

**Handout**

# Personal Narrative Connection Questions

**Directions:** After reading the personal narrative, discuss the Part 1 questions with others in your group. Support your ideas with examples from the reading and your own lives. Record notes so you can share key points with your classmates who read different narratives. Do not start the Part 2 questions until your teacher tells you to do so.

## Part 1: Expert Group Discussion Questions

### Reading: Lauren’s Story (Lauren from Providence, RI)

1. In your opinion, what is the most valuable idea in Lauren’s story?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What do you think Lauren means when she says, “Once I made that distinction, I began to think about what *ability* really means. I began to see things around me that were ableist”? How does this realization impact how Lauren understands herself and the world around her?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Discuss Lauren’s *social identity*. What labels does she use to describe her identity in different social groups? What labels do others or society assign to her? How does Lauren navigate the tension between how she defines herself and how others may perceive her?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Earlier, you learned about *narrative identity*, or the internal story that you tell about yourself that connects memories from the past with the present and ideas about the future. According to psychologist Daniel McAdams, “Like myths, our narrative identity contains heroes and villains that help us or hold us back, major events that determine the plot, challenges overcome and suffering we have endured. When we want people to understand us, we share our story or parts of it with them; when we want to know who another person is, we ask them to share part of their story.”<sup>1</sup>  
  
What do you think Lauren wants you, the reader, to understand about who she is through the story she tells?

1 Quoted in Emily Esfahani Smith, “The Two Kinds of Stories We Tell about Ourselves,” TED website (IDEAS.TED.com), January 12, 2017.

### Reading: AJ's Story (AJ from Washington, DC)

1. In your opinion, what is the most valuable idea in AJ's story?
2. How does AJ help explain the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation? Use examples from the text to support your ideas.
3. The reading ends with this reflection: "Trust who you are and always remember it. I still protect those pure aspects of that little boy growing up before he was told to be a girl."  
Discuss AJ's *social identity*. What labels does AJ use to describe their identity in different social groups? What labels do others or society assign to them? How does this quotation help you understand how AJ navigates the tension between how they define themselves and how others may perceive them?
4. Earlier, you learned about *narrative identity*, or the internal story that you tell about yourself that connects memories from the past with the present and ideas about the future. According to psychologist Daniel McAdams, "Like myths, our narrative identity contains heroes and villains that help us or hold us back, major events that determine the plot, challenges overcome and suffering we have endured. When we want people to understand us, we share our story or parts of it with them; when we want to know who another person is, we ask them to share part of their story."<sup>1</sup>  
What do you think AJ wants you, the reader, to understand about who they are through the story they tell?

### Reading: Zöe's Story (My Dell Hid My Privilege and My Mac Hid My Financial Need)

1. In your opinion, what is the most valuable idea in Zöe's story?

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Emily Esfahani Smith, "The Two Kinds of Stories We Tell about Ourselves," TED website (IDEAS.TED.com), January 12, 2017.

2. When describing the experience of studying in the library with her new friends at Andover, Zöe observes, “My laptop, which I had thought was my ticket to the elite world of Andover, actually gave me away as the outsider I was.”

How is Zöe’s Dell laptop both a ticket to and something that separates her from the social world of her school? How does Zöe navigate the tension between wanting to belong and feeling like an outsider at Andover?

3. Discuss Zöe’s *social identity*. What labels does she use to describe her identity in different social groups? What labels do others or society assign to her? How does Zöe navigate the tension between how she defines herself and how others may perceive her?

4. Earlier, you learned about *narrative identity*, or the internal story that you tell about yourself that connects memories from the past with the present and ideas about the future. According to psychologist Daniel McAdams, “Like myths, our narrative identity contains heroes and villains that help us or hold us back, major events that determine the plot, challenges overcome and suffering we have endured. When we want people to understand us, we share our story or parts of it with them; when we want to know who another person is, we ask them to share part of their story.”<sup>1</sup>

What do you think Zöe wants you, the reader, to understand about who she is through the story she tells?

### **Reading: Tiara’s Story (How Assimilation Changed My Identification with My Culture)**

1. In your opinion, what is the most valuable idea in Tiara’s story?

2. How does Tiara navigate the tension between wanting to belong and feeling like an outsider at her private boarding school in New Jersey? What does she gain and lose through this process?

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

3. Discuss the following sentence of Tiara's story: "I felt stuck in between two places, two people, and two cultures." Use this quotation to help you discuss Tiara's *social identity*. What labels do you think she might use to describe her identity in different social groups? What labels do you think others or society might assign to her? What impact do these labels have on her self-perception and relationships with others?
4. Earlier, you learned about narrative identity, or the internal story that you tell about yourself that connects memories from the past with the present and ideas about the future. According to psychologist Daniel McAdams, "Like myths, our narrative identity contains heroes and villains that help us or hold us back, major events that determine the plot, challenges overcome and suffering we have endured. When we want people to understand us, we share our story or parts of it with them; when we want to know who another person is, we ask them to share part of their story."  
What do you think Tiara wants you, the reader, to understand about who she is through the story she tells?

## Part 2: Teaching Group Discussion Questions

**Directions:** Start by having each student in your group answer the first question so you can learn about the writers from each other's personal narratives. Then discuss questions 2 and 3. Support your ideas with evidence from the personal narratives, other texts you have studied in this unit, and your own experiences.

1. Whose personal narrative did you read? What is one valuable idea from it that you want to share with the group?
2. What are some consequences for young people when their beliefs about themselves are different from the labels that others place on them? How do the personal narrative you read and your life experiences help you answer this question?
3. Who or what can make it challenging for young people to be who they really want to be in the world? How can young people navigate or rise above these challenges? How do the personal narrative you read and your own life experiences help you answer this question?