

Lesson

Belonging on Your Own Terms

Overview**About This Lesson**

In this final lesson of the text set, students read and discuss a collection of narrative essays in which the authors share stories of moving from fitting in to belonging as young adults. The narratives explore a range of barriers that prevent the authors from fully belonging—race, gender identity, language, and culture—and the ways in which their identities have been shaped by their beliefs about themselves, others’ perceptions of them, and messages they receive from society at large.

Taken together, these personal stories, along with the other texts in this text set, help students recognize that the process of navigating the relationship between who we are and where we belong is a complex, ongoing process that we are always negotiating. While the factors that shape belonging can be both internal and external, there are steps we can take to increase our own sense of belonging and foster inclusive and accepting spaces for others in our communities.

Essential Questions

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

Guiding Questions

- How do you navigate the tension between your desire to fit in and your need to express your own individual identity?
- What steps can we take to create a more inclusive and accepting class and school community?

Facing History Learning Outcomes

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

- Analyze the internal and external conflicts that characters face and the impact these conflicts can have on an individual’s choices and actions, both in the text and in the

real world.

- 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:** Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors
- **Reading:** I Am the Only American Indian
- **Reading:** I've Been Called Worse
- **Reading:** Living in Two Worlds
- **Audio:** Living in Two Worlds

Preparing to Teach

A Note to Teachers

1. Pacing This Two-Day Lesson

Unless students read their personal narrative for homework, plan to spend two class periods working with these essays. On the first day, students will do the first part of the **Jigsaw** activity in “expert” groups and complete a reflection. They will discuss the stories in “teaching” groups and as a whole class on the second day.

2. Preparing for the Personal Narrative Jigsaw

In this lesson, students will read and discuss personal narrative essays that feature young people finding a sense of belonging in their schools and lives. Before teaching the lesson, familiarize yourself with the **Jigsaw** teaching strategy and decide whether you will assign students specific readings, create random groupings, or preview each reading with the class and let students choose the one that interests them. The narratives range in length and text complexity. “Living in Two Worlds” includes an audio recording, so you might assign it to students who would benefit from audio support. “I Am the Only American Indian” is illustrated, so you might assign it to students who would benefit from images. You could work with a group that would benefit from teacher support to read “I’ve Been Called Worse.” The narratives are short, so students might read them to themselves or out loud together.

All of the narratives feature young people sharing personal stories about their sense of who they are and where they belong. Take time to review your [classroom](#)

[contract](#) with students before beginning the lesson so that they are ready to engage with the story they read. This extra step will help to reinforce the norms you have established for engaging with texts and the idea of the classroom as a brave space for students to raise questions or express emotions that may arise.

Lesson Plan

Activities

Day 1

1. Reflect on Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors

Distribute the [Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors](#) handout and read the quotation together to introduce Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's observations about the relationship between reading and identity.

Then have students reflect on texts that have provided windows, mirrors, and sliding-glass-door experiences for them. For this exercise, we have expanded Dr. Bishop's idea to include all kinds of texts, not just books.

Debrief the activity in pairs and see if any volunteers would like to share with the class. It can build community when you share your own responses to this prompt alongside your students.

2. Read and Discuss Personal Narrative Essays

Then let students know that they will be reading and discussing four personal narrative essays using the [Jigsaw](#) strategy. While each student will only read one of the four essays, there will be opportunities to learn about and discuss all four together. Depending on each student's identity and experiences, these readings may provide mirror experiences that resonate with them, windows into someone else's world, or sliding glass doors that they can step through in their imagination.

Then explain the activity and move students into their "expert" groups of four. Pass out the **Belonging on Your Own Terms: Connection Questions** handout and the readings for this activity:

- I Am the Only American Indian
- I've Been Called Worse
- Living in Two Worlds

- Who I Was vs. Who I Became

Let students know that in this class period, they will read and discuss their stories with their “expert” groups. Encourage students to support their ideas with evidence from the personal narratives, the text set’s readings, their journals, their handouts, and their own experiences. In the next lesson, they will share what they learned from their story and engage with the other stories in new “teaching” groups.

3. Reflect with a 3-2-1 Response

With students still in “expert” groups, use the [3-2-1](#) strategy to help them synthesize ideas from their reading. They can record their ideas in their [journals](#) or on an [exit ticket](#) if you would like to collect them to check for understanding.

- What are **three** things that you learned from your group’s text or discussion?
- What are **two** ways that you contributed to your group’s reading of the text and discussion?
- What is **one** question that you have about your text or something that came up in your discussion?

If you have time, you can ask for volunteers to share ideas from their responses. Let students know that they will have a chance to learn about all of the stories in the next lesson.

Day 2

1. Identify Valuable Ideas in Personal Narratives

Have students sit with their “expert” groups from the previous lesson. Let them know that they will have a few minutes to review their stories and **Belonging on Your Own Terms: Connection Questions** handouts before they move into “teaching” groups to share what they have learned.

Project the following question on the board and have students write a quick response in their journals: *In your opinion, what is the most valuable idea in your story about fitting in or belonging?*

Then invite students to share their ideas with others in their group so that they all feel confident in what they will share with their “expert” groups.

2. Discuss Personal Narratives in Expert Groups

Move students into “expert” groups and direct their attention to Part 2 of the **Belonging on Your Own Terms: Connection Questions** handout. After reading the instructions, circulate while students address the questions with their peers.

3. Facilitate a Closing Discussion

Facilitate a class discussion to help students synthesize key ideas from the text set. Start with a version of the first essential question, recording students’ ideas on the board: *What factors influence whether or not someone feels like they belong in a group or a place?*

Have students work in pairs to rank the factors from most influential to least influential. You might want to focus on the top five if they generated a large list. Invite students to share their ideas. Record the first list on the board and see whether there are any challengers whose lists differ. Such students should support their challenge with evidence from the text set and their own experience.

Next, ask students to discuss the following questions:

- What steps can we take to reduce the barriers to belonging for members of our classroom community?
- How can we create a more inclusive and accepting space where everyone feels a strong sense of belonging?

4. Reflect on a Personal Action to Cultivate Belonging

To capture students’ thinking at the end of the text set, have them complete a final exit ticket. Consider sharing their ideas anonymously in a future lesson to see if there are steps that the class is willing to commit to taking. Then check in on a weekly basis to assess the group’s progress. On an [exit ticket](#) that you create, have students respond to the following questions:

- What is one concrete step you can take in the upcoming weeks to help reduce the barriers to belonging and create a more inclusive and accepting space in this classroom?
- How would having this kind of classroom environment impact your learning?
- How might it impact other members of your class community?