

Ycteen

November/December 2014

LESSON GUIDE



Dear Educators,

Figuring out their answer to “Who am I?” is the work of the teenager. Asking that question, listening without judgment, and being responsive in our instruction is the work of the teacher. To help both student and teacher in this endeavor, *Ycteen*’s newest issue is all about identity. The stories show teens struggling to unpack, rethink, and advocate for their emerging identities.

This struggle needs exactly the kind of support you can offer in classrooms that foster caring relationships, multiculturalism, and equity. After all, another fundamental question of adolescence is “Do I belong here?” Being able to answer “yes” is a prerequisite for learning in any content area. This is what we in education call an “identity-safe classroom.”

A good place to start creating inclusive classrooms is the lesson *We All Belong Here*, which can help your group build community and explore identity. The stories “Keepin’ the Faith” and “The Fairest of Them All” deepen the discussion as those writers confront systems of oppression and messages that suggest to them that who they are is not OK. I hope the accompanying lessons will open up dialogue about these complex issues, which many young people struggle with, as evidenced in the first prize winner of our essay contest, Kira Robinson.

I want to close by thanking the teens who have written their truth in this issue of *Ycteen*. They find the voice to do so because they want their story to help other teens, like your students. And I want to appreciate you for finding the heart and energy to create and lead classrooms that have enough room in them for the diverse identities of all of your students.



Best wishes for a great 2014-15 school year,

Elizabeth Johnson

Elizabeth Johnson
Education Director





COMMON CORE

ELA Literacy & Social and Emotional Learning

We All Belong Here

Story to Use: “[Speak Out: Not Who You Think I Am](#),” by YCteen staff, p. 10.

Story Summary: We all have aspects of our identities that are surprising to others. Here, teens reveal less obvious parts of themselves that they’re proud of.

Lesson Objectives and Common Core Connections:

- Students make personal connections to a text and successfully participate in story-based activities and discussions.
- Students reflect on their sense of self and identity.
- Students will propel the conversation by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes and larger ideas (CCLS SL.1.b).
- Students will seek to understand other perspectives and cultures and communicate effectively with individuals from varied backgrounds (CCLS SL.1.e).

Before Reading the Story (10 min)

This opening activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. After gathering students in a circle, introduce the **Go-Round** by explaining that you will offer a prompt to the group. Going around the circle, each student will finish the sentence in a way that is honest for them. Students share just their one word or short phrase response with no discussion or story-telling. Remind students to practice active listening during the activity.
2. **Go-Round** prompt: “When you look at me, you don’t see...”
3. Thank the group for sharing and open a discussion with these questions:
 - Why do we sometimes hide parts of ourselves?
 - Have you ever experienced people being “blind” to parts of your identity by refusing to see or acknowledge them? How does that feel?
 - Where in your life do you feel the most free to be yourself, sharing all parts of your identity? What about that space makes you feel accepted?

During Reading (10 min)

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, students build comprehension and support fluency.

1. Introduce the story (see the summary above).

2. Share the expectations for a group read aloud; volunteers take turns reading aloud as much or as little as they would like. As the teacher, you may stop periodically to discuss or check in on active reading by asking students to share their responses to the story.
3. While still sitting in a circle, have volunteers read aloud the diverse teen responses in the “Speak Out” section of *YCteen*.
4. Next, ask the group to further consider questions of identity by asking what stood out to them, what connections they can make, and what questions were raised.

After Reading the Story (30 min)

During this post-reading activity students will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. Introduce **Identity Charts** as a graphic tool that helps us consider the many factors that shape who we are as individuals and as communities. When we share them with each other, it helps us to create community in the classroom by building relationships and breaking down stereotypes.
2. First, have students individually brainstorm a list in response to the question “Who am I?”
3. In a **Partner Share**, ask students to share their lists and then work together to identify the broader identity categories they considered when responding to the question. Next, have each pair share out the categories they agreed on and write them on the board. Your list will likely include:
 - Role in the family (e.g., daughter, sister, son, etc...)
 - Interests and affinity groups (e.g. guitar player, artist, skater, hip hop, etc)
 - Cultural background (religion, race/ethnicity, nationality, home language)
 - Gender and sexual orientation
 - Physical characteristics
4. Looking back at their brainstorm lists, students can group items into the categories the class generated on the board. They are now ready to make their identity charts.
5. On a large piece of paper have student write their name and/or draw a self- portrait in the middle, leaving lots of white space around. Give these directions:
 - As you chart the different aspects of your identity, think about their placement. Put closest to your name those items that have been the most significant in shaping who you are. Place furthest away those that have had the least impact, with the rest in between.
 - Next, consider the relationships between different aspects of your identity. Draw lines that connect them and consider the intersections that are created.
6. When everyone is done, have students return to the circle and share their identity charts with the group. You may ask them to just select and share three of the items that have had the most significant impact on their identity, and explain why. You may also ask them to notice new connections they have discovered among themselves.

