are not doting enough to come across as caring, but that is nothing to be concerned about. What’s great about the caring model is that any teacher, regardless of her personality type, can make an effective caring teacher. Some
teachers connect and demonstrate their caring through humor and relatability, while others can express their caring through more business-like statements such as “thank you for your contribution to class” or “I appreciate what you added to our discussion today”. Listening can manifest in any way the teacher sees fit to her personality, comfortability, and class population.

While listening to students is one of the most effective ways to show students we care, there are many other ways in which caring manifests: attending students’ extracurricular activities, greeting students in the hallway, staying after school to assist students, choosing literature that students will relate to, allowing students mental breaks when needed, and most importantly, treating them with the respect they crave and deserve. Adolescents are going through an emotionally challenging time as their roles change from child to young adult and they explore the implications of that change. Many adolescents challenge their roles at home with their parents and feel that they deserve more respect and independence. This tricky transition carries over to school and teens begin to question their role as the student as well as the role of the teacher. Creating a student-oriented classroom and allowing teens some choice and independence shows respect for their identities and individuality while offering the teacher the opportunity for more specific assessments of each student. For example, if students have just completed reading the multicultural YA novel *Esperanza Rising*, the teacher could offer a variety of summative projects for students to choose from. One project could be rewriting a chapter or section of the book through another character’s perspective. This could be perfect for the independent or introverted student who prefers to work alone and simultaneously teaches about empathy and understanding different perspectives. Another project could be a poster presentation connecting the class-divide and striking in *Esperanza Rising* to a recent or current event from somewhere around the world. This could be a group project which encourages students to keep
up with current events from all around the world and empathize with those who we haven’t yet met. A third project option could be to write and perform a skit of what might happen after the book has ended. This group project encourages creativity, while also forcing students to think beyond the easy ending; based on their knowledge of the world, the book setting, and the characters, what would happen the next day or even a year down the line? Each of these assessments informs the teacher of how well students understood the book and offer unique opportunities for students to show their individuality and personality. Offering multiple assessments is just one way to provide choice for your students.

Allowing student choice shows students that their opinions are valued and heard. Each teacher can decide how much choice she would like her students to have, from assessments to seating charts. This does not mean that you let the students do anything but having just a little bit of input makes a big difference. For example, if students complain about the classroom setup, you could allow a quick brainstorming session where students get together and draw a better solution, then vote on the suggestions. This only takes a couple of minutes and afterward students will feel that they made a real impact in their classroom and that the teacher values them and their opinions.

Another necessary aspect of the caring teacher is to be genuine and honest. As adolescents begin to question their role in society they question the adults around them as well. Being honest with your students about your expectations for them, the purpose of each assignment, and the importance of a caring classroom culture builds a trusting relationship with students. This does not mean you have to tell your students everything going on in your life but sharing a little bit with your students can go a long way. While student-teaching, my family’s dog passed away and the next day my students could tell I was not myself. I decided to share my
experience with them, and not only did it open an interesting and productive conversation about grief and mourning but it also strengthened the bond between my students and me. One student from another class visited during lunch to talk about his pet who recently passed. Students were calmer, sweeter, and more willing to work because they knew I was having a rough day. Being honest and open with students creates a sense of trust and mutual respect. Honesty in the classroom should not only apply to the teacher’s personal life; the teacher should make her intentions for each assignment clear, so students understand why they are doing the work and what they are expected to learn. We’ve all heard the phrase “busywork,” but hearing students describe your well-thought-out, relevant, engaging lesson as “busywork” hurts! Writing learning objectives in a visible place and discussing them before the lesson can help students understand what they are doing and why it is important. Informing students what is expected of them shows you are not just giving out work for the sake of it and allows students a more active role in their learning. Teachers sometimes feel they do not need to make their objectives clear, that they are meant for the teacher to know and for the students to find out. The problem with that thinking is that some students may not find out and see no clear point of the lesson. Honesty makes students feel trusted, respected, and involved in their learning.

The caring secondary teacher listens. She creates a space for students to share, explore, choose, and grow. She does not judge or embarrass her students for their failures, and she encourages her students to do the same. The caring teacher is honest with her students about learning objectives, the role of education, and difficult topics. The caring teacher hears the needs of her students and finds a way to meet those needs, whether they be academic, personal, familial, or otherwise. The caring teacher considers each of her students’ backgrounds,
proficiencies, deficiencies, and interests when creating a new lesson plan. The caring teacher encourages students to care about others by showing them what it is like to be cared about.

Culturally-responsive, Social-emotional Centered Classroom

Imagine that it is the first day of school. A group of students shuffle in, some look familiar, and some do not. Your mind races trying to match names with faces, students with their 504s, and teens with their assigned seats. You’ve been prepping for the opening lesson all week, and although you’ve started many school years off successfully, this one is different. You are going to integrate each of these students’ identities into your teaching in order to create a caring classroom, and that can seem overwhelming! Take a deep breath, and switch perspectives for a minute. Imagine how each of your students is feeling in that same moment. Many are feeling anxious about a new class and a new school year. Some are excited for ELA and some are dreading it. Others may be so distracted by their personal lives that they are not even thinking about ELA or your classroom. Every individual in that classroom has something different going on in their heads and in their lives, which is why creating a caring, culturally-responsive classroom is so important.

In the caring classroom, teachers must be receptive to all students, and all of their needs. The first step to creating a culturally-responsive, social-emotional centered classroom is the setup of your classroom space. The ideal classroom would have multiple seating options, such as exercise ball seats for students who fidget, or standing desks for students who are more comfortable standing. In the ELA classroom, it can be beneficial to include a reading corner or area with an array of literature and comfy seating to encourage extracurricular reading, as well as an open environment in which anyone feels free to share. Using lamplight or string lights can help create a warmer environment while shielding sensitive eyes from those bright fluorescent
lights. The room should have some evidence of the teacher’s personal life so the students can relate to the teacher and share interests with her. Although at the beginning of the school year there may be a lack of student work, hanging work done by students encourages class participation and instills pride in students. I also recommend including a calendar of events, (such as

elect=1&Get+Date=Day+Search) with holidays and historical dates from a diverse selection of countries and cultures in order to promote curiosity about other cultures and the value of our cultural differences. The setup of your classroom should feel open and welcoming to all students. It’s important to remember that depending on the lesson you can always rearrange the classroom to create a more conducive learning space. For example, if you are holding a debate you could rearrange the desks to two distinct sides with a podium of some sort up front. Once you have physically created a comfortable learning space you can begin to facilitate a comfortable headspace.

In order to benefit all students, the teacher must make every student feel valued. Culturally-Responsive Teaching is defined by Gloria Ladson-Billings as meeting three criteria: “an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (483). Being a culturally-responsive teacher means implementing multicultural texts, values, conflicts and more into our everyday teaching. This should not be considered an “add-on” or a once in a while lesson or discussion, but an ongoing conversation about our different perspectives and values around the world and in our classroom. Too often, curricula represent the majority perspective, or the white perspective. In the ELA classroom, the classics that are taught nationwide are almost
all written by white men. While these classics have some historic and literary value, students, especially students of color, cannot identify or relate to the subject matter. In order for all students to feel represented in their learning, we must integrate multiple perspectives, cultures, and values into our everyday teaching.

Teaching culturally responsive literature benefits every student; students will either identify with the adversity and cultural challenges the characters face, or they will learn more about a different culture, as well as practice empathizing with those around the world. When reading multicultural texts, it is important to first lay the groundwork for students to successfully understand what they’re reading. For example, if your class is going to read *The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, it is necessary to give students some context about the history of Native Americans and the oppression they have faced in America. Having an open discussion in which the teacher asks, “What do you know about Native Americans?” and building on their prior knowledge up to the history of oppression is a great way to facilitate a conversation before opening the book. This conversation is also a good time to identify and address any implicit biases or misunderstandings your students may have about Native Americans. For example, if a student suggests that Native Americans volunteered to move out to reservations (as some misinformed textbooks state) instead of being forced to relocate, the teacher can reiterate the oppression of forcing an entire population off their own land, as well as address misinformation and the erasure of history that happens when one perspective is valued over others. The teacher is sure to integrate informative non-fiction articles about Native American culture throughout the reading of the novel to ensure that students have more than one source of information about the lives and culture of millions. As students begin reading, it’s
helpful to give out a handout which allows students to both relate to the character’s experiences, as well as identify cultural differences.

**Understanding Differences**

Name:_________________________

Throughout the course of this novel, you will read about many different experiences and challenges the protagonist faces. Think about how your experiences are similar to the ones the protagonist is going through. Fill out this chart for each section, noting the similarities and differences between your experiences and the protagonist’s. Then, you will determine whether the differences in your experiences are because of cultural differences and how.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem faced by character (and page number)</th>
<th>Have I experienced this problem?</th>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Differences</th>
<th>Are the differences cultural? How?</th>
</tr>
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With this resource, students can relate to the character, while also recognizing the cultural aspect to their challenges and the importance of hearing all voices. Helping students find ways to relate to other perspectives is a culturally responsive aspect of a caring classroom. Sharing what students have written in their charts with the class validates the feelings, experiences, and differences of others. If a student feels she cannot relate to anyone in the class, sharing experiences helps her to realize that she is not alone.
Culturally-Responsive teaching includes more than teaching multicultural literature; students should be taught the values, hardships, and traditions of other cultures and countries daily, through every activity. Students of all races and backgrounds should feel that their perspective is considered in every aspect of the classroom. Even integrating cultural-responsiveness into the all-white classic canon is possible! For example, if reading Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, the teacher can relate the book to students by asking why Hester is being shamed, and if they have ever seen or experienced sex-shaming. Many adolescent girls and boys can relate to this trope or have friends who have experienced it. Connecting classics to what students are actively going through helps make the lessons more meaningful and relatable, and holding conversations about real-life topics helps students connect their lives with learning. Once the students understand the concept of sex-shaming in their lives, the teacher can provide examples of sex-shaming practices in countries around the world and compare those punishments with the one dealt to Hester Prynne. Taking what students read and connecting it to their lives makes it easier for them to apply their thinking to others, and to the world. Once the teacher is in the mindset of culturally-responsive teaching, it becomes easier and easier to integrate into the everyday. Other ways to integrate culturally-responsive teaching include learning about and celebrating cultural holidays, keeping up with global crises and current events around the world, addressing and dissecting racial/cultural stereotypes in the classroom, and facilitating open conversations with your students. Culturally-Responsive teaching should show students the value of their own cultural perspective, as well as to value everyone else’s perspective and culture.

In order for students to be emotionally mature enough to accept and value other cultures, they must first accept and value themselves. As I’ve said before, teens are going through an
intense change of body, mind, and morality, and they need some guidance with understanding and accepting those changes. In order to create a safe-space for students to try, fail, try again, and grow, the teacher must facilitate a caring, supportive attitude among her students. The caring teacher will get to know each student’s name, face, and interests within the first week, and gain more personal information as the school year continues. By knowing her students and bringing up their interests, experiences, and preferences, the students will realize that they are cared about. As the caring teacher works to integrate her students’ identities into her teaching the students will feel valued. By giving her students some individuality and choice in learning the students will feel heard. When teachers care about their students they are unknowingly modeling how to care about others to their students. Before students can truly care and empathize with others, they must understand themselves.

In order to build an environment in which students can explore and understand themselves, the caring teacher must create a classroom with high expectations, high participation, and zero judging. Many students struggle with ELA and don’t feel comfortable participating for fear of being wrong or looking unintelligent in front of their peers. Students who feel self-conscious will engage in self-protecting strategies, or techniques to avoid answering in order to avoid potential humiliation. These strategies can look like students with their heads down, students on their phones, or students who straight up refuse to answer. These self-protecting strategies take time away from class time, as well as prevent students from actively learning. In a caring, social-emotional centered classroom, students will feel no need to utilize these strategies, because they feel secure enough in their environment and with their peers to venture a guess without fear of humiliation. Students who feel secure and welcome in class are more likely to achieve higher academic performance (Cabello and Terrell 17).
A caring classroom environment with a focus on social-emotional learning is the best place for students to learn and grow, and there are some guidelines you can follow to ensure that students feel welcome and valued. As discussed earlier, listening to students and acting on their needs is one of the most important qualities of a caring teacher. Offering more wait-time between asking questions and receiving answers allows students to think the question over without feeling lost or left behind. When a student does offer an answer, the teacher should never reply with “no” or “that’s wrong” but instead say something encouraging such as “I see where you’re coming from, but what about…” or “you’re on the right track, think about…”. These answers validate the student’s response and effort, while also encouraging him to rethink his answer and stay an active participant in his learning. It can also be beneficial to thank students for participating either during or after class. Many students don’t feel rewarded or appreciated for participating, so letting them know that it helps you keep the class going can encourage them to take a more active role in class. When offering student feedback on assignments, avoid using a red pen. The red pen has connotations of failure, mistakes, and negative feedback. Phrase feedback in positive ways, such as “this is good, but it could be better if…” and offer specific examples of what the student did well. Knowing exactly what they did right and wrong helps students understand their grade, as well as identify what skills to work on to improve their performance. When students act out in class, many teachers will call out to them in the middle of class, interrupting the learning of everyone to call attention to the misbehaving student. This method is telling your students that calling out one student’s mistake is more important than the material being taught, as well as embarrassing for the misbehaving student. It is more effective for the class and for the student if the teacher uses a natural break in teaching (wait-time, independent practice) to privately speak to the student about his behavior. This does not disrupt
class and it shows the student that you care about why he is acting up, not just yelling at him for misbehaving. Encouraging and complimenting students on their work, participation, and effort should be a daily routine for the caring teacher. As the teacher continues to celebrate student success, students will become more academically secure, which will lead to higher academic self-esteem.

As students begin to feel confident in their academic performance it is important to encourage growth of their personal self-esteem as well. Adolescents’ bodies and minds are changing rapidly which can cause low self-esteem. Students may be feeling isolated, lost, confused, or alone. Students should be taught that although they all have unique cultural perspectives and opinions, they are not alone in their experiences and hardships. Discussing emotions and healthy coping mechanisms for dealing with those emotions is an essential part of the social-emotional centered classroom. When meeting a new group of students, it is important to encourage positivity, high expectations, and honesty; a great activity for early in the school year or semester is handing out a worksheet that helps you get to know your students and their relationship with themselves. This activity can be even more meaningful if the teacher includes some twists. Jimmy Kimmel has a series of YouTube videos (such as https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TL5QRcadM8) in which he shows an image of a person, then asks his audience a yes or no question about them such as, do you believe in ghosts, or is your profile picture a selfie? The segment is based on judging people you don’t know, and it can be a great opener for discussing judgmental attitudes. Pause the video along with Jimmy Kimmel and ask students to make these assumptions about strangers. After the video, ask students if that felt right, or if it felt mean. Write the word judgment on the board and ask students to come up with more examples of judgment. If students don’t get to it themselves, you can ask if we ever
judge ourselves and if that is a good or bad thing. Allow students to table talk for a minute, then have students come up and add to the pros or cons list. Once they are done write “self-reflection: serious thought about one's character, actions, and motives” on the board and discuss the positive and negative feelings that come from judging ourselves. When we think back and reflect on our actions we can grow from them, but when we insult or think negative things about ourselves that is judging. Pass out the weakness worksheet “Getting to Know You” and give students five minutes to complete it.

Name:________________________________________

**Getting to Know You**
(Weakness Worksheet)

Below are several questions about yourself. You will use Self-Reflection to answer the questions honestly. **Use complete sentences!**

1) What is one ELA topic you think you are bad at?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2) What subject do you think you are the worst at?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3) What`s one thing you wish you could change about yourself?

________________________________________________________________________
4) What’s your least favorite thing about school?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5) What non-school related activity do you struggle with?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

The worksheet is worded negatively, such as “what subject are you worst at?” or “What’s one thing you would change about yourself?”. Once students have completed the weakness worksheets collect them all and throw them in the recycling bin! Students will be shocked, which is when you tell them “I don’t want to focus on what you cannot do. We all have weaknesses, but we also all have great strengths! If we judge ourselves because of what we CAN’T do then we lower our own self-esteem. I want you all to be confident in yourselves and in your abilities because I am confident in every one of you.” Then, ask students to fill out the strengths or “Getting to Know You Better” worksheets which ask positive self-reflection-based questions that get students in a positive mindset to learn!

Name:______________________________

Getting to Know You Better!
(Strength Worksheet)

Below are several questions about your STRENGTHS! You will use Self-Reflection to answer the questions honestly. Use complete sentences!
1) What is one ELA topic you know you are good at?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2) What subject is your favorite?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3) What’s one thing you love about yourself?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4) What was the last nice thing you did for someone else?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5) What non-school related activities do you enjoy?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Self-reflection is:________________________________________________________________

Self-esteem is: _________________________________________________________________

BONUS: What’s one thing you can do to boost your self-esteem?

______________________________________________________________________________
Collect and keep the strengths worksheet as a way to get to know your students and remind students that focusing on what we CAN do is much more important than what we cannot! This lesson puts students in a positive mindset and encourages self-reflection and growth.

As their confidence continues to grow, students become more open with their classmates and peers, as they are no longer using self-protecting strategies. Openness with peers is the next step to facilitating a caring classroom culture, as students will develop a bond through respect for each other. The students recognize the teacher’s caring behaviors and will begin to practice those behaviors with their classmates in order to help others feel academically secure. In a study conducted on effective caring teacher habits and outcomes, authors Cabello and Terrell found that “students in exemplary teachers’ classrooms manifested more supportive behaviors than their counterparts in other classrooms” (22). Teachers who model positive and caring behavior instill the same behaviors into their students and create an environment in which teacher and peer support are integral parts of the classroom culture.

Encouraging peer support and acceptance is key to facilitating a social-emotional centered classroom. Students should already feel comfortable with the caring teacher and themselves, so now they can focus their attention on their classmates. The teacher should offer opportunities for students to share with each other nearly every day if possible, as sharing common experiences allows students to bond and understand more about each other. Assigning group and partner work is an efficient way to encourage positive peer interactions. Just as the teacher models caring behaviors, she should also model proper group communication skills. When grouping students for any type of assignment, reiterate and demonstrate the rules for respecting your group members: every member should both contribute and listen to others contributions, every contribution matters, there is no quitting a group, if someone is not
participating ask them how they are feeling about the project, and above all, respect your group’s opinions! Reminding students of these behaviors is helpful, but it may aid your students’ understanding of group dynamics to practice a couple of scenarios.

Gather a group of students who are willing to participate and choose a simple, yet controversial topic for discussion such as “How many hours playing video games are TOO many?” or “Which brand of phone is the best?”. Topics like these are relevant to the students’ lives so they’ll be eager to discuss but will also inevitably disagree. Remind the students of the rules as they begin discussing and interject at points where students break the rules. For example, if students in the group say “that’s stupid” or “that doesn’t matter” then the teacher interrupts and asks the students both in and out of the group which rules they broke. As students go on, the teacher will provide helpful transition statements such as “I see your point, however I feel…” or “While that is a good example, I believe…” to encourage respectful communication between peers. The demonstration will end once students have either come to an agreement or have properly demonstrated each of the group guidelines. Another fun exercise to help your students remember proper peer communication is asking students to create skits about group communication. Allow students to choose their own topics and determine which group will be the exemplar of perfect peer interaction and which will break every one of the rules. Remind students of the rules as they develop their skits and encourage each group to incorporate each of the guidelines into their skit. Allow the “misguided” group to go first, showing improper and disrespectful communication skills before presenting the “guideline” group following the rules. This activity is fun, student-oriented, and helps students visualize the rules while practicing respectful communication. Once students have practiced these behaviors they will feel more comfortable using them in actual group and class discussions.
Teaching students to respectfully communicate with one another opens the door for more meaningful class conversations and a stronger student-student bond. When students practice these communication skills, they are also learning that their words have impact on others and to consider other people’s emotions as well as their own. Many adolescents are still developing emotionally, so not only do they need support identifying and understanding their own emotions, but they also need support understanding other people’s emotions. Luckily, the ELA classroom is the perfect place to practice these skills! Many YA novels are character-driven, meaning the story is guided along more by character thoughts and actions rather than plot; this creates many resources for exploring the minds of others and considering why other people do what they do. For example, if a book your class is reading involves a big argument or breakup scene, it can be the perfect opportunity for students to practice empathy. After reading the section with the students, ask which character they feel is in the right. Then, designate a side of the classroom for each character, and have students stand with the character they agree with. Creating a physical space that aligns with the lesson helps students conceptualize ideas, as well as stretch their legs! They will most likely agree with the character who is/or is closest to the narrator, as we are picturing the argument from her perspective, but hopefully there will be some students on both sides. To help organize their thoughts, hand out the “Whose Side are YOU on” worksheet.

