

Lesson

Group Membership and Belonging

Overview**About This Lesson**

There is a universal desire to belong, to feel like we are part of a larger group that values, respects, and cares for us—a group to which we can contribute our ideas and talents. When we feel a sense of belonging, it has positive effects on our self-esteem, agency, and the meaning we ascribe to our lives.

In this lesson, students will analyze an informational text in order to develop an understanding of our innate need to belong and the emotional and cognitive impact that this deep desire to belong can have on us. They will consider the ways in which we may sometimes prioritize our own feelings of belonging and sacrifice our values in the process, while causing harm to others who are outside of our groups. Students' discussions will help them consider the factors that shape experiences of belonging for themselves and others in their community and world.

Essential Questions

- What are the forces that shape belonging?
- How can we reduce barriers to belonging for ourselves and others?

Guiding Questions

- Why do we seek out belonging in groups?
- What can we gain and lose from belonging to a group?

Facing History Learning Outcomes

In order to deepen their understanding of the text, themselves, each other, and the world, students will . . .

- Describe the factors that influence their moral development, such as their personal experiences, their interactions with others, and their surroundings, and reflect on how these factors influence their sense of right and wrong.
- Recognize that their decisions matter, impact others, and shape their communities and the world.

What's Included

This lesson uses the following texts and materials. Access materials and a lesson Plan-on-a-Page in this [Google Folder](#).

- **Handout:** Why Do People Need to Belong? Quotations
- **Reading:** Why Do People Need to Belong?

Preparing to Teach

A Note to Teachers

1. Preparing Quotation Cards for a “Mix and Mingle” Activity

“Mix and Mingle,” inspired by Kyleene Beers,¹ is a pre-reading strategy designed to get students out of their seats and interacting with one another as they make predictions about a text. Students each receive a card with a short excerpt from the text, and they “mix and mingle” to make predictions about what they will read. You can adjust the challenge level by distributing the cards randomly or purposefully assigning cards with more or less complexity to particular students. You can also have pairs of students share a card for additional scaffolding.

Before class, make enough copies of the handout **Why Do People Need to Belong? Quotations** so that each student can have one card. There are 12 quotations on the handout. If you teach multiple sections, you might consider affixing the quotations to index cards for durability so that you only have to make one set.

2. Familiarizing Yourself with “Conver-Stations”

If you have not used the “Conver-Stations” discussion strategy, which was designed by educator Sarah Brown Wessling, you can find instructions in the *Cult of Pedagogy* blog post [The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies](#).² Students will discuss the lesson’s reading using this interactive and engaging strategy.

3. Defining Terminology in the “Why Do People Need to Belong?” Reading

This lesson’s main reading includes a discussion of the groups that we belong to based on aspects of our identity. The following definitions can help students think and talk about their social identity—their sense of who they are based on their membership in certain groups:

¹ Kyleene Beers, *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do* (Heinemann, 2003), 94–95.

² Jennifer Gonzalez, [“The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies,”](#) *Cult of Pedagogy* blog, October 15, 2015.

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- **Ethnicity:** A group of people who are connected by a common language, culture, spiritual tradition, and/or ancestral history.
- **Gender:** The socially prescribed and enforced roles, behaviors, and expectations that are assigned to individuals at birth based on their biological sex. Gender is a social construct that individuals can embrace, reject, or adjust to create a gender identity that feels true to their sense of who they are.
- **Nationality:** Your membership in a country where you were born and/or where you have citizenship.
- **Race:** A socially constructed system of classifying humans based on their skin color and other physical characteristics. Race is not grounded in genetics or scientific fact.
- **Sex:** A label that individuals are assigned at birth that is based on chromosomes and the physical characteristics that distinguish male and female bodies.
- **Sexual orientation:** The inner feelings of who a person is attracted to emotionally and/or physically, in relation to their own gender identity. People may identify as “asexual,” “bisexual,” “gay,” “lesbian,” “pansexual,” “queer,” “straight,” or in other ways.

Lesson Plan

Activities

1. Mix and Mingle to Develop Schema

Start the lesson by letting students know that they will be thinking about their membership in groups and what we may gain or lose by belonging to a group. They will start with a “Mix and Mingle” activity in which they will each receive a card with a short quotation from a text they will be reading in class today.

Pass out the cards that you prepared from the **Why Do People Need to Belong?**

Quotations handout so that each student has one card. You may have two or three students with similar cards, depending on your class size. Ask students to read their card and then think about their response to the following question: *Based on your card, what might the text be about? What makes you say that?*

Then invite students to get out of their seats and “mix and mingle” with their classmates. You might play music while they walk around and have them find a partner when you hit pause. Once paired, have them share their cards with one another, discuss how their cards might be related, and make one or more

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predictions about the text based on their card. Repeat so that students have the opportunity to mingle with four or five peers.

2. Read and Discuss an Informational Text about Belonging

Tell students that next, they will be reading the source of their cards, an informational text about belonging. You might read together as a class or have students work in pairs, using a strategy like [Read Aloud](#) or [Say Something](#). If it's the first time that your students have used a strategy, we recommend that you model the first section of the reading with a [Think Aloud](#).

Pass out and read **Why Do People Need to Belong?** As you read, pause to answer any clarifying questions that arise.

3. Discuss the Reading in Rotating Groups

So that students can interact with a wide range of peers, use the Conver-Stations strategy³ to discuss the reading (see Teaching Note 2). Move students into groups of four and have them count off by four within their groups (tell them that they need to remember their numbers!). Then instruct them to discuss the first connection question that follows the reading. They should record notes because they will be sharing their ideas with people in other groups.

After they have finished with the first question, instruct the 1s to move to a new group. They should share highlights from their discussion of the first question and learn what their new group discussed. Then have the groups discuss the second question.

Repeat this process with questions 2 through 5. For the second round, the 2s can move to a different group while other students remain sitting. Each discussion round should start with students sharing their thoughts from the previous question before moving on to the new question. Then a different number moves so that the composition of the groups changes with each round.

4. Reflect on New Understanding

Use the [Connect, Extend, Challenge](#) strategy to help students reflect on their learning from this lesson. This could be a homework assignment or one that students complete at the end of class if you have time. You can decide whether it

³ Gonzalez, "The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies."

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should be a private reflection in their journals or you'd like to see a snapshot of their thinking on an [exit ticket](#).

- **Connect:** How do the ideas and information in the **Why Do People Need to Belong?** reading connect to what you already know about belonging, group membership, and values?
- **Extend:** How does this reading extend or broaden your thinking about belonging, group membership, and values?
- **Challenge:** Does this reading challenge or complicate your understanding of belonging, group membership, and values? What new questions does it raise for you?

Extension Activities

1. Make Connections across Informational Texts

If you taught the **Borders & Belonging Introductory Lessons** prior to starting this text set, have students see what connections they can draw between the two informational texts **Introducing Borders** (or the **adapted version**) and **Why Do People Need to Belong?** Working in groups of three or four, have students take out their readings and handouts from the introductory lessons and the text set thus far. After students have had a chance to review the **Introducing Borders** reading, have them use the [Connect, Extend, Challenge](#) strategy to synthesize their understanding of the resources.

- **Connect:** How do the ideas and information in the **Why Do People Need to Belong?** reading connect to the reading **Introducing Borders**?
- **Extend:** How does **Why Do People Need to Belong?** extend or broaden your thinking about the ideas and information in **Introducing Borders**?
- **Challenge:** Does **Why Do People Need to Belong?** challenge or complicate your understanding of borders and the ways in which they can influence a person's sense of belonging? What new questions does this reading raise for you?