7. As a **Learning Extension**, link this activity to your Group Agreements/Norms. Ask the group this question: “Considering the diverse identities in the room, what new agreements do we want to add to help ensure this classroom is inclusive of all parts of who we are?” (Examples might include, don’t make assumptions about each other, don’t use language that stereotypes people, get to know each other better, etc.). If you don’t have Group Agreements that you co-created with your students, this is a great opportunity to do so and to help create an identity-safe classroom for all learners.



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ELA Literacy & Social and Emotional Learning

Finding Myself in the Between

Stories to Use: “Keepin’ the Faith: Can’t I be Gay and a Christian?” by Anonymous, pp. 3-4. and “The Changing Relationship Between Christianity and Gay People,” by YCteen staff, pp. 4-5.

Story Summaries: The writer of the first story details his inner conflict between his religious beliefs and sexual orientation. The second story offers a different way of interpreting the Bible and its teachings.

Lesson Objectives and Common Core Connections:

- Students make personal connections to a text and successfully participate in story-based activities and discussions.
- Students reflect on their sense of self and identity.
- Students are able to empathize with other youths’ experiences.
- Students engage in a wide range of prewriting experiences, such as using a variety of visual representations to express personal, social, and cultural connections and insights (CCLS W.11.a).
- Students will read, annotate, and analyze informational text on topics related to diverse and non-traditional cultures and viewpoints (CCLS R.9.a).

Before Reading the Story (10 min)

This opening activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. Introduce **Freewriting** by explaining that students will have four minutes to respond to a prompt in writing. The goal is to express their thoughts freely without worrying about writing conventions. The expectation is that everyone writes, without stopping, for the full time. (Note: writing lists and/or drawing are modifications that support diverse learners.)
2. **Freewrite** prompt: Inner conflict occurs when you are confronted with a problem that presents difficult choices. It can feel like being torn between opposing demands, and struggling to know what the right decision is. Choose one of the two prompts below to reflect on an experience with inner conflict:
 - “Think of a time when you felt you had to hide a part of who you are in order to be accepted. What was the situation? How did you feel? What was the effect on your personal relationships?”
 - “Think of a time when you questioned or challenged a belief held deeply by your family. What was the situation? How did you feel? What was the effect on your family relationships?”
3. **Partner Share** directions: Students should select a partner and/or turn to the person next to them. Facing each other, and practicing active listening, partners each take a turn sharing their responses to the freewrite prompt. Each speaker will have two minutes

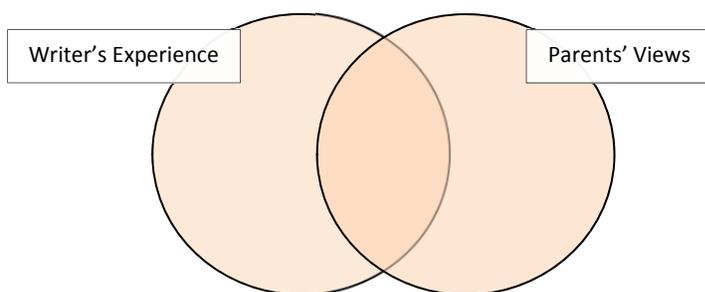
to talk and is in charge of what they choose to share from their writing. The listener does not need to respond, but should thank the speaker for sharing. After two minutes, direct partners to switch roles.

4. **Volunteer Share** directions: Returning to the whole group, ask for volunteers to share their responses to how inner conflict felt and what its effect on their personal relationships was.

During Reading (15 min)

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, students build comprehension and support fluency.

(Note: Before starting to read, draw a Venn Diagram on the board like this:)



1. Introduce the story “Keepin’ the Faith” (see the summary above).
2. Share the expectations for a group read aloud; volunteers take turns reading aloud as much or as little as they would like. As the teacher, you may stop periodically to discuss or check in on active reading by asking students to share their responses to the story.
3. **Reading for a purpose** directions: Half of the room is going to read for and underline examples in the text of the writer’s experience of being gay/questioning. The other half of the room is going to read for and underline examples of the writer’s parents’ beliefs about being gay.
4. Pause periodically to check in and ask for some examples of what students have underlined. Write them in the matching circle of the Venn diagram, leaving the center blank.