**Whose Side are YOU on?**

Name:_________________________

In every story, there are conflicts and complications which cause characters to disagree with each other. Each character has their own reasons for disagreeing, whether it be emotional or logical. Choose which character you agree with, and find textual evidence supporting why you believe they are in the right. After filling out the chart go on to answer the questions below with a partner.

**Character:__________________________**
Are there any cultural reasons these characters may be fighting? If so, what?

BONUS: Have you experienced an argument like this? How did you resolve it?

Give students some time to look for textual examples for why they agree with the character they have chosen and tell them they will be sharing those points with the class. Ask students to look for any reason, including emotional, logical, and cultural. Model taking turns, with one student from one group listing a point, and then allow the other group to offer a counterpoint. Allow this to go on for three or four points and counterpoints, then tell the students to switch sides. Students will be hesitant at first but they all must switch to the other side/character. Tell students they will now be looking at things from the other perspective and arguing the other character’s side. Give them five to eight minutes to prepare textual evidence, with or without the aid of the “Whose Side are YOU on” worksheet, and make sure most students offer a point. This surprise switch of perspectives forces students to consider things from the other side, when so often their first
impression is the one they stick with. Considering the other character’s emotions, motivations, and reasoning is practice for when students encounter arguments in real life. While we would all like to believe that we are right from the start, analyzing our own reasoning and then going on to contemplate the other person is an effective way to understand others and end conflicts sooner. Another activity that helps students understand perspective begins with the perspective book. Introduce the class holding up a book with one cover facing you and the other cover facing the class. This ONLY works if the front cover is a different color than the back cover! As the class settles in, say “this book is black”. Since the cover students can see is a different color, they’ll begin to disagree with you, and grow more and more frustrated that you are sticking by your “wrong” answer. Reveal the black cover and ask students if you were wrong for saying black, or if they were wrong for saying a different color. Are both of us wrong? Allow students to guess and write the word “perspective” on the board. Lead a discussion about the meaning of perspective and have students list topics they have perspectives about. How do we develop our perspective? Is it always right or wrong? Can our perspectives change or shift? Write “there are always two sides to a story” on the board and ask students to share a time they had a different perspective from someone. Then, pass out one square from the “2 Sides 1 Argument” to each student.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students will have to read their square which has one side of an argument and then find the student with the other side of the same argument. Once the pair matches up, they must fill out the</th>
<th>Students will have to read their square which has one side of an argument and then find the student with the other side of the same argument. Once the pair matches up, they must fill out the</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You sent a text to your best friend about how bad your day was, and they left you on read.</td>
<td>Your best friend forgot your birthday, and then texted about something else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your teacher yells at you for being on your phone for just one minute.</td>
<td>You’re telling someone something important, and they are looking at their phone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of your friends never goes out to events with you, no matter how many times you invite them.</td>
<td>Your friend group always goes to expensive places that you can’t afford.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Dad never shows up at your games because he thinks work is more important.</td>
<td>You work overtime to buy someone a special present, but they’re ignoring you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your teammate never goes to team events, so you stopped inviting them to go.</td>
<td>No one tells you about events going on, even though you want to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your friend won’t let you come over for dinner, even though you asked multiple times.</td>
<td>Your friend makes you feel guilty because you don’t want them to come over and hear your parents arguing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your friend just told you they won’t go to an event with you even though it’s TOMORROW.</td>
<td>Your friend is going somewhere without you while your mom said you had to stay home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You saw your friend talking to the girl/guy you like, and now you’re ignoring them.</td>
<td>You were doing a favor for your friend, but now they’re not talking to you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Resolving the Issue” worksheet in which they come up with a resolution as well as conversation starters that can resolve any future dispute!

Names: _______________________________________________

**Resolving the Issue**

Once you find the match to your side of the argument, discuss and answer the questions below!

1) First of all, what were the two sides to your issue?
   a. _____________________________  
   b. __________________________________
   __________________________________
   __________________________________
   __________________________________

2) Who is the issue between?
   __________________________________

3) When you saw just your side of the argument, how did you feel about the other person?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

4) Now that you see both sides of the argument, is it resolved? Why or Why not?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

5) List another example (real or made up, get creative!) of a time when you disagreed with someone because you couldn’t see their perspective.
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

6) How can we avoid silly arguments like these in the future?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________


BONUS: Write out the conversation that could resolve this issue between the two sides:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

This activity not only helps students understand their own perspective but also encourages the importance of multiple perspectives while giving students the tools to resolve conflicts.

Once students recognize that there are always two sides to any argument, they will begin to more effectively apply that thinking to real life. Adolescents, especially adolescent girls, have the most unstable friend groups of any demographic. If we can teach students to understand their own emotions, consider the perspectives of others, and learn to empathize with characters and people, they will develop better communication skills, and become better friends and better people. The social-emotional classroom not only helps students feel safe and comfortable, but it also gives students the tools they need to create and build a healthier relationship with themselves and others. If we want the next generation to be a caring one, then “we need to be explicit in helping students learn to recognize and manage their emotions, develop empathy for others, see others’ perspectives, and resolve conflicts peaceably” (Darling-Hammond 137).

As students become more familiar with themselves and the “local” community they can begin applying their empathy, conflict-resolution skills, and caring behaviors toward the global community. Students should be able to define culture, identify aspects of their own culture, and appreciate the cultures of others. Some students will already understand cultural differences, most likely if they are not white American students. However, in a classroom or school setting that is predominantly white, some students may not know what makes up culture because they have never been out of their cultural element. If that is the case, it can be helpful to explain
culture in a way they can relate to before going on to world cultures. This video
https://www.facebook.com/BuzzFeed/videos/10154071000705329/ from Buzzfeed works
perfectly for my region, as it is titled “I’m from Upstate New York, But I’m not…” and dissolves
stereotypes about those like me who live in Upstate NY. The video jokingly remarks about what
makes upstate unique and how other people perceive living there. While living “upstate” is not
necessarily a culture, it gets students thinking about what activities they consider cultural and
how stereotypes can negatively impact those from other cultures. After this video or another like
it, ask students what makes up our culture. The easy answers such as food, music, or holidays
will quickly be said, so allow for a lot of wait time. Prod students to think deeper about
themselves, their classmates, literature they have read, as well as history to identify aspects that
makeup culture and continue to write their suggestions on the board. After some wait-time,
suggest deeper dimensions such as faith, family structure, or values, and remind students that the
list could go on indefinitely due to the complexity of culture. Make sure race, gender, and social-
class are written on the board. Next, have students close their eyes or put their heads down so
they cannot see each other, and ask students to raise their hands if they have ever been made fun
of or stereotyped due to their social identity; once most students have raised their hands, tell
them to open their eyes and look around. All of us have been hurt or judged based on who we are
and that is wrong. Ask students to look at the list on the board again and ask if we can change
these aspects of ourselves, or if they’re a part of who we are. We cannot change our culture, but
we can change our perspective on culture. Pass out the Circles of Cultural Identity worksheet and
allow students to fill out the chart independently before meeting with their teacher-chosen
partners.
Circles of Cultural Identity

Name:_________________________________

Each of us have aspects that make up who we are or our social identity. Write your name in the middle circle then fill out the chart with those aspects that are most important in how you define yourself whether it be female, brother, African American, gay, Jewish, or anything else!

Next, meet up with the partner I assigned you and compare your identity circle, discussing your differences and similarities.

After getting to know each other a little better, you will each tell two stories.

One story will be about a time you felt especially proud of your cultural identity, and the other will be about a time it was painful or difficult to be a part of that social identity.

Allow each other to speak without interrupting and be respectful of your partner’s feelings.

What did you learn about your partner today? _________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Complete the following statement about dispelling stereotypes:

Ex: I am a Christian, but I am NOT against gay rights.

I am a/an ____________________________, but I am NOT ____________________________.
Choose pairs who do not know each other well so they can practice sharing and caring about those outside their normal friend group. After students finish the Circles of Cultural Identity, ask a few brave volunteers to share their stories of pride or shame about their cultural identities. As students share their stories they will become aware that each of them, regardless of background, has faced discrimination or stereotypes based on things they cannot change. After sharing, emphasize the pain and damage these negative cultural attitudes have on our mental health and ask students if they would make someone feel that way on purpose. Remind students to always be respectful and mindful of other cultures and to value each other as whole people full of social identities, instead of just one. An optional alternative use of the Circles of Cultural Identities worksheet is to have students fill out their charts, then tape them to the board and throw a marker/magnet/tape-ball at the circles. Tell students that whichever circle it lands on is now their only social identity, erasing all others. Ask students to imagine what the world would be like if each person was defined by one singular trait and see if they can come up with any examples of a person defined by one trait. This leads into a great discussion about the complexity of our identities, as well as the value culture brings to our lives. Without culture, everyone would be the same and that would be boring!

Creating a classroom in which all students value themselves, each other, and other cultures is the most efficient way to prepare students for life in and after high school. Too often, teachers have the mindset that students need to prepare for the “real world” after they leave high school, while for students, high school IS their real world. Understanding their confusion, validating their emotions, and giving them the confidence to build their identities is key to having a classroom full of emotionally healthy, considerate individuals. When students have the tools to understand and accept themselves, they can more confidently relate to others, and
appreciate those who are different from them. Once students learn to respect and value others locally, they can begin to think about the global community and how their compassion can help change the world.

**Cultural Perspectives on Caring**

Students across the United States are struggling through high school. Their bodies and minds are developing at an overwhelming rate, many are overloading their schedules with school, extracurriculars, and part-time jobs while also experiencing a shift in their family and friend dynamics. Every student has struggles in high school, but these struggles are amplified for students of color: “schooling in the United States is founded on European American cultural characteristics and students who do not share these cultural characteristics have difficulties navigating that system” (Tosolt 145). While all students experience hardships and stress in high school, students of color have the added stress of racial oppression and judgement, all while not fitting in to the education system. While a complete overhaul and rethinking of the education system in America would be the best solution, there is only so much one teacher can do. What you can do is make each student feel valued, safe, and confident in their identities, and give them the tools they need to face oppression both in and out of school.

As previously discussed, being a caring teacher can mean a lot of different things. What it means to care for someone else is up to interpretation, and even the most well-meaning teacher can unknowingly exclude students of color by not understanding how they interpret caring behaviors. Multiple studies have been conducted surveying students of all races and backgrounds on what they believe makes a caring teacher. Their answers were then placed into multiple categories including fairness, interpersonal skills, personal interest in students, and academic support. Once categorized, the answers were further analyzed by race and ethnicity. The results
show that “students who identify with a historically-underserved social group are likely to value academic caring over interpersonal caring” (Tosolt 150). White students most listed caring behavior was interpersonal skill, while Hispanic and African American students found academic support more important. Because white students are part of the majority that the American education system was designed for, they enjoy the perks of a teacher who is humorous, fun, and relatable. That is not to say that students of color don’t also enjoy a teacher with interpersonal skills, but because the odds are already stacked against them, minority students value teachers who go above and beyond to provide extra academic support.

Providing extra academic support should be an everyday act for the caring teacher and it can manifest in many different ways. Staying after school to provide individual or group study sessions is an excellent way to provide students with academic support, as well as cultivate meaningful relationships within your classroom. During class, the teacher should conduct multiple different checks for understanding and formative assessments in order to determine which students are struggling and what they are struggling with. There are multiple fun and quick in-class assessments that any teacher can do at any point. The teacher can provide students with red, yellow, and green cards, and when doing a check for understanding, students hold up green if they understand, yellow if they are a little confused, and red if they are totally lost. This quick check allows teachers an opportunity to reteach if necessary, as well as target support towards students holding up red cards. Another check for understanding is the 123 check: when a teacher asks how students are doing with the content, students hold up three fingers if they understand, two if confused, and one if they need teacher assistance. These in-class checks can be incredibly helpful to evaluate how each student is doing and determine if there is a pattern of misunderstanding. If with each check over multiple days, the same students are showing signs of
confusion, then the teacher knows she needs to go a step further to ensure those students receive the academic support they need. Creating a study group or holding meetings with students to identify exactly what skills need improvement shows students you care about their success.

Although it is incredibly beneficial, students of color need more than just academic support to feel welcome and at home in a classroom. Celebrating and integrating cultural diversity into the classroom in the form of literature, discussion, and values is necessary to making all students feel welcome. When students read literature about the majority culture year after year, it is damaging to everyone; students of color will begin to believe that their stories do not matter as much as the majority, while white students will continue to believe that other cultures are not as valuable or important as their own. Representation in literature is necessary for students of color to feel pride in their cultural differences. For example, Renee Watson’s book *Piecing Me Together* is an incredible multicultural resource that chronicles a black at-risk student’s journey through the education system. Including multiple literary resources in the curriculum about people from all different countries and cultures in the caring, culturally-responsive classroom encourages students to “draw both on their own cultural reservoirs of knowledge, but also from empathy and solidarity with the experiences of others” (Morrell and Morrell 12). Book Riot offers a reading list titled “Around the World in 80 Books” ([https://bookriot.com/2016/04/28/around-world-80-books-global-reading-list/](https://bookriot.com/2016/04/28/around-world-80-books-global-reading-list/)) and is a helpful resource for finding books from authors of all countries. Reading multicultural literature is beneficial for all students, and specifically helps students of color feel like they have a place in the classroom.

In order to make all students feel at home in the classroom, you must also welcome their parents. It is important to reach out to students’ parents or guardians to establish a strong parent-
teacher/school-home connection early on. Many teachers struggle to establish and maintain parent relationships and they only become more complicated across cultural boundaries. When there is an open communication line between teacher and parent, everyone benefits. The teacher has access to insider info about students, as well as home behaviors that may be affecting students’ academic performance. The parent feels like an active part of their child's education and social development, while trusting that their children are in capable hands. The student has consistent expectations at home and at school and feel that his education and home-life are connected. Despite all the good that can come from healthy parent-teacher relationships, there are multiple boundaries teachers face when establishing these ties. Sometimes, parents don’t answer calls or attend conferences, or when they do there are high tensions due to fear of judgement or scrutiny about their child-rearing practices. Parents and teachers can have different expectations about the student or how their schooling should be. When there is an incident or bad behavior, both parties may be looking for someone to blame that behavior on. Instead of being partners in education parents and teachers are arguing and judging each other. When parents disparage teachers in front of their children, they are teaching their kids that teachers are not worthy of respect. When teachers do not have open communication with parents, students may feel that their academic world is completely separate from their home-life. Creating open and positive lines of communication with all families is necessary to create a caring classroom with parental support.

In a study analyzing different cultural perspectives and perceptions about parent-teacher relationships, the participants identified six themes for creating effective and caring partnerships between guardians and teachers across cultural boundaries: being sincere, asking not telling, researching, communicating, good news/bad news, and parent education (Eberly et al. 19). The
first rule is to be sincere with parents about your intentions for the school year, as well as the progress their child has made. Too often, parents feel as though teachers are talking down to them or being condescending towards the parents. As teachers, we often feel like we know what’s best for a child without considering how offensive it is for a parent to be told they are wrong. The teacher must stay nonjudgmental about child-rearing practices, especially those which are cultural. For example, different cultures have different beliefs about child diet, with many Hispanic families giving their children coffee for dessert. While some teachers may complain about that student’s caffeine intake, they should instead choose to be respectful and sincere about their concern for that student. Instead of telling the parent what to do, the teacher should ask. Asking parents about their expectations at home, child’s feelings about school, cultural traditions or beliefs about school, what they expect their child to accomplish, and the best methods to communicate with their child is the most effective way to gain information while respecting the family’s knowledge and culture. When teachers ask for parental advice, they are asking the parent to take an active role in their child’s education and become a partner in learning. Asking questions is a non-condescending way to access a plethora of information about your student and their background. Conducting research about cultural traditions is another way to gain information about your students. It is important to keep in mind that students and their families are individuals with their own beliefs and traditions, and they are not defined by or confined to their culture. Research is simply a supplemental way to gain more understanding about that culture, but it should be paired with information directly from the source (parents or student). For example, if you have a student from Haiti, researching that nation’s language, customs, and beliefs could help you gain a better understanding of that student and her background. Learning a few phrases in students’ native language helps you connect to students,
as well as shows them that you care. The most difficult part of home communication is the
ACTUAL communication. Letters and forms remain unsigned, phone calls are sent to voicemail,
and their seat remains vacant at parent-teacher conferences. Just as students manifest self-
protecting strategies, so too do their parents for fear of judgment, ridicule, or embarrassment. In
order to establish an open, trusting communication line with parents, it is important to reach out
early and often. Reaching out to each family before school begins in September allows students
and parents time to prepare for the school year ahead and gives parents more time and
opportunity to meet with the teacher to discuss expectations. While communication in the form
of a letter is efficient, some parents aren’t great readers, or don’t know English very well,
making it difficult or embarrassing for them to respond. Phone calls are a more convenient and
universally accepted way to talk with parents. During the first communication, teachers should
ask parents a couple of key questions: what is the best way and time to communicate with you?
(letter, phone call, email, face to face) Do you have any concerns about [child] this schoolyear?
Is there anything going on at home that might affect [child]’s performance at school? What can I
do to improve our communication? Do you have any questions for me? These questions are
crucial not only in making the parent trust in your teaching ability, but also to facilitate a
mutually respectful relationship in which both parties work together to help the child succeed.
Offer multiple meeting options and times, including before, during, and after school, at their
home or work, at a café, over the phone, or even on the weekends. Parents can easily feel
overwhelmed with their familial, work-related, and other obligations so making your schedule
flexible will greatly help parents find a time to meet. If persistent attempts at communication are
left unanswered, you can send a notebook home with your student and ask that student to pass a
message along to parents. While some teachers may think that these parents do not care about
their child’s education that is often not the case. Parents are individuals with their own lives and values, and they may feel that a) their child is doing fine so they do not need to reach out, b) their schedules are too busy to meet with a teacher, or c) they are embarrassed about their relationship with education/schooling and feel anxious to come in. You as the teacher must get through to them! Remind them that they play a valuable and irreplaceable role in their child’s education and make them feel safe and welcome by listening carefully to what they say and respecting their cultural differences. Another reason parents may avoid picking up your calls is because they believe every call home is about something negative their child has done at school. Contacting parents should not be a “last resort” disciplinary method. Teachers should call parents semi-frequently with good and bad news. If a student has put a lot of effort into an assignment, call their parents and tell them the good news! This will not only motivate the student to keep up the hard work, but it will also make Mom feel proud while giving her a reason to answer the phone. When parents only hear bad things about their children, they stop answering because it becomes repetitive and insulting. Call with good news just as frequently, if not more than you call for disciplinary reasons. You could call to inform them of a student/parent training or activity! Including opportunities other than Open House to invite parents to an academic setting cultivates the importance of education and connects teachers and parents. A parent activity could be anything from understanding the SAT to discussing class topics or creating an activities calendar or planner supplied by the school. This website offers some helpful resources regarding parent training workshops (https://chadd.org/for-parents/parent-training-and-education/) These parent-teaching opportunities are not only fun ways to get to know parents but they also provide helpful tools and resources for families who need it. The most important guideline when communicating with families is respect. Regardless of whether you are of the same or different culture or belief
system, you must respect that parent’s childrearing techniques, parental decisions on behalf of
their child, and their schedules. Creating a trusting, open communication with parents is key in
making students of all backgrounds feel valued and cared about.