After Reading the Story (15 min)

During this post-reading activity students will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. Gather more text-based examples for the Venn Diagram from each side of the room. Check with the group to see that each perspective is fully and accurately captured.
2. Ask the group to look closely at the Venn Diagram. Discuss these questions:
 - “The middle usually represents what the two halves have in common. Is there anything we can write in the middle that bridges the writer’s experiences and the parents’ views?” (There will be nothing, or very little).

- “How would you describe the writer’s inner conflict?” Look for examples in the text that describe his feelings.
- “What advice would you give the parents? The writer?”

During Reading (15 min)

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, students build comprehension and support fluency.

1. Introduce the story “The Changing Relationship Between Christianity and Gay People” (see the summary above).
2. **Reading for a purpose** directions: In this interview with Reverend Danielsen-Morales, let’s read for new perspectives he offers that could help to bridge the differences between the writer’s experiences and his parents’ views. Underline these examples in the text.

After Reading the Story (20 min)

During this post-reading activity students will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. Going back to the Venn Diagram, add to the middle examples of (possible) common ground and connections you just underlined in the text.
2. After the Venn Diagram is complete and you have discussed it for understanding, transition the students to an independent writing activity.
3. **Dear Teen Writer** directions: Have students write a letter to the writer of “Keepin’ the Faith,” by Anonymous. Provide the following structure for the letter (*to support diverse learners you may draft sentence stems to guide the flow of the letter*):
 - Look back on and paraphrase the writer’s inner conflict.
 - Demonstrate empathy and/or make a personal connection.
 - Based on the Reverend’s advice in the middle of the Venn Diagram, offer some advice to the writer that can help him to resolve his inner conflict.
4. Share the letters as time allows.



COMMON CORE

ELA Literacy & Social and Emotional Learning

Unlearning the Oppression that Binds Us

Stories to Use: “[The Fairest of Them All](#),” by Jessica Flayser, pp. 12-13.

Story Summary: Jessica experiences racism in the U.S. and South Africa, and internalizes it. A natural hair blog and a growing understanding of society help her see that black is beautiful.

Lesson Objectives and Common Core Connections:

- Students reflect on their sense of self and identity and recognize how they can shape it.
- Students are able to take the perspective of others and empathize with their peers.
- Students will read and comprehend literary nonfiction proficiently (CCLS R.10).
- Students will participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners (CCLS SL.1)
- Students will engage in a wide range of writing experiences to express personal, social, and cultural connections and insights (CCLS W.11.a)

Before Reading the Story (20 min)

This opening activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. Before beginning this lesson, revisit your Group Agreements, or other community norms you use to ensure respectful communication and emotional safety in the classroom. Being able to actively listen and honor diverse perspectives are essential skills for engaging in difficult conversations about race.
2. Using the handout “Understanding Oppression,” build a collective understanding in the large group about what each term means.
3. **Table Talk** directions: Direct students to form small groups of three or four and distribute one handout to each table. Working together, group members should discuss the questions on the handout, with one person writing down notes from the discussion.
4. Have each group share out the highlights from their discussion of questions 1, 2, and 4. (Large group sharing of personal experiences for question 3 should happen by open invitation and based on the sense of emotional safety in the room and time to listen thoughtfully.)

During Reading (20 min)

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, students build comprehension and support fluency.

5. Introduce the story (see the summary above).
6. Share the expectations for a group read aloud; volunteers take turns reading aloud as much or as little as they would like. As the teacher, you may stop periodically to discuss or check in on active reading by asking students to share their responses to the story.
7. **Text Coding** directions (write up on the board): While reading aloud together, identify examples in Jessica’s story of the vocabulary we just learned about. In the margins, write the following:
 - **C** (when you read an example of **Colorism**)
 - **IT** (for an example of **Institutional Oppression**)
 - **IP** (for read an example of **Interpersonal Oppression**)
 - **IN** (for an example of **Internalized Oppression**)
 - **BB** (when you read an example of “**Black is Beautiful**”)

(As an alternative, assign different sections of the room to read for just one of the examples, thus dividing up the work of text coding.)
8. Read the story aloud together. Stop and discuss periodically by asking volunteers to share examples of what they have text coded and why. Share the examples you have coded and your thinking about them to model active reading.