Not only must the caring teacher communicate effectively with parents, but she must also
be able to communicate effectively with students. In her article “Do No Harm: Strategies for
Culturally Relevant Caring,” Williams gives teachers some recommendations for communicating
care with students of color. Williams writes that culturally responsive teachers must “(a) serve as
otherparents or fictive kin; (b) become role models giving time, compassion, and teach racial
pride; (c) accept responsibility for speaking back to stereotypes and address inequities; (d) teach
honestly in terms of systemic injustices; (e) know, believe in, and showcase students’ brilliance;
and (f) commit to genuinely loving relationships defined by high expectations, straightforward
loving talk, and support” (11). Although students of color are more likely to value academic
support, that is not the only trait in a caring teacher. Serving as a role model much like a parent
helps African American students connect to and care about their learning. It’s important to
remain calm, comforting, and supportive so students feel that you genuinely care about them and
their success. Acting as an “otherparent” to students of color encourages students to remain in
school because they have an adult there that cares for them, when so many students lack that.
Using the caring relationship you have cultivated with students, you must teach them about racial
inequality. Teaching students about racial pride in the face of racial inequality and adversity is
necessary to their mental health and wellbeing. Students in high school are already beginning to
understand racism; however, they may not fully comprehend the systematic oppression they will
face in their lives. Teaching students about racial inequality (items b, c, and d) will be covered
more fully in section five; however, it is worth noting that addressing this topic, although
difficult, shows students that you care for their success and you are an ally in combatting racism and inequality. Another way to show you care about all students is to believe in students’ success and have high expectations for everyone. Students of color or students from disadvantaged communities often do poorly in school because they feel like they are expected to fail. America’s racial injustice has already made students of color feel lesser than, so when teachers maintain high expectations while simultaneously believing that students can meet those expectations, all students will flourish.

Students of all backgrounds come to school to learn. Learning is not possible unless each student feels safe, secure, and valued. All students have different needs that you should be attentive to, but disadvantaged students need more explicit support to feel welcome in a system that has so long excluded them. Giving attentive support to students from historically disadvantaged communities supplies them with the confidence they need to face a world in which they may at times feel unwelcome. Teaching students about the roots, causes, and history of racism in America and how to effectively communicate about these issues will help students identify and fight against racial microaggressions, issues, and systems.

**Literature Based Conversations**

English teachers cannot be successful without a healthy love of literature. We know that there are many reasons to love reading: connecting with a deeper part of ourselves, understanding and appreciating the stories of others, and learning about new ideas and cultures to name just a few. Students however often have a different take on reading: “A hundred pages? That’s too long!” or “Why are we reading this?” and even, “This is pointless.” Although some students may be hesitant readers, we as ELA teachers must show them the power of literature
and help students find ways to connect reading to their lives. Before we can instill a love of literature into students, we first must understand the teenage mind.

There is a misconception that teenagers are selfish or self-centered. Although we as fully functioning adults may see their behavior that way, it is unfair to say that as it disregards their still developing social-emotional intelligence. Teens are so wrapped up in their own lives because every heartbreak, every accomplishment, every argument is happening to them for the first time. What we often disregard as a meaningless high school relationship is the first-time students are experiencing intimacy with another person. What teachers see as one bad test grade, students could perceive as the end of their academic success. What we call a silly high school argument, students call the end of their first significant friendship. We as teachers must be mindful of all the firsts students are experiencing and never disregard or invalidate their feelings. Luckily, the caring ELA teacher can use literature to help students navigate the treacherous waters of adolescence.

The best way to get students excited about reading is to teach literature in a way that connects to their lives. Because students are often distracted by the events occurring in their own lives, teaching literature that can help them label and understand what they are going through will be beneficial for the entire class. For example, teaching a book about LGBTQ youth such as *Symptoms of Being Human* by Jeff Garvin will help students who may be questioning their sexuality identify and label their feelings, as well as consider next steps for accepting their sexuality. Reading a novel about friends drifting apart such as *Girl in Pieces* by Kathleen Glasgow will help students comprehend and cope with the fact that friends don’t always stay friends. Reading a book about an abusive relationship such as *But I Love Him* by Amanda Grace will help students identify abusive behaviors, as well as find ways to safely leave those
relationships. Any good reader can find a connection to their own lives and a lesson to take away from any book, and it is up to ELA teachers to show students how to do the same.

Young Adult novels are literally written for your students, so use them! While they may not be the most respected genre of literature, they hold endless value for your students and can be incredibly beneficial tools in the classroom. Reading YA novels and teaching your students to connect with them is the first step to cultivating a love of literature within your students. When deciding on what YA novel to read, first consider how it fits into the curriculum. For example, if students must read Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, then choosing a YA novel that explores similar themes of sexuality and shame within the teenage world will help students better understand and connect with a classic novel that is usually far out of their reach. The Huffington Post offers some thoughtful YA-classic novel pairings here: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/8-modern-ya-novels-to-pai_b_5452763](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/8-modern-ya-novels-to-pai_b_5452763)

When beginning a YA novel, it is important to hook the students’ attention before they begin so they will be motivated to read the book. Identify one of the themes in the story and ask students about their experiences with that topic. Write the theme on the board in large letters and ask students to raise their hands if they have ever experienced something related to the topic. Topics could range from peer pressure, arguments, parental control, substance abuse, not fitting in, and many more. Have students come up and write words or phrases which they associate with the theme on the board, then ask how they know the items are related to the theme. Students will most likely list personal experience as their main source of information about the topic. Then, say something controversial as a fact, such as “Did you know that [popular restaurant] is horrible?” or “Call of Duty games aren’t any good.” Whatever you choose to say should set your students off and have them saying your opinion is wrong or is just one opinion. That is when you
remind them that one opinion or one experience about something does not make them experts on the subject, and that we should always be open to learning more about a topic, even if we think we know all about it. Remind students to keep an open mind as they read and pass out the “fill-as-you-read chart”.

**Fill-as-you-read Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vocab word and definition</th>
<th>Quote you connected with and why? (pg #)</th>
<th>What would you do next?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
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</table>

This chart helps students learn new concepts, actively connect to their reading, and empathize with the character by putting themselves in another’s place. After a particularly action-filled
chapter, or one with a great moral dilemma, prepare students to engage in a discussion. For example, if in the chapter, the main character caught her friend shoplifting, the moral dilemma presented would engage students in a discussion about the morally correct option: should the protagonist tell on her friend and risk losing that friendship, forgive her friend and betray her own morals, or is there another option altogether? The chart they have been filling out should have them in the mindset of the character already, so students will be prepared to take on the protagonist’s problems. Give students 15-20 minutes to fill out “The Situation” worksheet which will help them during discussion.

The Situation

Name:_________________________ Book: ______________________________

Each of us have faced situations in which we don’t know what the right thing to do is. There are so many options with so many different outcomes that it can be hard to figure out the best option! Filling out this worksheet will help you sort out all the details, and hopefully find an answer that is right for you.

First, briefly summarize the situation you are unsure about, making sure to name all characters involved:

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

Next, list out all the possible options, and the benefits and consequences of each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Benefits (+)</th>
<th>Consequences (-)</th>
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Name at least 2 examples of tricky situations similar to this, and what their decision and outcome was. The examples can be from popular culture, current events, TV shows, other books, or history.

1) 
2) 

Now, write about a situation you have been in where you had to make a similar tough decision, and consider what your own morals and values are.

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

Considering all of the details, benefits, and outcomes, which option have you chosen?
__________________________________________________________________

The Situation worksheet asks students to consider multiple options and reflect on their own knowledge as well as popular culture, history, and other media in order to make a well-informed decision. Once students have finished, organize the desks into a small circle of four to five desks with a larger circle on the outside. Instruct students that four of them will begin the discussion, and when another student outside the circle has something to say, he will tap one of the inside students on the shoulder and take their place in the conversation. Encourage all students to enter the middle at least once while the teacher will keep track of which students enter the circle and the level of comments made. This type of discussion method is called Fishbowl, and it encourages intimate student-centered conversation while allowing multiple students to join in. As students debate what the right decision is, remind them to use respectful language listed on the board when disagreeing: “I see where you’re coming from, but I feel…” “That is a good point, however…” “I remember that part, but you’re forgetting about when…” These transitioning phrases help students effectively and respectfully communicate with others, despite
disagreeing. The goal of this discussion is not to come to an agreement, but to share and understand our differing opinions in an effort to empathize with and respect other choices. This lesson gives students the tools to understand why they are making the choices they are, consider other’s emotions and opinions before acting, as well as how to respectfully disagree with someone. As students learn to connect YA novels to themselves, they develop the skills necessary to connect with all kinds of literature.

While YA novels have the clearest connections to students’ lives, it is important to teach students that they can connect with ANY piece of literature. The easiest way to make this transition is by beginning with a YA novel, then moving on to a book from the curriculum that explores similar themes. Students will benefit from practicing close reading and discussion with the YA novel because it is more directly connected to their lives, before taking those same skills and applying them to a more far-off book like The Outsiders. Luckily with classic novels, there are many interesting videos on YouTube you can use to hook your students’ attention. Thug Notes is a great (borderline inappropriate) resource for older teens to get a quick and modern retelling of the story, while Sparknotes offers more basic video summaries of classic novels (https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/1984/video-summary/). Many users have created visual “trailers” for classic novels such as this one https://youtu.be/6elVzwE3-B0 for An Ember in the Ashes by Sabaa Tahir. While you may worry about spoiling the ending for students by showing them a summary, it can be incredibly beneficial for students to have an idea of what’s going on so if they get lost or confused, they have that anchor of pre-knowledge to hold them in the story. Along with showing fun videos, making clear connections between the classic they are about to read and the YA novel they just finished will help students better relate to the literature. After showing a video or hook which gives some information about the book, ask students to meet in
their table groups and come up with a list of similarities and differences they can find between
the two books. The connections may be vague because they have not finished both books but
encourage the groups to brainstorm and share their answers. Each group will put one similarity
and one difference on the board then the class will discuss. Similarities could include themes,
maybe main conflict, and more, while differences will most likely be characters, culture, and
setting. Ask students to pick their favorite movie and allow students to share their answers.
When a student lists a movie where the cultural setting is particularly important, such as Forrest
Gump, or Grease stop the class and open a discussion about whichever movie you choose,
focused on the culture and setting. How would Grease be different if it took place today? How
does American culture affect Forrest, and how would the movie change if he was born in a
different country? While some students may not understand the film reference, it is an opener to
get students thinking about how culture and setting affect a story. Pass out the Same Stuff
Different Place worksheet and allow students to either work independently or with a partner.

Same Stuff, Different Place

Name:__________________________

We don’t often think about how our favorite stories would change if they happened in a different
time or a different place. That is exactly what you are going to do today. Choose your favorite
book, TV show, or movie, then follow the directions to transport it to another time and another
place!

Media I’m transporting: ____________________________________________________________

Circle one of the following to transport to, then write about how the plot, characters, and themes
would change:  1980’s  1950’s  1865 (end of Civil War)  Medieval Times
How would your story change? Think about technology, societal progress, laws, and acceptable behavior at that time:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Next, consider how the country or place your story happens in affects the story. For example, how does the setting of England affect the story of *Harry Potter*? Consider cultural aspects of the story’s country of origin, and how the cultural change might change the story.

Circle one place to move your story to:
Australia       Russia        South Africa        Antarctica        Mexico

What types of things would change and how?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Did the characters change? What about the overall plot? Why or why not?
______________________________________________________________________________

Across the world we are all struggling with similar themes: love, trust, morality, crime, etc. While cultural differences make stories unique and sometimes foreign to us, it is important to remember that they are just as valuable as stories that take place in America, and often chronicling the same hardships that we as humans face every day.

This worksheet helps students consider the implications of setting and culture while connecting their learning to media they love. Choose a couple student samples to be read aloud that successfully demonstrate both the time shift and the culture shift. Finally, close the lesson emphasizing the idea that although this classic book may seem far-off or irrelevant to students, it is exploring themes and issues that students struggle with every day, just in a different setting.
Once students comprehend that older literature is still relevant to them, they will begin searching for connections early on and develop a more meaningful reading of the book.

As students learn how to connect literature to their lives, they can begin to see literature as a way to connect with others. When informing students of the themes within the book they are about to read, it is always beneficial to ask students about their experiences with these themes. For example, if reading a book involving cyberbullying, ask students if they have ever cyberbullied, or been the victim of cyberbullying. Allow time for students to share their experiences and feelings surrounding the topic, as many will no doubt have relevant connections to the text as well as other students. When students share their experiences, they are strengthening the student-student bond and sharing commonalities with each other. While finding similarities between students is an effective way to create connections, identifying our differences is necessary to the culturally-responsive classroom. For example, Susan Beth Pfeffer wrote two books about the same apocalyptic event from different perspectives. *Life as We Knew It* is about an affluent white girl named Miranda living in the Midwest, whereas *The Dead and the Gone* follows a 16-year-old Hispanic boy named Alex living in New York City when the same crisis takes place: the moon is hit by a meteor, pushing it too close to Earth. The books are a perfect example of looking at things from another perspective and how we each perceive events differently depending on our background and location. Read both of the first chapters aloud in class and ask your students to decide which character will fare better in this new world. As students make their decisions, ask them to find at least two examples of text evidence defending their position. Miranda is affluent so she may have more resources at her disposal during this time; however, Alex knows the value of hard work and determination, making him more resourceful than Miranda. Record student answers on the board or in a polling website and
tell them we will continue this discussion after reading the next chapter of each. As students continue to read about the different protagonists’ reactions to this crisis their opinions about the characters will continue to change. Using a quick polling website like Kahoot allows students to vote each day for which character they believe will succeed in the apocalypse. Open up a conversation about the protagonists and their histories. What challenges do you think Alex and Miranda have faced in their everyday lives before the apocalypse? How are those challenges different? How have those challenges affected their survival skills during the apocalypse? When students begin analyzing different characters’ drives, emotions, fears, they are practicing empathizing and understanding other people in their lives. Literature based conversations may be about the characters, “but their conversations created opportunities to share their own experiences and perspectives with one another, thereby creating a more humane and close classroom community” (Morrell and Morrell 13). As students gain an understanding of those around them, they can begin to relate to those around the world.

Many students lack basic knowledge about the world outside of their country. History classes teach about other countries but it’s usually in the context of past wars and conflicts with America. The ELA teacher can use literature from authors around the world to give students a better understanding of the world around them. There are so many excellent books from around the world that it can seem difficult to choose which fit in to your classroom curriculum. Students learn best when they begin with the concrete or local knowledge before moving on to the abstract or global knowledge; just as you choose YA novels with similar themes to the classics you read, it is effective to choose books with similar themes to those students have already been exploring. For example, if students have been exploring themes of friendship through adversity then Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* would be a perfect book to begin exploring the world with your
students. A story about class, race, and redemption, Hosseini’s book details an unlikely friendship amongst a deadly warzone in Afghanistan. Although the themes are familiar, students will need context before and during reading. It may be helpful to begin by identifying Afghanistan, Kabul, and Pakistan on a map and asking students what they know about that region. They may know that the Middle East has long been a place of war. This video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gPsWoS9bDM “The Sunni and Shia divide explained - in 90 seconds” is an excellent opening tool as it outlines the centuries-old religious conflict between the Sunni and Shia in just 90 seconds. Because most students may not be familiar with Islam, it is important to frontload information and vocabulary, so students have all the information they need to feel confident in reading The Kite Runner. When defining Sunni and Shia make it clear that Shia is the minority. After watching the video about their persecution and unfair treatment, ask students to get in their table groups and identify a similar minority that has been mistreated in America or other countries. Each group should share their findings as well as examples to support their claim. Making explicit connections between the familiar and unfamiliar is necessary for students to have the context they need to understand and enjoy the book. As students continue reading it’s important to offer multiple opportunities to make connections both to America and to your students’ lives. The “Real World Connections” worksheet asks students to make connections between the book’s themes, their personal lives, history, and current events.

### Real-World Connections

Name: _________________________________________

On this worksheet, you will compare the themes in The Kite Runner to society today. Use experience from your own life, history, or current events.

1) Being considered less than because of something you can’t change:

In society today, women are being paid less than men, and black women are being paid even less than that. Society is still prejudiced against people based on things they cannot control.
2) Loyalty is necessary in a good friendship:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

3) Intelligence is not determined by your background:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

4) Standing up to an unjust government is necessary:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

5) The past motivates us to change our future:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

6) Following your own beliefs of right and wrong is better than falling to peer pressure:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

This worksheet will help students feel more connected to the book and its themes.

As students near the end of their literary trip to Afghanistan they will have a foundational set of knowledge about religious and ethnic persecution. It is important to build upon this knowledge with non-fiction examples of religious persecution around the world. Divide students into four groups and give one of the four articles (“Shia and Hazara: Minorities in Pakistan,” “Meet the Most Persecuted Group in the World,” “Absolutely No Mercy”: Leaked Files Expose
How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims,” and “Religious Liberty Is Eroding in Canada”) to each group.

Shia and Hazara: Minorities in Pakistan

Profile

Shi’a account for approximately 10–15 per cent of the Muslim population of Pakistan. They include a number of different ethnic groups and can be found throughout the country. Pakistani Shi’a are represented in all walks of life, but in many cases have succeeded in playing prominent roles in Pakistan’s cultural sphere and attaining influential, high-profile positions. Though as Muslims they are free from certain restrictions affecting other religious groups, Shi’a are still regarded as apostates by some extremist Sunni groups and individuals. As a result, many face regular hostility from extremists and public calls for members to be killed.

Among them, the most vulnerable is the sizeable Hazara population in Quetta due to their ethnicity as well as their religious beliefs. Hazaras are an ethnic group predominantly based in Afghanistan, but also with a large population in Pakistan, with estimates of this group ranging from 650,000 to 900,000. The majority of Hazaras in Pakistan, approximately 500,000, live in the city of Quetta, the provincial capital of Baluchistan. While some Hazaras are Sunni, the majority identify as Shi’a. As both an ethnic and religious minority, Hazaras face intersectional discrimination.

The situation for Hazaras in Quetta is particularly serious, as highlighted by the series of bomb blasts around Alamdar Road in January 2013 which killed 126 members of the community, and a number of violent attacks thereafter. In addition to such high-profile incidents, there are frequent incidents of shootings and other attacks against individuals or small numbers of Hazaras in Quetta.

History

There was relatively little strife between Sunni and Shi’a groups until relatively recently. The roots of the militant attacks against Shi’a in Pakistan can be traced to the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq, who held the presidency from 1978 following a military coup the previous year and remained in power until his death in 1988. After the Iranian revolution in 1979, many majority Sunni states including Pakistan began to fear the export of Shi’a Islam. In an attempt to counter this, Zia strengthened relations with Saudi Arabia and opened Pakistan’s doors to a fundamentalist interpretation of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism. Saudi Wahhabi religious preachers were welcomed into Pakistan, establishing madrassas and other learning centres where this interpretation was widely disseminated. The main targets of these religious leaders were Shi’a Muslims and Sufis, who are followers of Islamic mysticism.

In 1985, Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) was formed with the main objective of aggressively promoting Sunni Islam. A decade or so later a breakaway faction of the group went on to form the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), with the aim of transforming Pakistan into a Sunni state through violent means.
The LeJ’s founder and leader until 2002, Riaz Basra, was known in the 1990s for orchestrating an attack on Iranian diplomat Sadiq Ganji and killing Iranian Air Force cadets on an official visit to Pakistan. The group was banned in Pakistan in 2001 for provoking sectarian violence and subsequently listed as a terrorist organization by the United States government in 2003. The LeJ was also implicated in the assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 2007 and is suspected to have played a role in the 2009 grenade attack on the visiting Sri Lankan cricket team.

From their inception, both organizations have publicly called for the killing of Shi’a in Pakistan and conducted a number of violent attacks against them. The SSP, having been banned in 2002 by the Musharraf government, was subsequently re-established under the new title of Ahl-e Sunnat Wal Jama’at (ASWJ) before being banned again in 2012. More recently, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), or the Pakistani Taliban, became associated with targeted killings against Shi’a.

In 2011 militants sent an open letter to the Shi’a, largely Hazara, community in Quetta, which numbers around 600,000 people, stating that ‘all Shi’a are worthy of killing’ and their intention to ‘make Pakistan their graveyard’. These statements were accompanied by a systematic campaign of violence directed towards the community in Pakistan, including Shi’a professionals, officials and pilgrims travelling to and from holy sites and festivals. Between 1999 and 2003, around 600 Shi’a were killed as a result of extremist violence and, in this span of time, approximately 500 Shi’a doctors fled the country as a result of the assassination of more than 50 of their colleagues in Karachi alone.

Attacks by extremist groups against Pakistan’s Shi’a have been on the increase since the 1980s, but targeted killings reached unprecedented levels in 2013, with some 700 Shi’a murdered. Many of those killed were Hazaras in the province of Baluchistan. The attacks included a particularly lethal suicide attack followed by a car bomb in the same location in January 2013, killing a total of 91 people in Quetta. The following month, another bomb in Quetta’s Hazara Town left another 110 dead. In March, two explosions outside a Shi’a mosque in Karachi killed at least 50 people. Another 30 people were killed in a further suicide attack in June outside a mosque in Hazara Town.