After Reading the Story (20 min)

During this post-reading activity students will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. Introduce the concept of a **Praise Poem** as a form of creative writing that asks us to honor and celebrate the unique aspects of our cultural identity. Writing these kinds of poems helps to unlearn the stereotypes we hold and free ourselves from internalized oppression. In her book *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*, educator Linda Christensen writes about how praise poems “give us a positive way to look at ourselves,” and also “speak against the negative portrayals students often see associated with their neighborhoods, their race, language, gender, sexual orientation, and size.”
2. Before this lesson, collect examples of poems that celebrate multicultural traditions and beauty. For example, the poem “Who Can Be Born Black” by Mari Evans and “Blackberry Sweet” by Dudley Randall speak of the beauty of Blackness. Lucille Clifton’s poem “What the Mirror Said” can provide both inspiration and structure for this writing exercise. Other examples include Clifton’s “Homage to My Hips” and works by Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, and Countee Cullen.
3. After exploring some literary examples, have students think about aspects of different cultural identities that dominant society has overlooked, stereotyped, or put down. Skin color, hair texture, eye shape, body shape, and home language are examples that typically come up. Next, have them think about ways they could praise those same aspects and reclaim them as examples of beauty, pride, and strength. (Usually this results in a series of similes and metaphors.)

4. Directions for free writing of **Praise Poems**: Working individually, have students write to one, or all, of the following prompts:
 - Write a Praise Poem that celebrates a friend or family member whose cultural identity is *different* than yours.
 - Write a Praise Poem that celebrates your cultural identity.
 - Write a Praise Poem that celebrates Jessica Flayser’s cultural identity.

5. After students have had some time to free write, set a positive tone in the classroom for sharing by dimming the lights and gathering students in a circle. Invite volunteers to read their poems. As an alternative, ask everyone to identify just one line in their poem to share in a go-round reading.

Student Handout #1

Understanding Oppression

COLORISM

Prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group. For example, when lighter-skinned people are seen as more attractive, and treated more favorably, than darker-skinned people.

INSTITUTIONAL OPPRESSION/RACISM

The idea that one group of people is better than another group and has the right to control the other gets embedded in the institutions of the society: the laws, the legal system, police practices, the education system and schools, public policies, media images, and political power. These systems perpetuate racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of discrimination and prejudice.

INTERPERSONAL OPPRESSION/RACISM

Institutional oppression gives permission and reinforcement for individual members of the dominant group to personally disrespect and mistreat individuals of the oppressed group. Interpersonal oppression is what white people do to people of color up close—the racist jokes, stereotypes, harassment, etc.

INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION/RACISM

When members of an oppressed group absorb into themselves the negative messages and discrimination they receive from the dominant group and see reflected in the institutions of society. People of color suffering from internalized racism, for example, may loathe the physical characteristics that make them distinct such as skin color, hair texture or eye shape, and adopt a white supremacist mindset. This results in self-hatred and hatred of their respective racial group.

“BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL”

Beginning in the late 1960s, this is an example of a cultural pride movement to fight the internalized racism experienced by African Americans, specifically with regard to beauty standards. To express cultural pride is to understand how institutional and interpersonal oppression affects you personally and to choose to challenge that thinking and replace it with a love and appreciation for your cultural identity, and other members of your cultural group.

Discussion Prompts:

1. What questions do you have about the terms described above?
2. Have you observed any of these playing out in your community or in our society? Please list as many examples of each as you can.
3. Do you have any personal experiences you would like to share?
4. What do you predict the story “The Fairest of Them All” is going to be about?

Open-ended questions you can use with any story in YCteen:

1. What main problem or challenge did the writer face?
2. What choices did the teen have in trying to deal with the problem?
3. Which way of dealing with the problem was most effective for the teen? Why?
4. What strengths, skills, or resources did the teen use to address the challenge?
5. If you were in the writer's shoes what would you have done?
6. What could adults have done better to help this teen?
7. What have you learned from reading this story that you didn't know before?
8. What connections from your own life, the world, or other text you have read, can you make to this story? *This reminds me of.... (text-to-self, text-to-world, text-to-text)*
9. What surprised you in this story?
10. Do you have a different view of this issue, or see a different way of dealing with it, after reading this story? Why or why not?

YCteen Essay Contest

\$150 First Prize | \$75 Second Prize | \$50 Third Prize

Enter online at bit.ly/ycwritingcontest

Contest #226

Have you kept difficult emotions to yourself and then eventually opened up to a friend, family member, or therapist? Did your behavior, actions, or attitude change after you talked about your feelings with someone you trust?

Deadline: January 30, 2015