A sectarian bomb attack in Quetta on February 2014 that targeted Hazaras and killed at least 84 people also provoked a peaceful protest. Following the attack, about 4,000 women staged a sit-in, refusing to bury their dead and demanding that the government and security forces prevent further killings. Similar protests were also held in solidarity in other parts of the country, such as Karachi.

Current issues

The targeting of Shi’a professionals by militant groups have continued to the present day, and in recent years these attacks have been especially bloody. Bombings carried out by militants and terrorist organizations have targeted social gatherings and crowded Shi’a areas with near impunity. Shrines have also been attacked on a regular basis, including an October 2017 attack in Baluchistan that killed at least 20 worshippers. There have been no meaningful crackdowns or
investigations into the perpetrators of this violence, and police have generally been unable to stop attacks when they occurred.

Though the escalation of violent attacks against Shi’a in the last decade has occurred alongside a general deterioration in the country’s security context, the specific attacks against Shi’a are distinct in character and intent to most political killings, armed conflict deaths and indiscriminate violence against civilians. There have been a number of attacks on Shi’a pilgrims travelling to and from Iran to attend holy sites and festivals: the 700-km highway connecting Pakistan to Iran runs through Baluchistan and is vulnerable to militant attacks. The Shi’a community is not only affected by the wave of killings and suicide bombings.

Shi’a have also been subjected to various forms of hate speech, most commonly as campaigns in mosques, schools, public spaces and increasingly on social media. Shi’a are vilified as a community for their religious beliefs and individuals are also picked out for criticism. The campaigns openly label them as apostates or heretics, and call on Sunnis to kill them.

The situation for Hazaras in Quetta is now particularly serious. Because of their clearly identifiable features, it is dangerous for them to travel out of their neighbourhoods. In addition to the high-profile attacks that reach the headlines, there are frequent incidents of shootings and other attacks against individuals or groups of Hazaras in Quetta. According to a March 2018 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan report, at least 509 Hazaras were killed and 627 were injured over the past five years as a result of violent attacks by extremist groups (community leaders warn that the actual figures could be far higher). These have contributed to an acute sense of insecurity and vulnerability.

While previously known to have been the most educated community in Quetta, figuring prominently in public life in Baluchistan, their freedom of mobility has been heavily restricted due to threat of attack. At present the Hazara community in Quetta has been effectively ghettoized to two predominantly Hazara areas, namely Hazara Town and Alamdar Road. Insecurity has in turn affected other areas of their everyday life, including access to education and employment. This insecurity also manifests itself along gendered lines, with the mobility of Hazara women particularly restricted.

Adapted from
“Shi'a and Hazaras.” Minority Rights Group, June 2018, minorityrights.org/minorities/shia-and-hazaras/.

Meet the Most Persecuted Group in the World

May 2015. An average spring day in southern Thailand. People ride mopeds past the region’s many rubber plantations or lie exhausted in hammocks in front of their homes. Suddenly, three
men clad in tattered rags stagger out of the jungle. They are covered in wounds and pale as the
dead, and they speak a foreign language.

At first, the villagers think these are the spirits of their dead ancestors, but as more of them
follow, the truth slowly dawns on them: these people are still alive.

This isn’t a scene from *The Walking Dead*, but merely one of the many horrors the Rohingyas
endure.

The UN crowned them the world’s most persecuted people back in 2013, and not much has
changed since then. In their own country they are imprisoned in ghettos within hostile cities or in
camps patrolled by the army – cut off from the outside world.

Outside those walls they are attacked and killed and no one lifts a finger to stop it.
Several human rights organizations say that no ethnic group in the world is as seriously
threatened by genocide as the Rohingya.

Now that the rainy season has ended, thousands of Rohingyas will repeat the ritual of previous
years, taking to the sea in boats that are best described as modern-day slave ships. Like last year,
countless Rohingyas will die in the torture camps to which they are taken.

And no, those causing the misery aren’t radical Muslims – they’re nationalist Buddhists. In this
story, Muslims are the victims.

**The Rohingya have no rights, only restrictions**

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority who originate from Bangladesh but have lived for centuries
in the Western Burmese province of Rakhine State. Because the government does not recognize
them as citizens, but rather as illegal immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh, they enjoy no
rights and are subject to restrictions on nearly every aspect of their lives.

In northern Rakhine State, the Rohingya are the majority. Through illegal immigration from
Bangladesh and a higher rate of population growth, their number is growing faster than that of
the area’s original inhabitants, the Buddhist Rakhine. In recent years nationalist monks and
politicians, supported by powerful members of the military, have encouraged increasing distrust
of the Rohingya. As a result, more and more people have begun to believe that the Muslim
Rohingyas want to take over the area.

In June 2012, clashes between Rohingyas and Buddhists culminated in a bloodbath after three
Rohingyas reportedly raped and killed a Buddhist girl. Encouraged by the region’s largest ethnic
political party and nationalist monks, and supported by the police and (to a lesser extent) the
army, locals burned hundreds of Rohingya homes and killed dozens of people in revenge.

At least 200,000 Rohingyas fled to neighboring Bangladesh, a country even poorer than Burma.
More than 140,000 Rohingyas were sent to detention centers in the region, where they survive
thanks to international aid. Thousands of others fled to sea in rickety boats, seeking refuge in
Malaysia or Indonesia.

**A neighborhood as a symbol of determination**
Photographer Andreas and I decide to travel to Malaysia to record the stories of displaced Rohingyas and their hardships in the jungle camps. We then travel on to Burma, to see for ourselves why they fled and where the hatred of them comes from. (We explore the latter in a subsequent story.)

The trip takes us to Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State. Two days after the massacre began there in 2012, one neighborhood was still standing: Aung Mingalar. Thousands of Rohingyas had taken refuge there. They were being protected by the army, which under growing international scrutiny could no longer look away.

Now, more than three years later, the neighborhood is a symbol of determination for those left behind. But life there is hard. Because the residents are neither refugees nor displaced persons, international aid is not allowed. And because no one can freely enter or leave the quarter, there is a glaring lack of almost everything.

While fewer than a hundred yards away tourists enjoy fine dining in one of the restaurants along the main avenue, the Rohingyas in Aung Mingalar are gutting their homes in search of firewood for cooking.

Khin Ngunt Nge, one of the quarter’s residents, gives us a despondent look. "When we go outside, we are murdered. Inside, we die from lack of food and medicine. We live like animals in a cage."

On weekends, drunk Rakhines sometimes try to enter the neighborhood to terrorize its residents; rumors that the Rohingyas are planning something regularly make the rounds, drawing troublemakers. The police and the army are supposed to keep the two groups separate, but the quarter’s residents don’t trust them. Out of fear, 70 Rohingyas keep watch every night themselves.

Outside the neighborhood, meanwhile, everything that evokes the Rohingya is slowly disappearing from the streets. The old mosque is abandoned and crumbling; soldiers keep watch to ensure that no one enters the ruin. Pagodas have been built on the foundations of burned-down Rohingya homes, and the Buddhist museum and cultural museum stand on land that was formerly owned by Muslims from the city.

Adapted from:


‘Absolutely No Mercy’: Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims
HONG KONG — The students booked their tickets home at the end of the semester, hoping for a relaxing break after exams and a summer of happy reunions with family in China’s far west.

Instead, they would soon be told that their parents were gone, relatives had vanished and neighbors were missing — all of them locked up in an expanding network of detention camps built to hold Muslim ethnic minorities.

The authorities in the Xinjiang region worried the situation was a powder keg. And so they prepared.

The leadership distributed a classified directive advising local officials to corner returning students as soon as they arrived and keep them quiet. It included a chillingly bureaucratic guide for how to handle their anguished questions, beginning with the most obvious: Where is my family?

“They’re in a training school set up by the government,” the prescribed answer began. If pressed, officials were to tell students that their relatives were not criminals — yet could not leave these “schools.”

The question-and-answer script also included a barely concealed threat: Students were to be told that their behavior could either shorten or extend the detention of their relatives.

“I’m sure that you will support them, because this is for their own good,” officials were advised to say, “and also for your own good.”

The directive was among 403 pages of internal documents that have been shared with The New York Times in one of the most significant leaks of government papers from inside China’s ruling Communist Party in decades. They provide an unprecedented inside view of the continuing clampdown in Xinjiang, in which the authorities have corralled as many as a million ethnic Uighurs, Kazakhs and others into internment camps and prisons over the past three years.

Children saw their parents taken away, students wondered who would pay their tuition and crops could not be planted or harvested for lack of manpower, the reports noted. Yet officials were directed to tell people who complained to be grateful for the Communist Party’s help and stay quiet.

The Chinese leadership wraps policymaking in secrecy, especially when it comes to Xinjiang, a resource-rich territory located on the sensitive frontier with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Predominantly Muslim ethnic minority groups make up more than half the region’s population of 25 million. The largest of these groups are the Uighurs, who speak a Turkic language and have long faced discrimination and restrictions on cultural and religious activities.

Beijing has sought for decades to suppress Uighur resistance to Chinese rule in Xinjiang. The current crackdown began after a surge of antigovernment and anti-Chinese violence, including ethnic riots in 2009 in Urumqi, the regional capital, and a May 2014 attack on an
outdoor market that killed 39 people just days before Mr. Xi convened a leadership conference in Beijing to set a new policy course for Xinjiang.

Since 2017, the authorities in Xinjiang have detained many hundreds of thousands of Uighurs, Kazakhs and other Muslims in internment camps. Inmates undergo months or years of indoctrination and interrogation aimed at transforming them into secular and loyal supporters of the party.

Of the 24 documents, the directive on how to handle minority students returning home to Xinjiang in the summer of 2017 offers the most detailed discussion of the indoctrination camps — and the clearest illustration of the regimented way the party told the public one story while mobilizing around a much harsher narrative internally.

Even as the document advises officials to inform students that their relatives are receiving “treatment” for exposure to radical Islam, its title refers to family members who are being “dealt with,” or chuzhi, a euphemism used in party documents to mean punishment.

The directive’s question-and-answer guide begins gently, with officials advised to tell the students that they have “absolutely no need to worry” about relatives who have disappeared.

The authorities anticipated, however, that this was unlikely to mollify students and provided replies to a series of other questions: When will my relatives be released? If this is for training, why can’t they come home? Can they request a leave? How will I afford school if my parents are studying and there is no one to work on the farm?

The guide recommended increasingly firm replies telling the students that their relatives had been “infected” by the “virus” of Islamic radicalism and must be quarantined and cured. Even grandparents and family members who seemed too old to carry out violence could not be spared, officials were directed to say.

“Family members, including you, must abide by the state’s laws and rules, and not believe or spread rumors,” officials were told to say. “Only then can you add points for your family member, and after a period of assessment they can leave the school if they meet course completion standards.”

In his speeches, Mr. Xi showed a deep familiarity with the history of Uighur resistance to Chinese rule, or at least Beijing’s official version of it, and discussed episodes rarely if ever mentioned by Chinese leaders in public, including brief periods of Uighur self-rule in the first half of the 20th century.

Violence by Uighur militants has never threatened Communist control of the region. Though attacks grew deadlier after 2009, when nearly 200 people died in ethnic riots in Urumqi, they remained relatively small, scattered and unsophisticated.

Even so, Mr. Xi warned that the violence was spilling from Xinjiang into other parts of China and could taint the party’s image of strength. Unless the threat was extinguished, Mr. Xi told the leadership conference, “social stability will suffer shocks, the general unity of people of every
ethnicity will be damaged, and the broad outlook for reform, development and stability will be affected.”

Within months, indoctrination sites began opening across Xinjiang — mostly small facilities at first, which held dozens or hundreds of Uighurs at a time for sessions intended to pressure them into disavowing devotion to Islam and professing gratitude for the party. New security controls and a drastic expansion of the indoctrination camps followed.

The party had previously used the phrase — “ying shou jin shou” in Chinese — when demanding that officials be vigilant and comprehensive in collecting taxes or measuring harvests. Now it was being applied to humans in directives that ordered, with no mention of judicial procedures, the detention of anyone who displayed “symptoms” of religious radicalism or antigovernment views.

The authorities laid out dozens of such signs, including common behavior among devout Uighurs such as wearing long beards, giving up smoking or drinking, studying Arabic and praying outside mosques.

The number of people swept into the camps remains a closely guarded secret. But one of the leaked documents offers a hint of the scale of the campaign: It instructed officials to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in crowded facilities.

Adapted from:


Religious Liberty Is Eroding in Canada

Outside of watching the occasional hockey game or purchase of maple syrup, most Americans pay little attention to Canada.

We may know of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s colorful socks, but little of how unpopular he is among his constituency. We may discuss the single-payer health care system but are unfamiliar with the government’s disrespect for religious liberty of our neighbors to the north.

Faithful patriots in this country who are concerned by the attacks on free exercise of religion in America should also be concerned by the similar attacks on liberty echoing within Canada, a country with strong protections for religious liberty in its Charter for Rights and Freedom.

In light of the immense trade between our two countries, we must determine if religious intolerance is an intangible export that has escaped our notice.
Last month, Alberta’s Child and Family Services barred a Christian couple from adopting a child because their religious views about sexuality—views shared by orthodox Jews and Muslims—were incompatible with “the official position of the Alberta government.”

The Ministry of Children’s Services stated that the couple’s belief that sexuality should not be experienced or explored until a person is married, would not create a “safe, healthy, loving, and inclusive home.”

And in June, Ontario passed a law that gave state agencies the power to prevent families from adopting or fostering children if the parents would not affirm the child transitioning their “gender identity” from male to female or vice-versa, calling such a denial “child abuse.”

Similarly, the ACLU is suing the state of Michigan over legislation that allows faith-based adoption agencies to only place children into homes with mothers and fathers while under government contract.

And much like Ontario, Illinois is requiring foster parents to affirm the gender identity of any child in their care and aid in any medical procedures the child wishes to undergo.

The Canadian government has unilaterally taken positions on sexuality without the consent of its citizenry, much like the Obama administration’s unilateral decision to reinterpret the definition of “sex” to include sexual orientation and gender identity in Title IX.

But if Americans and Canadians can’t adopt or foster children because they don’t affirm a child engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage, will the government also begin using this criteria for “good parenting” of biological children?

Will they treat the parenting practices of orthodox Christians, Jews, and Muslims as suspect if they simply refuse to adopt the latest sexual trends?

Also in Canada, the Supreme Court will soon determine if attorneys who hold orthodox religious beliefs on sexuality are eligible to practice law.

Before Trinity Western University could even open its law school, the accrediting legal societies within Nova Scotia, Ontario, and British Columbia, voted not to accredit graduates from the university’s School of Law, because the Christian university has orthodox Christian beliefs about marriage and sexuality.

Trinity Western University is the only Canadian university to have received an A+ grade in quality of education over the past seven years yet in 2014, the Law Society of Upper Canada labeled the students’ views as “abhorrent” and “not welcome in the public marketplace.”

Without a degree from an accredited law school, students cannot practice law in the province.

Similarly, in 2015, the mayor of Salem, Massachusetts lambasted Gordon College, a Christian University, for its beliefs about marriage after the university president wrote to President Barack Obama asking a for religious exemption from a forthcoming executive order on hiring practices related to sexual orientation and gender identity.
The mayor decided to prohibit Gordon College and its students from using a local meeting hall they had used for years. Lynn Public Schools then banned Gordon College students who were majoring in education from training as student teachers at local public schools.

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges even held a special meeting to consider revoking Gordon’s accreditation.

In both the United States and Canada, governments and accreditors are threatening the ability of graduates of Christian universities to work in the professions for which they have been trained.

Canadian members of parliament also denied MP Rachael Harder the chance to chair the Status of Women Committee led by the Liberal Party solely because of her pro-life views. Despite the chair position being procedural, not political in nature, the Trudeau government refused to allow Harder’s “outrageous” views into any kind of position of authority.

Much like a scene from “Mean Girls,” politicians staged a walkout to protest Harder’s appointment because of her viewpoint on abortion. Ultimately, they gave the position to a member of Parliament who did not want it.

In the United States, senators including Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and Al Franken, D-Minn., and leftist organizations like the American Bar Association have smeared judicial nominees like Judges Amy Barrett and Steve Grasz and public officials like Kelvin Cochran and Russell Vought as “unqualified” and “hateful,” simply because of their Christian beliefs.

Their ability to serve as judges, work in government, or lead a fire department is being questioned solely because of their religious views.

In both the United States and Canada, the ability to work in government and pursue your dreams is becoming increasingly dependent on one’s beliefs about sexuality, biology, and the beginning of human life.

These developments should concern all those who believe in the right to not only hold religious beliefs in private, but to exercise them in public.

Canada was founded on the idea of religious pluralism, allowing Catholics living in Quebec to freely practice their faith. The United States was founded as a refuge for religious dissenters, as the Puritans fled persecution from the Church of England.

It is this commitment to religious liberty for all that has led America to defend religious minorities around the world, including Jews, Muslims, Bahai’s, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians.

The U.S. and Canada were the only two countries that had ambassadors for international religious freedom. But Trudeau opted to dissolve Canada’s office of ambassador of religious freedom.

If America and Canada, who are traditionally the foremost defenders of religious freedom around the world, are now forsaking that value, what will happen to the Rohingya Muslims in
Burma, the Christians and Yazidis facing genocide by ISIS, and the Jews who are facing renewed anti-Semitism in Europe, all of whom the U.S. has fervently advocated for?

Right now, Canadians and Americans of faith have the opportunity to form strategic alliances, especially as they relate to marriage, family, and the free exercise of religion. But the growing threats to religious liberty and freedom of conscience make it especially urgent that these partnerships develop quickly.

Many of the world’s most dire and violent religious conflicts are rooted in lack of respect for religious freedom and religious diversity. There is no time to waste.

Adapted from:


Then, pass out the “Fiction to Non-Fiction Connections” worksheet to each student.

**Fiction to Non-Fiction Connections**

Name:______________________________

The books we read help us to better understand the world around us. As you read your article, make connections to *The Kite Runner* to better your understanding of religious persecution around the world.

Article:____________________________________________________

Briefly summarize the main points of the article:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
What group is being persecuted? Who are they being persecuted by?

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

Fill out the chart making text-text connections between your article and *The Kite Runner*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happened in the article?</th>
<th>What happened in <em>The Kite Runner</em>? (pg #)</th>
<th>How are the two events similar?</th>
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What is one thing that surprised you about this article?

______________________________________________________________________________

Have the groups work through their assigned article and remind students that each of them must fill out the worksheet even though they are working in groups. Once students are experts on their article it is time to create new groups; one person from each group will compose a new group so that each member has read a different article. Each member will explain their article and present their connections to *The Kite Runner* which helps students who haven’t read the article better.
understand each situation. This activity is called Jigsaw and it is a fun, effective way to present a lot of information to your class at one time while encouraging students to teach each other. As students have a better understanding of religious persecution around the world they can prepare for the upcoming final discussion.

Give students the “Dense Questions” worksheet which helps students make text-text, text-student, and text-world connections in order to ask important comprehension and discussion questions about what they’ve learned.

**Dense Questions**

Name: ___________________________
Topic: __________________________

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Question directly from information in the Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reader</td>
<td>Question based on the reader’s experience, values, or ideas on the topic</td>
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<td>(Ask the reader’s opinion)</td>
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<tr>
<td>World or Other Literature</td>
<td>Question about the topic bringing in the ideas of history, other cultures, or other literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Text/Reader</td>
<td>Question dealing with the text and the reader’s experiences, values, or ideas on the topic (Ask the reader’s opinion)</td>
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<td>Text/World or Other Literature</td>
<td>Question dealing with the text while bringing in ideas of history, other cultures, or other literature</td>
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<td>Reader/World or Other Literature</td>
<td>Question asking the reader about their experiences, values or ideas on the topic as it relates to history, other cultures, or other literature (Ask reader’s opinion)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dense Question</td>
<td>Question combining all of the ideas of the text, the reader, the world and other literature (Ask reader’s opinion)</td>
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These sheets will be necessary for facilitating a student-led conversation activity called Fishbowl. The Fishbowl discussion works like so: a small group of four or five students sits at a cluster of desks in the middle of the classroom while the rest of the students form a large circle of desks around the group with a couple openings. The students in the middle will start the conversation while the students outside will take notes on the discussion points. Any student may join in the conversation at any time by tapping an inside participant on the shoulder. When I’ve used this activity, I found it helpful to set a visible but silent timer of one minute to ensure that students entering the discussion have at least one minute of discussion time before being replaced. Encourage students to replace the student who has been in the conversation the longest. This discussion technique is incredibly valuable because it is led entirely by student passion and motivation to speak about their topic. The teacher should be as quiet as possible and should only interject if the conversation goes WAY off topic. While students discuss, the teacher can keep tallies of which students contribute to the conversation and quietly motivate those who have yet to join. Students will have a variety of things to talk about based on their connections to outside topics or events. Allow an entire period or block of time to complete the discussion. After the
discussion students will have a better understanding of the book, their peers, and the injustices taking place around the world.

Literature holds endless values for those who are willing to find it. Students have a multitude of reasons to dislike reading, whether it be low reading skills, low comprehension, finding books boring, or the time it takes away from other activities. It is the ELA teacher’s duty to instill a love of reading in students by showing them how to get the most out of their reading experiences. Reading can help us understand the depths of ourselves, find solutions to problems, better understand our friends and neighbors, and develop a conscious awareness of the world around us. The conversations that stem from reading literature are endlessly valuable to students and teachers alike. When teachers and students work together we can build an honest dialogue about the world outside the classroom and give students the tools and comprehensive thinking skills they need to navigate the world both in and out of school.

**Prejudice, Equality, and Privilege**

As students develop their academic and personal self-esteem, social identities, communication skills, and cultural awareness within the safety of the caring classroom, the teacher can begin to introduce students to difficult, real-life topics such as equality, prejudice, injustice, and many more. Students entering high school will have a range of knowledge about these topics from personal experience, media exposure, discussions at home or in class, or what they hear from their peers; some students may be capable of defining societal oppression, while others may only know racism as a vocabulary term in History class. All students need to be able to understand the roots of racism in America as well as its prevalence today in order to fight against racial oppression and inequity. It is our job as educators to prepare students for the rest of their lives; we are doing our students a disservice if we choose not to give them the emotional
preparedness, knowledge, and tools needed to face an unfair world because it is “uncomfortable”. In a classroom culture facilitated on trust and honesty, the caring teacher can teach racial pride, identify biases, dispel stereotypes, address inequities, and explain systematic injustice and privilege all under the safety of the caring classroom.

As I previously mentioned, students entering your class will be on a broad spectrum from completely naïve about race relations to well aware of the system of oppression in America. Students of color are more likely to be aware of racial prejudice than white students because they have probably already experienced racist incidents or microaggressions in their lives. White students may consider racism as a problem only in extreme events, such as Trayvon Martin’s murder or segregation. White students are part of the dominant race since birth and are therefore often blind to their own privilege until they are exposed to the racist societal order that they have unknowingly been a part of. When white students cannot see or acknowledge their privilege, they continue to perpetuate a culture that devalues people of color and caters only to white people. When the topic of racial inequality is ignored, white students are encouraged to continue thinking they are the pinnacle of all existence while students of color are shown that the racially charged adversity they struggle with every day is not important enough to make it on the curriculum. We must stop the cycle of oppression by educating all students about the prejudices and biases that cause racism and the institutions in place that perpetuate racism.

Students in the caring classroom have already had practice empathizing, communicating affectively, and looking at the world from another perspective; opening a discussion about inequality and prejudice is all about perspective and understanding. Students have already learned about stereotyping, which links directly to prejudice. There are so many excellent resources for teaching about race, diversity, and prejudice on www.tolerance.org and you can
choose to start with any subject or literature you think is best for your students. One incredible resource is Sherman Alexie’s short essay “I Hate Tonto (Still Do)” in which Alexie addresses the stereotypes Western films perpetuate about Native Americans.

I Hated Tonto (Still Do)

By Sherman Alexie

I was a little Spokane Indian boy who read every book and saw every movie about Indians, no matter how terrible.

I’d read those historical romance novels about the steroidal Indian warrior ravaging the virginal white schoolteacher.

I can still see the cover art.

The handsome, blue-eyed warrior (the Indians in romance novels are always blue-eyed because half-breeds are somehow sexier than full-blooded Indians) would be nuzzling (the Indians in romance novels are always performing acts that are described in animalistic terms) the impossibly pale neck of a white woman as she reared her head back in primitive ecstasy (the Indians in romance novels always inspire white women to commit acts of primitive ecstasy).

Of course, after reading such novels, I imagined myself to be a blue-eyed warrior nuzzling the necks of various random, primitive and ecstatic white women.

And I just as often imagined myself to be a cinematic Indian, splattered with Day-Glo Hollywood war paint as I rode off into yet another battle against the latest actor to portray Gen. George Armstrong Custer.

But I never, not once, imagined myself to be Tonto.

I hated Tonto then and I hate him now.

However, despite my hatred of Tonto, I loved movies about Indians, loved them beyond all reasoning and saw no fault with any of them.

I loved John Ford’s “The Searchers.”

I rooted for John Wayne as he searched for his niece for years and years. I rooted for John Wayne even though I knew he was going to kill his niece because she had been “soiled” by the Indians. Hell, I rooted for John Wayne because I understood why he wanted to kill his niece. I hated those savage Indians just as much as John Wayne did.

I mean, jeez, they had kidnapped Natalie Wood, transcendent white beauty who certainly didn’t deserve to be nuzzled, nibbled, or nipped by some Indian warrior, especially an Indian warrior
who only spoke in monosyllables and whose every movement was accompanied by ominous music.

*

In the movies, Indians are always accompanied by ominous music. And I’ve seen so many Indian movies that I feel like I’m constantly accompanied by ominous music. I always feel that something bad is about to happen.

I am always aware of how my whole life is shaped by my hatred of Tonto. Whenever I think of Tonto, I hear ominous music.

I walk into shopping malls or family restaurants, as the ominous music drops a few octaves, and imagine that I am Billy Jack, the half-breed Indian and Vietnam vet turned flower-power pacifist (now there’s a combination) who loses his temper now and again, takes off his shoes (while his opponents patiently wait for him to do so), and then kicks the red out of the necks of a few dozen racist white extras.

You have to remember Billy Jack, right?

Every Indian remembers Billy Jack. I mean, back in the day, Indians worshiped Billy Jack.

Whenever a new Billy Jack movie opened in Spokane, my entire tribe would climb into two or three vans like so many circus clowns and drive to the East Trent Drive-In for a long evening of greasy popcorn, flat soda pop, fossilized licorice rope and interracial violence.

We Indians cheered as Billy Jack fought for us, for every single Indian.

Of course, we conveniently ignored the fact that Tom Laughlin, the actor who played Billy Jack, was definitely not Indian.

After all, such luminary white actors as Charles Bronson, Chuck Connors, Burt Reynolds, Burt Lancaster, Sal Mineo, Anthony Quinn and Charlton Heston had already portrayed Indians, so who were we to argue?

I mean, Tom Laughlin did have a nice tan and he spoke in monosyllables and wore cowboy boots and a jean jacket just like Indians. And he did have a Cherokee grandmother or grandfather or butcher, so he was Indian by proximity, and that was good enough in 1972, when disco music was about to rear its ugly head and bell-bottom pants were just beginning to change the shape of our legs.

When it came to the movies, Indians had learned to be happy with less.

We didn’t mind that cinematic Indians never had jobs.

We didn’t mind that cinematic Indians were deadly serious.

We didn’t mind that cinematic Indians were rarely played by Indian actors.

We made up excuses.
“Well, that Tom Laughlin may not be Indian, but he sure should be.”

“Well, that movie wasn’t so good, but Sal Mineo looked sort of like Uncle Stubby when he was still living out on the reservation.”

“Well, I hear Burt Reynolds is a little bit Cherokee. Look at his cheekbones. He’s got them Indian cheekbones.”

“Well, it’s better than nothing.”

Yes, that became our battle cry.

“Sometimes, it’s a good day to die. Sometimes, it’s better than nothing.”

We Indians became so numb to the possibility of dissent, so accepting of our own lowered expectations, that we canonized a film like “Powwow Highway.”

When it was first released, I loved “Powwow Highway.” I cried when I first saw it in the theater, then cried again when I stayed and watched it again a second time.

I mean, I loved that movie. I memorized whole passages of dialogue. But recently, I watched the film for the first time in many years and cringed in shame and embarrassment with every stereotypical scene.

I cringed when Philbert Bono climbed to the top of a sacred mountain and left a Hershey chocolate bar as an offering.

I cringed when Philbert and Buddy Red Bow waded into a stream and sang Indian songs to the moon.

I cringed when Buddy had a vision of himself as an Indian warrior throwing a tomahawk through the window of a police cruiser.

I mean, I don’t know a single Indian who would leave a chocolate bar as an offering. I don’t know any Indians who have ever climbed to the top of any mountain. I don’t know any Indians who wade into streams and sing to the moon. I don’t know of any Indians who imagine themselves to be Indian warriors.

* 

Wait.

I was wrong. I know of at least one Indian boy who always imagined himself to be a cinematic Indian warrior.

Me.

I watched the movies and saw the kind of Indian I was supposed to be.

A cinematic Indian is supposed to climb mountains.

I am afraid of heights.
A cinematic Indian is supposed to wade into streams and sing songs.
I don’t know how to swim.
A cinematic Indian is supposed to be a warrior.
I haven’t been in a fistfight since sixth grade and she beat the crap out of me.
I mean, I knew I could never be as brave, as strong, as wise, as visionary, as white as the Indians in the movies.
I was just one little Indian boy who hated Tonto because Tonto was the only cinematic Indian who looked like me.


Your students will probably not be familiar with the “Lone Ranger” or his Native sidekick Tonto, so displaying a picture of the two may help your students understand more about the essay title. Before reading the essay, ask students why the author might hate Tonto and list theories on the board. After students’ initial thoughts, reveal that Alexie is Native American and ask if that changes their theories and why. Show the short video “How Hollywood Stereotyped the Native Americans” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hJFi7SRH7Q which shows clips from Western films as well as interviews from Native Americans about the implications of their portrayal in American culture. Ask students to answer the following questions during the video: How did Westerns commonly stereotype Natives? How did Westerns stereotype whites? Why don’t Native Americans like Westerns? Have students partner up and discuss their answers before coming to a class consensus that these movies stereotype whites as all-powerful, pure, with only good intentions, and the Natives as savage, violent, animalistic beasts. Go on to read Alexie’s essay and have students underline quotes that answer these questions: How did the
stereotypes that Alexie saw in the films affect his self-worth? How did stereotypes that Alexie saw in the films affect his feelings toward his people and heritage? Engage the class in a discussion about the negative implications of stereotypes and encourage students to share their personal experience with stereotypes. As discussion dies down, ask students why the writers and directors of these Westerns would do this? What do they gain from portraying Native Americans this way? The white men who created these films are not only gaining money from white audiences with these films, but they are also rewriting history by creating a clear good guy and bad guy. When students are finished discussing Alexie’s essay, close the lesson by asking students to brainstorm a list of other demographics that have been stereotyped against in film or media, including women, Jewish people, transgender people, black people, low-income families, and many more. Write each on the board and tell students to choose one or two impacted communities and begin analyzing media more closely in search of these stereotypes. Give an example, such as how commercials for cleaning products always show women as happy housewives. Tell students that if they find media that stereotypes and write a paragraph about it, they can have extra credit the next day. They will begin doing this in the classroom, but extra credit can help motivate students to begin actively thinking about stereotypes outside of school.

As students arrive the next day, it is important to emotionally prepare them for some of the images they will see. Begin the class with a question on the board: What is something that is outdated? Students may list fashion trends, technology, or media. Have students meet in their table groups and define what outdated means and how something becomes outdated. After they have discussed, have each group read their definition and qualifications for outdated. Gather a consensus and write it on the board. Then, have a serious chat with students. What you are about to see may be shocking and it is the product of a racially insensitive time period. We are looking
at how a white company portrayed people different from themselves and we will discuss the racist implications afterwards. I encourage you all to be sensitive to each other’s feelings as we watch and discuss this outdated clip. For this lesson I chose the clip “Scrub me Mamma with a Boogie Beat” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUYarKCTvIk by Universal studios because it is filled to the brim with racial stereotypes, racist depictions of black people, and racist tropes. You do not need to show the entire six-minute clip. After the clip is finished, be slow to turn on the lights and start discussion, as students may still be processing the horror they feel. First, remind your students that this clip was from 1941 and ask them what their initial reactions are. Tell students that it is okay to feel angry, disgusted, confused, or any other emotion. Ask the students to list all of the racial issues they identified with the clip, which should include the animalistic portrayal of black people, black people enjoying watermelon, black people being lazy, black people being taught rhythm by a white woman, black women being obscenely proportioned, and black men being predatory towards white women to name a few. Why did white people create such an awful image of black people? What effects do you think this video had on a white audience? What about a black audience? Connect their learning with the Sherman Alexie essay and ask how a video like this may change a black child’s self-worth. To lead into the next part of the lesson, ask how these stereotypes can be dangerous to black people other than to their own mental health and self-esteem.

Tell students that for the next activity they must be completely silent. Anyone who talks will be docked a point off the assignment. We will be reading “Who Was Emmett Till” (www.history.com) silently and then you will each continue to work silently in your groups. Till was a 14-year-old black child who was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered in 1955 because he supposedly flirted with a white woman.
Who Was Emmett Till?

Till grew up in a working-class neighborhood on the south side of Chicago, and though he had attended a segregated elementary school, he was not prepared for the level of segregation he encountered in Mississippi. His mother warned him to take care because of his race, but Emmett enjoyed pulling pranks.

On August 24, while standing with his cousins and some friends outside a country store in Money, Emmett bragged that his girlfriend back home was white. Emmett’s African-American companions, disbelieving him, dared Emmett to ask the white woman sitting behind the store counter for a date.

He went in, bought some candy, and on the way out was heard saying, “Bye, baby” to the woman. There were no witnesses in the store, but Carolyn Bryant—the woman behind the counter—later claimed that he grabbed her, made lewd advances and wolf-whistled at her as he sauntered out.

Emmett Till Murder

Roy Bryant, the proprietor of the store and the woman’s husband, returned from a business trip a few days later and heard how Emmett had allegedly spoken to his wife. Enraged, he went to the home of Till’s great uncle, Mose Wright, with his half-brother J.W. Milam in the early morning hours of August 28.

The pair demanded to see the boy. Despite pleas from Wright, they forced Emmett into their car. After driving around in the Memphis night, and perhaps beating Till in a toolhouse behind Milam’s residence, they drove him down to the Tallahatchie River.

Three days later, his corpse was recovered but was so disfigured that Mose Wright could only identify it by an initialed ring. Authorities wanted to bury the body quickly, but Till’s mother, Mamie Bradley, requested it be sent back to Chicago.

Open-Casket Funeral

After seeing the mutilated remains, she decided to have an open-casket funeral so that all the world could see what racist murderers had done to her only son. Jet, an African American weekly magazine, published a photo of Emmett’s corpse, and soon the mainstream media picked up on the story.

Less than two weeks after Emmett’s body was buried, Milam and Bryant went on trial in a segregated courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi. There were few witnesses besides Mose Wright, who positively identified the defendants as Emmett’s killers.

On September 23, the all-white jury deliberated for less than an hour before issuing a verdict of “not guilty,” explaining that they believed the state had failed to prove the identity of the body. Many people around the country were outraged by the decision and also by the state’s decision not to indict Milam and Bryant on the separate charge of kidnapping.
Carolyn Bryant Confesses

The Emmett Till murder trial brought to light the brutality of Jim Crow segregation in the South and was an early impetus of the African-American civil rights movement.

In 2017, Tim Tyson, author of the book The Blood of Emmett Till, revealed that Carolyn Bryant recanted her testimony, admitting that Till had never touched, threatened or harassed her. “Nothing that boy did could ever justify what happened to him,” she said.

Adapted from:


Divide students into groups and pass out the article “Who Was Emmett Till” along with a large piece of paper, and each student their own colored marker. This technique is called the “Big Paper” and it ensures all students have a voice in the matter even if they are too shy or introverted to speak in class. Basically, students are given a stimulus for discussion, such as the Emmett Till article, and are asked to each silently write out a question about it as well as any thoughts they would like to share. The group can then rotate the paper and begin a silent discussion about a hard topic. The Big Paper technique encourages respectful silence and allows students to sort out their thoughts on paper before sharing with the whole class. Remind students that they must begin their conversation about Till or the video we saw then allow it to flow naturally. After about 8-10 minutes, tell students they may now discuss aloud in their groups, and prepare to share one insight from their group’s discussion. Hopefully, the students will make the connection that the stereotype of black men being predatory towards white women, as shown in the video, is the same stereotype that lead to Emmett Till’s murder. As students discuss their connections between the two, remind them that the video came out in 1941, the same year Emmett was born. The discussion should be student-led, with the teacher posing questions if
necessary; be sure that students end the day understanding the influence racist media has on society. Close the lesson by thanking students for their participation and cooperation in a difficult lesson such as this one. Ask students to begin thinking about how racist media still affects our society today.

Begin the next day with a recap of outdated media; the clip we watched was explicitly racist, and Emmett Till’s murder was racially motivated but that’s all in the past right? Wrong! Ask students what they know about Trayvon Martin’s death. Trayvon was a black 17-year-old child who was shot by George Zimmerman in Florida in 2012. George Zimmerman plead self-defense and was found not-guilty.

(https://www.miamiherald.com/news/state/florida/article135413214.html) Ask students to make connections between Till’s death and Martin’s death noting that both were black teens, both were murdered, and both murderers were found not-guilty. These connections will help students understand that racism is still heavily present, as well as connect prior knowledge to the lesson they are about to receive. Ask students to raise their hands if they have ever experienced or witnessed racism. All hands should go up, as even white students have seen examples of racism in school and media. Divide students into four groups and pass out the four “First Encounters with Race” stories.

First Experiences with Race Handouts

Followed by a Police Officer
About two months ago, I was walking to the BART station from school, sipping on soda and listening to a podcast when I noticed a blue uniform following me like a shadow. It was a white police officer. He scanned me as if he were the Terminator, trying to see if I posed a threat. I had never been stopped by a cop before. But I wasn’t scared or even nervous. I was prepared.

My mother was always gearing me up for something: a good education, future job security and, most of all, institutionalized racism. Every time we passed a police car, she would drill my sister and me on what to do if and when a police officer stops us. We would begrudgingly repeat what our superior said: “Maintain eye contact, stand straight, speak when spoken to, no sudden movements.”

As children, we never understood why she grilled us like that. Then, when I was 12, Trayvon Martin was killed. Even though it wasn’t a cop who killed him, I started to comprehend what she was preparing us for. Although we live in a quiet suburb of Oakland, we are in a city where a police officer is usually seen as more of a threat than a friend. As a young black man, I know an officer of the law can shoot me no matter where I am — and maybe especially in the middle of Orinda, the mostly white city where I was being stopped for the first time.
So, as the cop was questioning me, I decided to practice what my mom preached. “Is there a problem, officer?” I asked in my most articulate, mature, but nonviolent voice.

“No. What’s your name?”

“Riley Lockett.”

“How old are you?”

“Sixteen.”

“Where do go to school?”

“Orinda Academy, just up the hill. But I live in Oakland.”

“Do you have ID?”

“Yes, here you go.”

I felt like I was performing a one-man show I’ve been rehearsing my whole life. He eyed my ID, then looked through me while handing it back. He turned on his radio and mumbled some breaker-breaker nonsense into it, and in a few seconds he got a few squawks back.

“You’re free to go,” he said to me in a tone that made it sound like his mind was on something else.

I felt bold enough to ask, “What was the problem, officer?”

“Oh, some guy robbed a convenience store a couple streets over,” he told me. “He fled in this direction, and you matched the description.”

I’ve never had to face the color of my skin in anything but a mirror. So as far as police interactions go, I’d say my first one went pretty well. I know there will be plenty more as I get older.

Having to spend my childhood rehearsing for the day a police officer would pull me over may sound scary. And I’m aware it’s not something parents of all races feel the need to teach their kids. But the day it actually happened, I was grateful, at least, that my mom made sure I was ready.

A Slur Directed at Me
Marianne Nacanaynay, 15, Youth Radio
Mountlake Terrace, Wash.
Filipina

The first time someone directed a racial slur toward me I was at a pizza place in Everett, a town in western Washington State. One of my friends who works with me on our high school newspaper wanted to get lunch early, and the place was already crowded with a line stretching around the block. I was waiting outside of the restaurant and chatting on the phone when out of the corner of my eye, I saw two dudes walking by. They were young looking — teenagers or 20-somethings — with light skin and blond/brown hair. As they passed me, I heard them laugh and say, “(expletive) chink.”

It took me a few moments to process what I had just heard. I was taken aback, but not exactly surprised. After all, there I was, a Filipina reporter covering a Trump rally.

Washington State tends to be super liberal. We had the first elected married gay mayor of a major American city. We’ve legalized recreational marijuana. Until recently, Republicans I knew here were mostly “in the closet” in the sense they didn’t talk much about their opinions in public. But I’ve learned that doesn’t mean racism doesn’t exist in Washington — it’s just typically a less overt brand of racism.

Growing up, I lived in Auburn, a suburb south of Seattle, and there weren’t a lot of other kids who looked like me. Back then, it didn’t bother me, because I didn’t think too much about race. My family raised me with phrases like “People are people,” and “It’s who you are inside that counts.”
I remember the time I had a white classmate come over to my house for dinner. We served adobo, which is chicken or pork that’s been marinated in soy sauce or vinegar then fried, and ube, a dessert made of purple yam. The girl politely tried everything but mostly pushed the food around the plate. When I asked her about it later, she said the flavors weren’t familiar to her.

Then in sixth grade we moved to Mountlake Terrace, a suburb about 20 minutes north of Seattle with a noticeable Asian population. Being around more Asian friends, I found myself reflecting differently on my interactions with white peers.

I brought a plate of the same adobo to a party, and people loved it. Having people like my culture made me feel more comfortable with it, too.

So, after years of slowly opening myself up to having pride about my race and culture, hearing two boys call me a chink in the middle of a pizza place was a snap back to reality. On the one hand, it was so over-the-top, it was almost comical. I mean, it’s not even the right racial slur, since I’m not Chinese.

Sometimes I think back on that incident, like when I hear about other people being called a racial slur, or when I hear about people harassing others at Trump rallies. And I remember how I felt vulnerable. It’s a reminder that there are some places where I am still considered the “other.”

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A Lesson From Kindergarten

Maya James, 19, Youth Radio
Traverse City, Mich.

Mixed Race (Black/White)

Shortly after enrolling in kindergarten, one of my classmates threw the N-word at me in a small scuffle. I cannot remember what the little boy was so upset about — it was probably something elementary school students usually get upset about. Maybe I was hogging the markers; maybe I cut in line, or vice versa.

It was the first time I had ever heard that word. I didn’t know how to react. I had many questions. Should I be upset? Could I call the white student the N-word, too? Who invented this word? Do adults use the word?

Before that moment, I had no idea what race was or what class meant. Now I had to grow up.

My teachers tried to intervene — yanking the little boy’s arm and demanding he look in my eyes and “see the pain she feels!” They forced him to stay in and write apology letters during recess in their words, not his. “I should have thought before saying black people are bad,” says one note I’ve kept all these years, “To me, you are a good friend.”

But the letters didn’t stop the name-calling or the rock throwing at recess, at the bus stop or after school.

Back then I had a lot of loud temper tantrums. I was not a picnic for my parents. I cried a lot, I was irritable. That’s when my father — who grew up in Longview, Tex., at the height of Jim Crow politics — started talking to me about race. After my teachers told him about the incident, he had no choice; he had to teach his 5-year-old daughter the tragic story of African genocide and white supremacy that was the American slave trade.

My dad’s struggle and the struggle of his parents were now rubbing off on me at such a young age. No longer a little girl in the suburbs, but a descendant of people considered cattle. No reparations.

I remember thinking: This is unfair! What did I do to be born black?

Traverse City, Mich., is 94 percent white. So it’s no wonder I felt alone growing up as a half-black, half-white little kid.

I am biracial, but in the United States, more often than not, I am always going to be labeled a person of color. I constantly have to choose between one side of my culture and the other — always seeking a greater identity. I feel like a puzzle piece that got lost, always trying to find some way to fit.

What I Wish to Tell
Jose, 16, Youth Radio (Jose is undocumented. He is using his first name only to protect his privacy. His essay has been translated from Spanish.)

Los Angeles Salvadoran

I remember the first day I learned what American racism means. My friend and I were walking home from school and we walked by a white couple. They looked at us and started talking to each other in hushed tones. We couldn’t understand everything they said, but we caught some bad stuff about Latinos and immigration, and we knew they were talking about us. We just kept on walking. It’s not worth getting into a back-and-forth. It’s better to just be quiet.

They don’t know the stuff that we had to go through back home.

I wish I could tell them about my life in El Salvador. Back there, things are really tough with gangs. There was a time when I was walking to the store and a couple of gang members stopped me and asked, “What do you bang?” I don’t, I told them. “So what are you doing in this area?” they replied. It was clearly a threat.

I would tell them how hard it was to say goodbye to my friends and family. I wasn’t going to go to same school anymore. I wasn’t going to have the same friends. I wasn’t going to live with the family I grew up with all my life. I asked God to help me, asked him to guide me, to bless me and keep me safe during this journey.

I would tell them about the day I left home, how I woke up at 3 a.m. nervous and sad. I didn’t know what to expect. I envisioned the United States as this big city where things were so close
and everything was accessible, like hospitals and businesses. When I finally got here, everything felt strange to me, from the language to the streets. Everything.

I would tell them about how hard I’ve worked for people to accept me. At school, I’ve tried to be friendly, but there have been times when people have said things to me because I speak Spanish. You know, racist people who say, “This is America. You should speak English.” I don’t care what people say. At the end of the day, they don’t pay my bills.

Source:


As students read, ask them to think about their own first encounters with race and write the following questions on the board: What happened to ________ and what was their response?

What was your personal response? Did you learn anything you didn’t know before? How did each of these people’s encounters with racism affect them? After each group has finished their story, they will prepare to share the story and their responses with the rest of the class. Students must identify who was being racist towards whom and share their responses. After discussing each story ask the class: Did the individual commit this racially motivated act to purposefully hurt the other person’s feelings? If not, then why did they do it? Show the quick video “Peanut Butter, Jelly and Racism” https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000004818663/peanut-butter-jelly-and-racism.html?action=click&gtype=vhs&version=vhs-heading&module=vhs&region=title-area&cview=true&t=119 which defines implicit bias and gives visual examples of how our mind associates one thing with another. Write “Implicit Bias” on the board and ask students to define each word. Implicit means it is IMPLIED, or not direct, and bias means prejudice or favor for one thing over another. Read the article “We’re All a Little
Biased, Even if We Don’t Know It” as a class, either through popcorn reading (bouncing from one student to the next) or however your students prefer.

**We’re All a Little Biased, Even if We Don’t Know It** by Emily Badger

One of the newest chew toys in the presidential campaign is “implicit bias,” a term Mike Pence repeatedly took exception to in the vice-presidential debate on Tuesday.

Police officers hear all this badmouthing, said Mr. Pence, Donald J. Trump’s running mate, in response to a question about whether society demands too much of law enforcement. They hear politicians painting them with one broad brush, with disdain, with automatic cries of implicit bias. He criticized Hillary Clinton for saying, in the first presidential debate, that everyone experiences implicit bias. He suggested a black police officer who shoots a black civilian could not logically experience such bias.

“Senator, please,” Mr. Pence said, addressing his Democratic opponent, Tim Kaine, “enough of this seeking every opportunity to demean law enforcement broadly by making the accusation of implicit bias every time tragedy occurs.”

The concept, in his words, came across as an insult, a put-down on par with branding police as racists. Many Americans may hear it as academic code for “racist.” But that connotation does not line up with scientific research on what implicit bias is and how it really operates.

Researchers in this growing field say it isn’t just white police officers, but all of us, who have biases that are subconscious, hidden even to ourselves.

Implicit bias is the mind’s way of making uncontrolled and automatic associations between two concepts very quickly. In many forms, implicit bias is a healthy human adaptation — it’s among the mental tools that help you mindlessly navigate your commute each morning. It crops up in contexts far beyond policing and race (if you make the rote assumption that fruit stands have fresher produce, that’s implicit bias). But the same process can also take the form of unconsciously associating certain identities, like African-American, with undesirable attributes, like violence.

The science of how this submerged bias affects your actions is still a work in progress; studies have found a link between the biases and specific actions in some situations but not others. But because this bias is a function of universal human psychology, researchers say, we all experience it — and you can’t exactly get “rid” of it.

Well-intentioned people may also hold implicit biases that run counter to their stated values. That’s why it’s hard to square Mr. Pence’s description with the science. To broach implicit bias isn’t to impugn someone’s values; it’s to recognize that our values compete on an unconscious level with all the stereotypes we absorb from the world around us. And even black police officers aren’t immune to internalizing them.
“These types of cultural biases are like smog in the air,” Jennifer Richeson, a Yale psychologist, wrote in an email, citing an analogy often used by a former president of Spelman College, Beverly Daniel Tatum. “To live and grow up in our culture, then, is to ‘take in’ these cultural messages and biases and do so largely unconsciously.”

In the context of race, implicit bias is considered a particularly important idea because it acknowledges forces beyond bigotry that perpetuate inequality. If we talk less about it, as Mr. Pence suggested — this “really has got to stop,” he said Tuesday night — we lose vocabulary that allows us to confront racial disparities without focusing on the character of individual people.

“You’re removing the language that allows you talk about the mechanism of inequality,” said Phillip Atiba Goff, the president of the Center for Policing Equity at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a professor there. “If you take away that language, what that means is inequality gets stronger and justice gets weaker. It really gets that serious.”

Mr. Goff said he hears objections similar to Mr. Pence’s every time he gives presentations or leads training sessions with police departments. “Someone will say, ‘I’m tired of being called a racist,’ ” he said. To which he explains that racism and implicit bias aren’t interchangeable.

“That wrong formulation is so ingrained,” Mr. Goff said. “That’s what’s dangerous. It’s so easy to call it a slight, and if that metastasizes in our political discourse, we really have lost out on an incredible opportunity to take great strides forward.”

He fears that implicit bias could become a political trope, dismissed as an insult and not as science, or worse, tugged into the realm of political correctness. He acknowledges that the left mistreats the topic, too, citing implicit bias as a catchall to explain all the forces of racial unfairness in society that aren’t bigotry.

In fact, implicit bias is just one of many psychological processes that shape how we interact with one another. We also tend to be better at remembering the faces of people in our own racial group, or to subconsciously favor people in our group. The fear of being stereotyped psychologically weighs on people, too. In police training, Mr. Goff has watched officers using other kinds of mental shortcuts in which they assume “active shooters” must be men. He now talks more broadly about “identity traps” that encompass implicit biases and much more.

The challenge, he argues, isn’t to eliminate biases, but to try to interrupt them so we can act more often in ways that line up with our values. Researchers, though, still have a lot to learn about how to do that. And it would be unfortunate, Mr. Goff argued, if implicit bias became politically unmentionable right at the moment when science was trying to uncover the answer.

For now, laboratory simulations don’t easily translate to the real world, and it’s hard to convert beliefs into behaviors. It’s unclear how well nascent police training programs work. And police officers are not the only ones facing implicit-bias training — this fall, the home-sharing company Airbnb announced it planned to offer such a program to its hosts. It’s not clear that will work, either.
Tony Greenwald, a professor of psychology at the University of Washington, said training can even backfire, as a result of another tendency we have: People who attend programs like these may falsely believe they’ve rooted out their biases and so don’t need to worry about them any more.

“Just wanting to eliminate implicit bias is not sufficient,” Mr. Greenwald said. “You can’t unlearn implicit biases. We live in a society and culture where the influences that create these are so strong and pervasive, that we’re not going to get rid of those influences in any short period.”

Source:


This article goes further in depth about how we develop these associations as well as how to continually question our own implicit biases. After the article, divide students into groups and pass out the “Implicit Bias Examples”. You can have students tackle each or give one scenario to each group.

Implicit Bias Examples

A doctor doesn’t ask his Latina patient if she has any questions.
What is/are the implicit bias(es) at work in the scenario?

Would most people consider the interactions in these scenarios as racist?

Is it possible that the doctor is unaware of their biases? Could they even hold antiracist views on a conscious level in their everyday lives?

A teacher assigns her only Asian student to tutor other students.
What is/are the implicit bias(es) at work in the scenario?
Would most people consider the interactions in these scenarios as racist?

Is it possible that the teacher is unaware of their biases? Could they even hold antiracist views on a conscious level in their everyday lives?

An employer places the resumes of applicants with Arabic-sounding names at the bottom of the stack.

What is/are the implicit bias(es) at work in the scenario?

Would most people consider the interactions in these scenarios as racist?

Is it possible that the employer is unaware of their biases? Could they even hold antiracist views on a conscious level in their everyday lives?

A woman who clutches her purse when a black man enters the elevator.

What is/are the implicit bias(es) at work in the scenario?

Would most people consider the interactions in these scenarios as racist?

Is it possible that the woman on the elevator is unaware of her biases? Could they even hold antiracist views on a conscious level in their everyday lives?

This activity shows everyday examples of implicit bias and questions if each action is considered racist. After students complete the activity, have them share their example and how they felt about it. As a closing activity, pass out small pieces of paper and ask the students to write one stereotype or implicit bias they have seen, heard, or believed. This is called the snowball activity, and it is a fun, anonymous way to gather stories or opinions from every student. Remind students that their paper will be read by someone else so if they say anything purposefully hurtful, vulgar,
or rude, it will directly and negatively impact their classmates. After students have finished, instruct them to crumple up their paper and throw them across the classroom. As they throw, it can be helpful to make the connection that we put our own implicit biases out into the world every day, and if we take some time to rethink them and how they affect others we can make the world a nicer place. Have students find a crumpled “snowball” and prepare students to read them aloud. Remember, these are not necessarily biases students in this class have but biases that we are aware of. Once we are aware of them, we can begin fighting against that thinking. After each bias or stereotype is read instruct the student holding it to rip it up. This symbolic act shows students that in this classroom we do not believe stereotypes and we fight against our own biases. Thank students for their active participation and remind them that you have an open door and are always willing to help students understand these sometimes painful topics.

For the next lesson, begin with a video about selective attention; the most famous video asks viewers to count the number of times players dressed in white pass the ball to each other while a gorilla walks through the scene. Because students are focused on one thing, they are totally unobservant of the gorilla. You can use the Gorilla one: https://youtu.be/vJG698U2Mvo or there is another excellent short video that asks students to focus on solving a murder while every aspect of the scene changes behind them. You may even use these videos consecutively and see if students are more attentive during the second video, linked here: https://youtu.be/ubNF9QNEQLA These videos offer students a new way to look at their implicit biases as something that they do not see unless they are actively looking for it. We all have implicit biases that even WE don’t see, that is why they are called implicit! We must challenge ourselves every day to question these biases and realign our thinking. Ask students what percentage of people have implicit bias. Is there a type of person that has implicit bias? Write on
the board that 100% of us have implicit biases! What types of things lead to implicit biases? Lead a conversation about what influences us to have biases and write each on the board. Our parents, our community, our faith, and the big media company! Ask students to think back to Sherman Alexie’s essay about how Native American’s are portrayed in Westerns as well as Universal Studios cartoon and ask if they can think of any other media that portrays stereotypes that lead to implicit biases. Have students brainstorm at their table groups and then take answers from each table over and over until groups cannot think of anymore. The list should be extensive, covering war films that dehumanize the non-American enemy, Indiana Jones films portrayal of Natives, cleaning commercials that show women cleaning, action films where the bad guy is always foreign, and many more. Think about what did NOT make the list. For example, if a commercial for The Cheesecake Factory only shows white families at their restaurant that is an example of underrepresentation in media which also affects our implicit biases.

Hopefully, your students have included commercials on their extensive list of examples of media bias. Tell students that they will be viewing commercials and determining what the implicit bias is as well as the stereotype it is perpetuating. There are four ads I found that are perfect for this activity, as they showcase advertisers who were simply unaware of their own implicit bias. Heineken has an ad called “Lighter is Better” in which a light beer is slid down a bar past multiple people of color before being picked up by a light-skinned woman with the words “sometimes lighter is better” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_u__OD1_z0. Dove created an advertisement for their body wash in which a black woman takes off her dark shirt and unveils a white women in a light shirt; this perpetuates the stereotype that black women are “dirty” or that they should work on lightening their skin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4OreEdwaAM. Popular clothing brand H&M chose a
black boy to model their sweatshirt which says “Coolest Monkey in the Jungle” which
dehumanizes black boys:

Kellogg’s artwork on the back of a cereal box featured yellow Corn Pops at a mall, while the one
and only brown Corn Pop acted as janitor:
These ad companies were not trying to be racist, but simply did not have the perception or awareness to see that their implicit biases were perpetuating negative stereotypes. Divide students into groups and give each group one ad, as well as the “Key Questions for Analyzing Ads” worksheet.

Name:_________________________

**5 Key Questions for Analyzing Ads**

Complete this worksheet after analyzing your advertisement.

Type of advertisement: _________________

1. Who created this message?

   _____________________________________________________________________________

2. How might different people understand this message differently from me? (Think family values, background, race, etc.)

   _____________________________________________________________________________

   _____________________________________________________________________________

3. Do you think the advertiser has an implicit bias? If so, what is it?

   _____________________________________________________________________________

   _____________________________________________________________________________

   _____________________________________________________________________________

4. What stereotype is being perpetuated by this ad?

   _____________________________________________________________________________

   _____________________________________________________________________________

5. What could the advertiser have done to avoid this mistake?

   _____________________________________________________________________________
This worksheet helps students conceptualize and determine not only the bias within the advertisements, but also how those biases lead to harmful stereotypes which in turn strengthen our implicit biases. Students will then have 15 minutes to create a powerpoint or poster presentation in which they display their ad and teach the rest of the class about the biases and stereotypes portrayed. The worksheet acts as a guide for students and they can present in whatever form they find fit. Once students finish their presentations, pose a discussion question to the class: We have seen examples of bias and stereotyping in commercials and movies, but does this actually affect our everyday lives? Encourage students to answer honestly but be aware that some white students may say that implicit bias doesn’t affect them. This could be frustrating for other students who better understand the concepts of racial relations but ensure that each of us can have our own opinions. As the discussion ends, show the video on bike theft from the show “What Would You Do” https://youtu.be/ge7i60GuNRg. The clip shows first a white man, then a black man of the same age, and finally a white woman all trying to steal a bike while bystanders look on and sometimes interact. Write on the board: How was each person treated differently? Identify one implicit bias one of the bystanders had. This video demonstrates how each of us have biases and how they influence the choices we make every day. Reiterate that this video shows how our biases CAN turn into racial discrimination.

Now that students are aware of how their own biases can affect their decisions and interactions with others, they must be exposed to the inequity in America, and the systems of oppression that perpetuate racism and oppression. As students come in the next day, they will notice multiple posters up around the room each with one word written at the top. The posters have the following words: Racism, Bias, Stereotype, Oppression, Diversity, Discrimination, and Inequality. Students will be divided into groups and sent to one of the posters. Students will
spend two minutes at each poster adding key-word associations, examples, or anything else they feel is relevant. After two minutes, each group will shift to the poster on their right. This activity is called Carousel and allows the teacher a snapshot of how well her students are comprehending these racial terms, as well as encouraging students to learn from their peers through collaboration. After each group has visited each poster, give students two more minutes to go back and view the changes made to the posters. This is a great activity to get students thinking about these terms, while also connecting to prior knowledge from the lesson before. Ask students which term they felt most challenged or confused by. Whichever they choose, bring the poster with that word to the front of the classroom and analyze it closer. Pick out student examples that are accurate and add some words or examples that will help students better understand. For example, if students are confused about the term oppression, it may be helpful to dissect the word and ask students what word is in the middle of oppression. Oppression is when a power in charge, whether that be societal expectations, government, or a dominant monoculture PRESSES down a minority group because they do not value that group. Ask students to try to come up with more examples of oppression, explaining it is when a group in power unfairly treats another group using control. Students should come up with slavery, women’s late right to vote, and other past examples of oppression. Next, ask students how they feel America is progressing with oppression, or the word they have chosen. This may be easier to do as a quick poll, such as “raise your hand if you think America is past racism” and “raise your hand if you think America still has a long way to go”. The results may be mixed, but do not allow students to debate…yet. Pass out the “Equity and Diversity in the U.S.” quiz from www.edchange.org and tell students that this will not be graded. Give students at least ten minutes to complete the quiz in silence and offer help if students do not understand a question.
1. 57% of people in state prisons for drug offenses in the US are African American. What percentage of illicit drug users in the US are African American?
   a. 14%
   b. 28%
   c. 42%
   d. 56%

2. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, 34 anti-Muslim organizations were operating in the US in 2015. How many were operating in the US in 2016?
   a. 21
   b. 34
   c. 101
   d. 146

3. According to GLSEN, what percentage of students who report an incident of homophobia at school say the school did nothing in response or told them to ignore it?
   a. 18%
   b. 31%
   c. 48%
   d. 64%

4. US Census data show that African American and Latina women earn how much for every dollar a White man earns?
   a. one dollar and one dollar, respectively
   b. 81 cents and 79 cents respectively
   c. 64 and 56 cents, respectively
   d. 54 cents and 49 cents, respectively

5. The Service Women’s Action Network has reported that women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are less likely to have been killed by an enemy than they are to have been:
   a. raped by a colleague
   b. dishonorably discharged
   c. promoted in rank
6. According to the Center for American Progress, compared with schools attended by at least 90% white students, those attended by at least 90% students of color spend how much less per pupil annually?
   a. $312
   b. $733
   c. $1,028

7. About 5% of the world’s people live in the United States. About what percentage of people currently in prison live in the United States?
   a. 5%
   b. 25%
   c. 45%
   d. 65%

8. In a study conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research, researchers replied to help-wanted ads by sending résumés from fictitious applicants. Each applicant had the same qualifications, but some had stereotypically African American sounding names while others had stereotypically White sounding names. How much more likely were applicants with stereotypically White names to get a callback regarding their applications than applicants with stereotypically Black names?
   a. 15% more likely
   b. 26% more likely
   c. 39% more likely
   d. 50% more likely

9. Identify the source of this quote: “We have deluded ourselves into believing the myth that capitalism grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifices. Capitalism was built on the exploitation of black slaves and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor, both black and white, both here and abroad.”
   a. bell hooks
   b. Michael Moore
   c. Martin Luther King, Jr.

10. The median household income in the US has increased 16% since 1980. During the same period, corporate profits after taxes increased 182%, the average income for the wealthiest 1% of families increased 190%, and the average income for the wealthiest 0.01% of families grew 322%. What happened to the average income of the poorest 90% during that time?
    a. increased 16%
    b. increased 0.03%
    c. decreased 16%

For a list of references as well as other quizzes and answer keys, please visit the Multicultural Pavilion Web site at http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/quiz.html.

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Gorski, Paul. “Equity and Diversity in the U.S.” Edchange, 2017,
www.edchange.org/multicultural/quiz/quizNEW.pdf.
This quiz asks questions about current race relations in America so students can see that America is not as multicultural as some of us think. Tell students to correct their own papers as we all go over the answer key together. Some of the questions include shocking revelations such as the fact that although 57% of people in state prisons for drug offenses in the US are African American, only 14% of illicit drug users in the United States are African American. Going over the answers to this quiz should shock some of your students, shattering the illusion that racism in America is over. Ask students which quiz answer surprised them the most and engage in a discussion about whichever one they chose. Ask students if their opinion of America has changed after hearing the answers to this quiz. Students may express frustration that the country they have been taught to love has not yet fixed these racial issues. That is when you inform them that the USA is actually perpetuating these racial issues in what is called systemic racism. Race Forward has a series of videos about different aspects of systemic racism linked here https://www.raceforward.org/videos/systemic-racism, so choose whichever one most applies to your earlier discussion, or allow students to choose. You could view more than one, as each is around only a minute long. These videos use graphics, statistics, and examples to demonstrate the effects of systemic racism in a way that is easy for high schoolers to understand.

After viewing the video, ask students to brainstorm ways that the government can perpetuate systemic racism. The list should include laws, government-funded-programs, media, societal expectations, and more. Look into your community’s history and you may find some effective examples of widespread, government funded discrimination; in Monroe County in New York, it was recently discovered that thousands of house deeds in the Rochester area have one crucial condition: the premise cannot be owned by colored people. Share the article “County Wide Discrimination” with students.
County-Wide Discrimination

Monroe County, N.Y. — (WHAM) - Thousands of deeds to property across Monroe County have been found to have a surprising restriction: race.

Racist language stating that “the premises cannot be owned or occupied by a colored person” are on original land deeds in Pittsford, Rochester, Irondequoit and other towns.

Christopher Brandt, who lives in Irondequoit, said he found a racial covenant in his deed after hearing about their existence on thousands of area land deeds.

“It’s right there, item number 7: ‘The premises cannot be owned or occupied by a colored person,’” said Brandt.

Racist language stating that "the premises cannot be owned or occupied by a colored person" are on original land deeds in Pittsford, Rochester, Irondequoit and other towns. (WHAM photo)

“It’s amazing how brazen it was,” he said, noting it was in between other items, like keeping up on lawn care to maintain property value.

Brandt was inspired to search his property after seeing a presentation by Shane Wiegand on the topic. Wiegand, a local teacher, has been investigating the locations of racial covenants in area land deeds for years.
“It’s like this crazy scavenger hunt,” said Wiegand. “I found them in Pittsford, Rochester, Irondequoit, Gates, Greece, and Brighton. Irondequoit has the most: well over a couple thousand.”

Wiegand notes the clauses are only on the original property deeds, and likely not on the version homeowners have seen in recent decades, because the practice was outlawed under the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

He says the goal of these restrictions were meant to keep non-whites out of entire neighborhoods, and that most of the covenants can be found in homes built in the 1920s through the 1940s.

He’s spent hours in the Monroe County Clerk’s Office looking at original deeds on microfilm to investigate these racist restrictions.

Now he and others are looking to rewrite history.

Wiegand and Pittsford Town Councilmember Kevin Beckford are pushing to allow homeowners to alter their deeds with formal disavowals on the deed. Instead of erasing the original language, it would formally renounce it.

“It’s the reason why today we are living with the same challenges we’ve had,” said Beckford.

Beckford says the measure is largely symbolic, as the covenants are no longer enforceable. Yet he believes a formal renunciation of the language would be a step toward righting a past wrong.

“It’s a very symbolic but powerful step where a community is saying, ‘We did this years ago, and we want to do the right thing now and say, ’Not here, not now, not ever.’” said Beckford.

Homeowners like Brandt say they’d be willing to take part in a formal change, and hope others would follow suit.

“To bring it back up to the forefront, to the present day as an amendment to a deed would be a powerful signal,” said Brandt.

Wiegand says right now, he’s looking to create an online database to allow homeowners with these past deed restrictions to map their homes, and formally renounce the language.

He said he’d like to see lawmakers pass a measure allowing legal amendments to their original deeds, similar to what happened in Minnesota earlier this year.

Source:

As students read, write the words “erasure vs amend” on the board and bring up the culture warning from Warner Brothers:

Ask students their initial thoughts on the article and then ask specifically about this section:

“Wiegand and Pittsford Town Councilmember Kevin Beckford are pushing to allow homeowners to alter their deeds with formal disavowals on the deed. Instead of erasing the original language, it would formally renounce it.” Ask students to consider the difference between erasing and amending. What do we erase and why? Students will most likely say we erase mistakes. Think of one mistake you have made in your life; you do not need to share with the class! What did you learn from that mistake? If you had the chance, would you erase that mistake from your life, knowing it would change who you are today? The great thing about mistakes is that they help us learn what we’re doing wrong. We can look back on a mistake and remember the lessons we’ve learned since then. Show students the “Warner Brother’s statement on Culture” and read it aloud. What has Warner Brothers chosen? To amend, or to erase? Is this
the right choice? Allow students a couple moments to discuss before closing the lesson with a statement. When we can reflect on our mistakes it helps us continue to grow from them. If Monroe Country tries to erase this racist act they are pretending it never existed, which is not only a lie, but an insult to the hundreds of black people currently occupying these homes. We must face the past with resilience and keep reminders of our past present in order to continue the fight against racial discrimination and create a better world for everyone. Thank students for their participation.

While being straightforward with students is helpful and necessary to having open conversations, it can be just as helpful to pose a hypothetical situation to students without their knowledge. This technique actively engages students as well as shows students’ genuine reactions. As students come in the next day, ask them if they have heard about the school’s new security policy. Tell students they may want to turn their phones off if they don’t want to be affected, continue until students ask what this new policy is. Tell students that the board has decided to install new machines which listen in on students’ phone calls and social media activity. This protocol is to ensure the safety of the school and everyone in it. Students should be upset and claim that this policy violates their privacy. Ask students if they would rather have their privacy or school security and allow for discussion. Afterwards, inform students that this school policy is not real and allow for a sigh of relief; however, America has a law called the Patriot Act that does listen and record your conversations, as well as your online activity. Show or pass out the Infographic on the Patriot Act, [https://www.aclu.org/issues/national-security/privacy-and-surveillance/surveillance-under-patriot-act](https://www.aclu.org/issues/national-security/privacy-and-surveillance/surveillance-under-patriot-act) and allow students to decide whether they would like to work through it as a class or divide into groups. Have students highlight which parts bother them the most and after reading ask students if the Patriot Act has
achieved its original goal of preventing domestic terrorism. Have students discuss and ask guiding questions as needed: What evidence do you have? Do you think this law is fair? What parts specifically bother you? Do you believe there are any racially motivated aspects of this law? Does this law match our definition of oppression? The infographic states that out of 143,043 National Security Letters issued to receive individual’s private data, only 53, or .04% led to a criminal referral. Out of those 53 referrals, 17 were related to immigration (ACLU).

Refer to this information when informing your students that this law is being misused and abused to spy on and arrest minority members of society. Tell students that there are more ways the government can oppress people of color other than law alone.

Show students the video “American Kids and the School to Prison Pipeline” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04pcSyzwoTg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04pcSyzwoTg) which discusses and demonstrates the ways school systems punish black students disproportionately to white students. Play the video “Mass Incarceration: Visualized” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u51_pzax4M0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u51_pzax4M0) immediately after. These videos go hand in hand because they both discuss the unfair treatment of people of color, specifically black boys and men in America. The use of infographics is easy to understand while also visually shocking, and students should be able to comprehend the depth and severity of the school to prison pipeline. After watching, repeat or write this quote on the board: “We’ve chosen deprivation of liberty for a group whose liberty in the United States was never firmly established to begin with.” What does the narrator mean by this? How does American history affect our mass incarceration rates? Think back to our “First Encounters with Racism” story about Riley, the 16-year-old black boy who was followed by a police officer because the officer believed he could have robbed a convenience store. Riley mentions that “every time we passed a police car, [his mother] would drill my sister and me on what to do if and when a police officer stops us.”
Do you think Riley’s mom was right to prepare Riley and his siblings for police encounters? Do white families have to do the same? Why is that? Lead a discussion about the different expectations for black children and white children, and how the school to prison pipeline affects black students. As Williams writes in her article “Do No Harm: Strategies for Culturally Relevant Caring,” it is the caring teacher’s duty to prepare all students for the world they will enter after high school (8). This includes being honest with students about how society may view them and the challenges they are up against as they face racially charged adversity and hardships. This is when you remind students that you deeply value each of them for their presence, input, opinions, experiences, and personalities. Waking students up to prejudice and inequality in America is necessary to begin their journey of combatting it, however the teacher must also reaffirm students’ positive qualities and reassure each student of their value in and out of the classroom. To close the lesson, the teacher can give students a “Ticket out the Door” to fill out before they leave.

**Ticket out the Door**

Name:_____________________________________

What is one thing you learned today?

What is one thing you have had to “unlearn”? It could be a stereotype, bias, belief, or anything you used to believe but are now rethinking.

What is one topic you would like to learn more about?
These tickets ask questions about the lesson that day and act both as an effective closing activity and useful assessment tool.

The next day, have all of the desks and chairs pushed out of the way, or take the class to the gym, hall, or any other wide open area. This will be one of the culminating lessons of this unit which addresses privilege and advantage. You can choose to begin this activity with a discussion about white privilege or you can throw students in with no context. If you choose to lead-in to the activity, ask students if they remember the selective attention video with the gorilla. Remind students that some things are difficult to see unless we are looking for them, such as white privilege. Bring up Riley’s story from “First Encounters with Race” and ask if white parents think to prepare their children for a police encounter. When students say no, ask why white parents wouldn’t think to do that. The answer is that white people often do not have to fear police because they are treated fairly by the criminal justice system. This is an example of white privilege. For this activity, students will all begin standing beside each other in a line at one side of the room. Ask students to place a hand on the shoulder of the student next to them, and if any students are uncomfortable with this, do not make them. Inform students that you will be reading a series of statements, followed by instructions to either move a step forward, or a step backward. If you do not want other students to know some of these answers, you may stay where you are for that turn. Try to maintain physical contact with the people next to you or as long as you can reach. List each of these items followed by the command, with a pause in between. Urge students to be honest with themselves and others during this activity.

1. If you are right-handed, take one step forward.
2. If English is your first language, take one step forward.
3. If one or both of your parents have a college degree, take one step forward.
4. If you can find Band-Aids at mainstream stores designed to blend in with or match your skin tone, take one step forward.

5. If you rely, or have relied, primarily on public transportation, take one step back.

6. If you have attended previous schools with people you felt were like yourself, take one step forward.

7. If you constantly feel unsafe walking alone at night, take one step back.

8. If your household employs help as servants, gardeners, etc., take one step forward.

9. If you are able to move through the world without fear of sexual assault, take one step forward.

10. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward.

11. If you often feel that your parents are too busy to spend time with you, take one step back.

12. If you were ever made fun of or bullied for something you could not change or was beyond your control, take one step back.

13. If your family has ever left your homeland or entered another country not of your own free will, take one step back.

14. If you would never think twice about calling the police when trouble occurs, take one step forward.

15. If your family owns a computer, take one step forward.

16. If you have ever been able to play a significant role in a project or activity because of a talent you gained previously, take one step forward.

17. If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear of ridicule or violence, take one step forward.

18. If you ever had to skip a meal or were hungry because there was not enough money to buy food, take one step back.

19. If you feel respected for your academic performance, take one step forward.

20. If you have a physically visible disability, take one step back.

21. If you have an invisible illness or disability, take one step back.

22. If you were ever discouraged from an activity because of race, class, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation, take one step back.

23. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to fit in more, take one step back.

24. If you have ever been profiled by someone else using stereotypes, take one step back.
25. If you feel good about how your identities are portrayed by the media, take one step forward.

26. If you were ever accepted for something you applied to because of your association with a friend or family member, take one step forward.

27. If your family has health insurance take one step forward.

28. If you have ever been spoken over because you could not articulate your thoughts fast enough, take one step back.

29. If someone has ever spoken for you when you did not want them to do so, take one step back.

30. If there was ever substance abuse in your household, take one step back.

31. If you come from a single-parent household, take one step back.

32. If you live in an area with crime and drug activity, take one step back.

33. If someone in your household suffered or suffers from mental illness, take one step back.

34. If you have been a victim of sexual harassment, take one step back.

35. If you were ever uncomfortable about a joke related to your race, religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation but felt unsafe to confront the situation, take one step back.

36. If you are never asked to speak on behalf of a group of people who share an identity with you, take one step forward.

37. If you can make mistakes and not have people attribute your behavior to flaws in your racial or gender group, take one step forward.

38. If you have always assumed you’ll go to college, take one step forward.

39. If you have more than fifty books in your household, take one step forward.

40. If your parents have told you that you can be anything you want to be, take one step forward.

Source:


As students move back and forward across the room, a clear distinction will start to take place; white, male students should be nearing the front of the room while girls and students of color
will still be near the back, if not further back from where they started. This activity is meant to show the unseen advantages that allow students in the dominant demographic to succeed. The setup of the room is meant to show the correlation between race and privilege. The physical act of touching demonstrates the closeness of the bond students have created in the caring classroom, and when they are forced to break that bond due to unwritten societal expectations it emphasizes the point that racial inequality tears us apart. The second part of this activity is the debrief session. Have students sit in a large circle together and remind them that it is perfectly natural to feel emotional during this activity. If you have a large group, it may be helpful to have a “talking stick” or object that is passed around which dictates who currently has the floor. Ask students about their initial impressions and feelings revolving this activity. White students may be feeling guilty for their white privilege so it is important to emphasize that these privileges and advantages are beyond our control. They are nothing we chose and nothing to be ashamed of. If discussion is slow, some guiding questions are: What are some factors you had never thought about before? What question made you think the most? What question would you add? Has this activity changed the way you see your classmates? Finally, how does understanding privilege and disadvantage improve your relationship with yourself and others? Allow students ample time for this discussion, as we want to be sure they sort through their feelings so as not to leave the activity in a negative mindset. After the activity, students will be wondering what they can do to help combat racism, bias, inequality, and privilege. Show students this video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_BdYDrGll0 featuring a white woman standing up for two Mexican women being harassed in a grocery store for speaking Spanish. Explain how the white woman uses her privilege for good by defending marginalized groups and confronting racist behavior. Encourage students to use their moral decision-making skills to stand up in situations
like this, because as the woman in the video says, it’s the right thing to do. Lead a discussion about what else has, can, and should be done to combat racism listing examples on the board: art, social media campaigns such as #blacklivesmatter, political cartoons, speeches, letters to those in charge, plays, and many more. Encourage students to think about each of these as they open up this link https://www.nytimes.com/topic/subject/race-and-ethnicity which offers a variety of NY Times pieces on race and ethnicity. The articles range from pieces about black music identity to black superheroes and more. Tell students to take the time to scroll through and find an article that interests them. Have students print and read their articles, annotating the piece for examples of bias, stereotypes, oppression, school to prison pipeline, or anything else they have learned over the past several lessons. Have a few volunteers share their articles and discuss the racist implications of their article topic.

After students have read and shared their articles, ask if there are any new additions to the list of ways to combat racism. Tell students that their final project will be one of these items. Students may produce artwork, a political cartoon or comic, a play or skit, a speech, a social media campaign, a video, a letter to someone in charge, or any other plausible idea that is approved by the teacher. Although this type of assessment can be difficult to grade, giving your students the freedom to explore and combat inequality in a way that is suited for their talents, knowledge, and comfortability level is the most realistic way to prepare students to combat racism outside of school. Each student needs to find what they are passionate about in order to create something powerful enough to make change. Speeches, letters, cartoons, and artwork should be done independently unless approved by teacher, whereas plays, videos, and social media campaigns can be done in groups of three or four. Plan for a day or two where students will exhibit, perform, or read aloud their presentations, and as students begin planning,
brainstorm names for this exhibition. Including students in the creation of lessons makes lessons more meaningful as well as keep students actively involved.

This final project is meant to encourage students to find their voices. Students have been made aware of the racial inequality and prejudice in America as well as their privileges and disadvantages, but without a way to combat it students are only half-prepared to enter life outside of school. Allowing many different avenues for the combatting inequality project encourages students to fight injustice in their own way. When students feel excited about the medium they are working in, they are more likely to feel pride in their work and take it seriously. Encouraging individuality among your students shows them that you care about their passions and want to see them succeed in their own right. We should all be using our privileges and skills to denounce and resist racist practices and that is what this unit is about.

Teaching about race is difficult. No matter the makeup of your school’s population, teaching about past and current racial injustices and relations is challenging both for you and your students; however the pervasive nature of bias and racial divisions demands that we end the cycle of misinformation, misrepresentation, and withholding information by teaching students the truth about race relations in America. Students trust their teachers to tell them the truth and by avoiding the topics surrounding racial injustice in America we are lying to them. Purposefully bypassing the harsh realities of racial bias, profiling, discrimination, and systemic oppression is not doing students any favors, as despite schools’ efforts to shelter students from these topics they will still undoubtedly face them in their lives with no preparation on how to emotionally handle such topics. Teachers who create caring classrooms based on trusting relationships with students have the opportunity, time, and resources to unpack these complicated issues in the safety of the classroom; not doing so is hurting our students and our country.
Discussing Uncomfortable Topics

As mature as we would like to believe our students are, sometimes they need more support than the typical caring classroom offers to unpack uncomfortable topics. Cultivating a caring relationship with each individual student and between students is necessary to begin addressing any difficult topic you choose to discuss in your classroom. Students must be comfortable communicating with you and with each other in order to have any type of meaningful discussion in class. When students truly feel like the classroom is a non-judgmental, safe, and genuine place they will open up and share their experiences with others creating a stronger bond within your class. Once you and your students decide it is time to tackle a complex issue in your class there are some guidelines and techniques that will help ease the transition into difficult topics.

After establishing a caring classroom with rules on respectful communication, you can begin to address the topic. Adolescents learn better when they have real-life experience that connects with their learning so begin the topic with a student brainstorm about the subject. If your topic is simple enough to put in one word write it on the board and have students list off every word, phrase, or event that they associate with that topic. If you’re tech-savvy, try creating a word cloud here [https://worditout.com/word-cloud/create](https://worditout.com/word-cloud/create) which shows the most frequently used phrases out of the suggestions your students give you. This visual will help students expand their prior knowledge of a topic and see which phrases are more often associated with a topic. After word associations, ask students if they have ever had any experiences related to that topic. Depending on the number of student volunteers and their willingness to share aloud, you could do the snowball activity instead of sharing out loud. This anonymous activity asks students to write their experience on a small piece of paper, crumple it up, and throw it across the room for
another student to find and then share aloud. With this activity, the experiences are being shared without the students fearing judgment. Once students hear other students’ experiences with the topic they will feel a connection to their peers who have also faced similar adversities. Too often, teenagers feel that they are alone in their troubles and that no one else could possibly understand what they are going through. By sharing experiences, students realize they are more like their peers than they initially thought which creates a bond strong enough to face difficult lessons ahead.

Whether it is your first time teaching a touchy topic or your 20th time, it is necessary to emotionally prepare students for the subject they’re about to dive into. Remind students to be respectful of each other and go over the rules for courteous conversation. Tell students that it is perfectly natural to feel a wide range of emotions including anger, guilt, fear, or sadness when discussing sensitive material. Inform students why you feel this topic is important and why it must be addressed in your classroom; once students comprehend the necessity and importance of the topic they will take the subject more seriously. Whether your topic is abusive relationships, immigration, sexual abuse or assault, genocide, or any other harsh reality of this world remember that some students in your classroom may have close experience with these topics and they are to be addressed sensitively. If you are concerned about students sharing personal information about each other outside of the classroom then create a confidentiality contract; this type of document reassures that any personal information or experiences shared in your classroom will not become the next gossip topic because all information stays within the walls of the caring classroom.

ALWAYS ensure the mental, physical, and emotional safety of your students before beginning a sensitive subject as we are there to help them understand and face these topics not to depress them or scare them away from difficult conversations.
How you choose to begin your topic depends on your teaching style and philosophy; however, there is one thing that should remain consistent: students learn best when learning begins with the concrete and then transitions to the more abstract. For example, when teaching about empathy and perspective, it is best to begin teaching about the individual student’s emotions, then move on to peers’ perspective before finally discussing cultural and world perspectives. As students move from the concrete or local knowledge to the abstract or global knowledge, they develop a better sense of understanding how they relate to others and the world around them. Whatever your topic is, begin by addressing it locally or in a manner that your students feel an obvious connection to such as their hometown, their school, or their experiences. Once students know how this topic relates to them, they can begin to comprehend how this subject relates to other people before eventually having an understanding of how it affects people around the world.

When finding connections between your topic and your students, use their brainstorming session to inform your lessons. What experiences do your students have with this topic that could inform their learning? What is the culture of your school and what shared experiences may connect with this topic? Use your students’ experience with the topic to tailor your lesson directly to them. For example, if your topic relates to sexism and your school recently had a dispute about dress code use that as a starting point to fuel students’ motivation. Make explicit connections between their everyday lives and your topic in order to show both the pervasiveness and importance of your chosen topic. The New York Times offers a series of lesson plans in the article “Making It Relevant: Helping Students Connect Their Studies to the World Today”

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/07/learning/lesson-plans/making-it-relevant-helping-students-
connect-their-studies-to-the-world-today.html which gives students techniques to connect their learning with the world around them.

When beginning the unit on your chosen topic it can help to start with a video overview of the topic. Despite student experience with the subject, it is beneficial to all students to have a set of knowledge including vocabulary, history, and events related to your topic. For example, this video https://youtu.be/pITvjVaUvWA about sexism gives explicit examples and visuals to help all students comprehend it. After viewing a video on the topic ask students their initial reactions and feelings. Although this step takes up valuable class-time it is necessary to allow students the time to work out their feelings so they do not leave the classroom in a negative or confused headspace. Validate students’ feelings and thank them for their respect. Validating and thanking students after each lesson about touchy topics shows respect for your students as well as appreciation for their active participation. Remember that despite the comfortability of the safe classroom it can still be difficult or even painful for students to participate in these conversations because it is likely the first time they are doing so. Be patient and kind with your students at all times and never skip thanking them for their participation.

When choosing materials for your topic, be sure to consider factors within your classroom that may affect how students interpret them. For example, if your topic is refugees and you have refugee students in your classroom it becomes imperative that you choose sensitive material that in no way shames or humiliates your students. If a touchy topic directly affects students in your classroom you may want to have a private conversation with those students prior to beginning the unit. Ask those affected by your topic if they are comfortable proceeding, if there is any part of the topic they want to specifically address or avoid, and how much or little they would like to participate. Having these private meetings with students ensures their
emotional and mental safety while also giving you an insight to how these topics directly affect your students.

Lessons on your topic should cover the roots or history of your topic, its evolution, how it is still relevant today, its form in other countries, how people have resisted it, and what students can do to help. The order of these is entirely up to the teacher, but keep in mind that students learn best from the concrete to the abstract. For example, if your topic is racial oppression it may be easier for students if you begin with something they already understand such as slavery. In this case, starting with the past makes it easier to show students how racial oppression has evolved into its more subtle yet prevalent form today. However, if your topic is sexism then it may help to point your students to a current example such as the U.S. female soccer team earning significantly less money despite more wins and more viewers. This is a current heated topic which can lead into a lesson on the history of sexism and how far we have come before discussing how much further we have to go. Whatever order you choose, be sure to make clear connections to how it affects the students. Teens may seem apathetic but when something relates directly to them they are more likely to be actively engaged. Because we don’t want to leave teens feeling helpless, we must offer ways that they can fight back against these issues that affect them. Creating a project opportunity that helps fight, discuss, or raise awareness about an issue is an excellent way for students to take agency and practice social justice. Whether your students create posters, PSA’s, social media campaigns, artwork, presentations, skits, or anything else they can think of, they are taking on an active role in their classroom and in their community.

Materials for these lessons should be in all different forms: books, videos, interactive websites, articles, interviews, and more. If possible, it is incredibly powerful to have someone affected by the issue come in to tell their story. The Institute for Holocaust Education offers a list
of guidelines for bringing in a survivor: [http://www.ihene.org/survivor-visit](http://www.ihene.org/survivor-visit) When teaching about the Holocaust, our school had a Jewish survivor come in and talk with the students about his experiences. Students were moved to tears by his story and reported a deeper more meaningful understanding of the horrors of the Holocaust. Having honest dialogue made students feel like adults so that is how they acted. Although having an adult affected by your chosen topic is powerful, it can be just as meaningful for students when their peers share stories and experiences related to the topic. As professor O’Brien puts it, “students have reported in evaluations that some of the most powerful learning experiences they have taken away from my courses have been those gleaned from the passionate participation of other students… somehow hearing it ‘live’ from a real person they sit next to every day seems to consistently have the greatest impact” (72). Teachers can choose informative videos, show powerful images, and read empowered speeches but the moments students remember most are conversations with their fellow classmates. This is why discussion is so important. Student-led discussion allows teens to explore themes, perspectives, experiences, and much more through a mutual goal to build knowledge. When students lead the conversation in a caring classroom they have an avenue to discuss related issues that they have concerns about. When one student voices a concern you may find that many other students join in to discuss; this is when true learning through honest dialogue takes place.

Although student-led discussions are incredibly powerful moments of learning they can be difficult to manage. By allowing students to steer the discussion the teacher must relinquish some control over her classroom which goes against many classroom management styles. However, it is possible for students to successfully guide discussion without going totally off-track. Edutopia provides many examples to help teachers initiate student-lead conversations here
Student-lead discussions should take place near the end of a unit so students have a lot of information to analyze, interpret, and compare. Your worksheets and assignments should help students build towards the discussion topic so they may use those to prepare. The day prior to your class discussion it may be helpful to review the texts, videos, or media used throughout the lessons so students can continue to make connections between them. It is also in your best interest to model respectful communication methods, transitions, and counterpoints; if students disagree during the discussion you do not want to have to interrupt to settle an argument. Students should know and practice phrases like “I see where you’re coming from, but I think…” or “That’s an interesting point, however…” and you should also remind students that the goal of discussion is just that: to discuss. There does not need to be a winner or a clear-cut answer. If you are still concerned about your students’ discussion skills there are further techniques to ensure success. If you are having a class-wide discussion you may want to establish a talking-stick or item. This item, whether it be a ruler, stuffed animal, gavel, or whatever, dictates who in the room is allowed to talk at any given time. Establish the importance of the talking-object by practicing passing it around the room and allowing students ten seconds to speak before they must pass it off to the next person. This object adds a physical aspect to the discussion which empowers students and deters others from interrupting. Another practice tool is mini-discussions in which you divide students into groups and give them a discussion topic; topics could range from an informational article on whaling to the new school security system. Tell students to focus on the discussion techniques of respect, building on a comment, and countering a point instead of the actual subject. Allowing students to practice respectful conversation in smaller groups gives them the confidence and tools they need to be successful in a large group conversation. To further motivate students you
may put in place a point system based on amount of responses, level of responses, and active engagement. This technique is tricky. In one discussion I used a point system and eager students were hogging the conversation in hopes of a higher score which discouraged the quieter students. I suggest only putting a point system in place if your students need extra motivation to participate.

While students lead the discussion, teachers are not simply sitting back and relaxing. As facilitator, the teacher should keep close track of where the conversation began and where it has taken the students. Although it may be difficult, it is best not to interfere in the conversation unless totally necessary. There will be some moments where you are so proud of a revelation a student just made that you want to praise them and other moments when a student says something so controversial your eyes will bulge out of your head, but we must allow the students to follow the natural flow of the conversation. If students don’t learn how to disagree successfully they will not develop the capacity for having difficult conversations. The only time a teacher should intervene is if a student says something disrespectful with the intent to hurt feelings. This should not occur in a caring classroom, but if it does the teacher may take disciplinary action or interrupt in order to discuss why that student’s comment was disrespectful and why he said it. Leading a brief conversation about disrespect will deter other students from acting out in similar fashion.

If viewing a particularly disturbing video or reading a gritty article one day in class you should prepare students emotionally. No matter the topic or content, if you think your content will be particularly difficult it is your responsibility to warn your students and validate any emotions they may feel after viewing. Once you have finished the content give students a moment of silence to process their emotions before discussing. The first question you ask should
not be a critical or deep-thinking one but instead offer students the chance to express their reactions and emotions. This step takes time, but you cannot let students leave the room without debriefing and helping them understand their feelings. Be explicit about why you chose that content and why it is relevant to the topic before proceeding with the lesson.

Choosing to teach a touchy topic is a brave but necessary choice. Sheltering our students from harsh truths only makes it harder for them to face the facts later on in life. By withholding information from our students we are teaching them an inaccurate view of the world around them which will be shattered as they discover these difficult realities on their own. Although it is hard to teach students about sexism, racism, religious persecution, domestic and sexual abuse, gun violence, and more, it is worth it to give young adults the tools, coping skills, and emotional preparedness they need to face the world and change it for the better.

**Resources for Further Practice**

Although I used many resources for learning throughout, there are so many more incredible articles, websites, books, videos, and more that can help any teacher create a caring classroom environment in which to teach difficult topics such as inequality and racism. Taking the time to explore these websites, links, and books can take you to all new lesson ideas that you can customize to fit your classroom’s needs.

[www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) is an incredible resource for every teacher. This website offers full lessons, units, interactive and up to date activities as well as a plethora of insightful articles and opinion pieces. This is the first website I turn to when looking for lesson ideas.
The National Education Association has a variety of informational links, tools, and lesson plans for cultivating a caring classroom management style as well as advice and support for new teachers: [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)

[www.teach.com](http://www.teach.com) is another website that has a variety of teacher resources for caring and grants to fund your classroom.

[www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org) offers several ideas from simple activities to fully constructed lesson plans about topics such as diversity, ethnicity, sexual identity, disability, immigration, class, and more. Tolerance.org also offers professional developments and workshops teaching teachers to become culturally responsive teachers. This website is an excellent resource for any topic you address in your class!

[www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org) stands for The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and they have been helping schools focus on social-emotional learning for over twenty years. They offer tips on how to create a caring and safe classroom as well as lesson plans and tools for implementing a caring culture schoolwide.

[www.edutopia.org](http://www.edutopia.org) offers information on a large assortment of education topics including social-emotional learning, culturally responsive teaching, and equity. They offer personal narrative, professional opinions, and research based studies to help change your classroom for the better.

[www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org) stands for the Anti-Defamation League and they actively fight against injustice. They give teachers almost endless lesson plans and ideas to teach about all types of bias and discrimination.
www.teacherspayteachers.com is a helpful teacher-led website where teachers post their lesson plans and ideas about any topic from K-12. This website can be helpful, but some of the lessons require a paid membership to view.

www.ted.com is the official website of Ted Talks. Ted Talks are thoughtful, humorous, and informative presentations or speeches done by people around the world about every topic you could think of. They even have playlists about certain topics including race, sexism, bullying, and more difficult topics.

www.goodreads.com is an incredible resource for finding the perfect book for that lesson you’ve been meaning to create. If you need a book to explore sexual preferences there is a search option that brings you to a list of dozens of books related to that theme all rated by relevance and readability. This website is so helpful for finding literature!

www.bookriot.com is a literature lover’s dream! This website offers extensive lists of books including “Around the World in 80 Books” or “Best YA Novels of 2019”. If you are looking to offer students choice in their literature, these lists will help you narrow down your options.

www.discoveryeducation.com has countless interactive lessons for students on a variety of topics. Many of the lessons focus on science or social studies, but there are a number of lessons about issues around the world and cultural awareness.

www.nationalgeographic.org also has several interactive lesson plans and unit plans. These plans focus on connecting with the world in order to create a better society.

Using children’s literature can be helpful when analyzing how society primes us to behave the way they expect us to. Interpreting the way a children’s book like Ludwig
Bemelmans “Madeline” preaches societal norms to small children can be an interesting route to teach students about the control society has over people.

An excellent book for exploring perspective and race is Kekla Magoon’s *How It Went Down*. This book looks at the act of a black teenager getting shot from a variety of different perspectives around the neighborhood and explicitly shows students the meaning of multiple perspectives. This book would be excellent for debate and discussion as students must see through all the different characters’ perceptions and biases to find the truth.

Stephen Chbosky’s YA novel *Perks of Being a Wallflower* is an excellent book to address topics such as sexuality, sexual abuse, and peer pressure. There is also a film version that is moving and appropriate to show in class.

*All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely is an eye-opening book about racial discrimination and white privilege. The book explores the aftermath of a harrowing police encounter in which their classmates are choosing sides and spreading lies. This book makes white privilege explicit for students who just don’t get it.

*Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell is a YA novel that explores social anxiety and introversion in teens. This can be an excellent beginner book to get teens to open up about their anxiety.

*The Girl Who Fell* by S.M. Parker explores abusive teen relationships and how quickly they can become all-encompassing. This is an excellent and interesting read for discussing relationship violence.

The collection of short stories *One in Every Crowd* by Ivan Coyote explores the many stories of LGBTQ adolescents joys and struggles as they face adversity. It can be read for one story or as a whole as each story is powerful.
If you plan on teaching about immigration and deportation, you cannot do so without using Sara Saedi’s memoir *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*. Saedi’s honest and frank attitude about learning she is undocumented makes for a humorous and eye-opening read about the realities of being an undocumented citizen in America.

Each of these resources came up in my research but unfortunately could not all make it into this paper. I wish each teacher the best of luck in creating a caring classroom culture in which she can discuss any topic with her students. Each of these resources offer valuable information, tools, or plans for your students but remember that the teacher is the most valuable resource of all!
Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

Preparing the next generation of young adults is no small task; we must help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in a complex world. Unfortunately, many students are leaving school with a censored view of reality because their teachers have been sheltering them from difficult truths. When students develop this unrealistic, diluted vision of the world in their adolescence it can be incredibly hard for them to understand and accept the painful realization that the “real world” is not always a nice place. During high school, students are going through moral, intellectual, social, and emotional development and it is a time of exploring their relationship to the world around them. If adolescents have a skewed view of the world throughout these developmental stages, then when they do face racism, sexism, classism, and other harsh truths, the foundation they have built their identities on will crumble along with the half-truths they were taught in high school. It is our duty to be honest with students so they are well-equipped to cope with and fight against injustice.

When students are taught only the pleasant half of the truth, not only will they be unprepared for life ahead of them but they will also learn willful ignorance. If teachers don’t lead honest lessons about difficult topics like racial inequality then all students suffer. White students will not be able to identify their own privilege and therefore will deny its existence, further widening the racial divide in America; students of color will be unprepared to cope with the systemic racism which will lead to a declining state of mental health and self-esteem as well as complacency due to a lack of knowledge on how to fight injustice. Although these lessons can be emotionally challenging and potentially painful for your students, they are necessary to help them become a generation of well-informed, caring, passionate citizens who want to change the world for the better.
Opening students’ eyes to uncomfortable topics involves having some very difficult discussions. In order to create an environment in which your students feel safe addressing complicated topics, you must first cultivate a caring classroom environment. A caring classroom teacher knows her students well, listens and acts on their specific needs, offers student choice and independence, and facilitates trusting relationships with each student. The caring classroom focuses on culturally responsive and social-emotional learning to help students become aware of their own identities as well as learn to value others. In this environment, the teacher can help students identify and manage their own emotions, hone their decision-making skills, build their ability to resolve conflicts peaceably, and see things from another perspective. Once students have a better understanding of themselves and their peers, they can use that knowledge to interact with people all over the world. Integrating cultural aspects into the caring classroom not only shows all students that they are cared for but it also teaches students the value of our differences. Blending a caring classroom with social-emotional and culturally responsive pedagogy creates the perfect environment for students to engage in a genuine conversation about difficult topics.

Many researchers have advocated for telling kids the whole truth about their world and many studies have shown the positive effects of both social-emotional and culturally responsive teaching. The concept of a caring classroom culture is far from new and secondary teachers are always looking for appropriate ways to tell our students we care. All of these ideas together in one caring classroom opens the door for the teacher to talk about difficult topics in a safe, non-judgmental space. In your class, students will develop the communication skills, empathy, and emotional maturity needed to comprehend and cope with the complex issues that affect us. These
skills will pave the way for students to learn about sensitive topics in a mature, sophisticated way.

Pairing relevant literature along with these lessons helps students relate to the concepts in a more thoughtful and personal way. Use literature to open up discussions about these themes and how the characters cope with them. Not only does literature offer a wide variety of answers and insights for students, but it also encourages them to practice their empathy and problem-solving skills as well as share similar experiences with the class. When students begin to open up to each other about their experiences with subjects such as discrimination the classroom becomes a more honest and humane place. Encouraging the sharing of stories and experiences shows that you respect and value your students’ voices and inspires a deeper connection with the content. When students see how these difficult issues affect themselves and those around them, they will be driven to better understand and fight back against injustice and inequality.

For further study, I would recommend exploring different topics through the lens of the caring classroom. Caring is the key which opens the door to infinite possibilities and teaching about any topic is entirely possible in a caring classroom. I would like to see further study done on different touchy topics explored through the caring classroom. I would recommend that a study be done on how to address uncomfortable topics with middle school students as they lack the social-emotional and intellectual maturity that high schoolers have developed through puberty. I would also recommend further study into what else the caring classroom is capable of such as community based projects, global communication, and advocating for disadvantaged groups.

Teachers spend their time, resources, money, and effort preparing high school students for “the real world” as if they are not already living in it. When this phrase is used it only further
distances students from reality which is the exact opposite of preparing them for life outside of high school. We need to value our students’ voices, opinions, and experiences; validate their emotions, frustrations, and passions; show them the value of literature, discussion, and empathy; and teach them about adversity, hardship, and reality. Anything less and we are only preparing our students for failure.
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