

Text Set

From Fitting In to Belonging: Understanding the Forces That Shape Belonging

Overview

About This Text Set

There is a fundamental human desire to belong—to be part of a group that values, respects, and cares for us. Our decisions, from the mundane to the monumental, can bring us closer to a true sense of belonging or push us further away. From choosing our clothing to forming new friendships to smiling at a stranger, our actions can impact our sense of belonging and that of others in positive and negative ways. Additionally, feeling as if we don't belong is a common experience that many people share at various times in their lives. By engaging with works of literature that feature characters who also struggle with a limited sense of belonging, we can normalize this feeling for students and help them (re)frame their experiences with the understanding that the factors that shape belonging are both internal and external.

Navigating the borders of belonging—the boundaries that define who is considered a member of a particular group—can be challenging, especially for young people in our increasingly diverse and interconnected world. It requires bravery, open-mindedness, empathy, and a willingness to step outside of our comfort zones. Belonging is not just about where we come from or what we look like; it is also about our shared experiences and values as humans.

This text set invites students to grapple with the complexities of belonging and the tangible and intangible borders that shape it. Through analysis of multimodal texts, discussions, and writing opportunities, students will explore the difference between fitting in and belonging, as well as examine how the process of negotiating belonging can influence an individual's sense of who they are and the choices they make. This text set aims to empower students to navigate the borders of belonging in their own lives and foster more inclusive and

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empathetic spaces in their school and local communities.

Essential Questions

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

What's Included

Access this text set's lessons, texts, and materials in this [Google Folder](#).

- 8 Lessons
- 1 Assessment

Preparing to Teach

A Note to Teachers

1. Preparing to Teach with Poet and Memoirist Richard Blanco

Before teaching this text set, we recommend that you engage in your own professional learning by watching and reflecting on two short videos with award-winning poet and author Richard Blanco.

The videos **Navigating the Borders of Belonging** and **Inspiring the Next Generation of Writers: A Conversation with Richard Blanco** will help you develop schema and language to teach the collection and provide practical tips to engage your students with the poetry they will encounter in this text set.

As you watch the videos, reflect on the following questions:

Navigating the Borders of Belonging

1. What are examples of different kinds of borders that Richard Blanco has negotiated in his life? How have these borders shaped his sense of who he is and where he belongs?
2. What ideas or lessons can you take from this video that could help your students understand the fluidity of borders and the ways in which those borders can shape our sense of belonging in the world?

Inspiring the Next Generation of Writers: A Conversation with Richard Blanco

1. What is your own relationship with poetry, and how might it influence the way you teach it?

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2. What words of advice does Richard Blanco offer that can help you build students' confidence in reading, talking about, and crafting poetry?

2. Starting with the Borders & Belonging Introductory Lessons

Our **Borders & Belonging Introductory Lessons** ([Lesson 1](#) and [Lesson 2](#)) help prepare students to engage with the resources in this collection by developing their conceptual understanding of the ways in which the tangible and intangible borders we encounter in our lives can shape our sense of belonging in the world. If you have not taught these two 50-minute lessons, consider doing so before teaching this text set so that your students have a schema and vocabulary to support their analysis and discussions of the themes and texts they will encounter.

3. Learning Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The three Facing History learning objectives at the heart of any ELA unit address students' cognitive, emotional, and moral growth. Aligned to each learning objective are specific learning outcomes, which describe the observable and measurable knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that students develop over the course of the unit.

Learning Objective 1: Explore the Complexity of Identity

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

- Value the complexity of identity in themselves and others.
- Examine the many factors that can shape an individual's identity.
- 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.
- Engage with real and imagined stories that help them understand their own experiences and how others experience the world.

Learning Objective 2: Process Texts through a Critical and Ethical Lens

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

- Critically and ethically analyze thematic development and literary craft in

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order to draw connections between the text and their lives.

- 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.

Learning Objective 3: Develop a Sense of Civic Agency

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

- Recognize that their decisions matter, impact others, and shape their communities and the world.

4. Navigating This Text Set

Use this text set to introduce or supplement a Borders & Belonging literature or book club unit or as a standalone mini-unit. The lessons are intended to be taught in the order they are presented over the course of one to two weeks, depending on the length of your class periods and whether or not students complete some of the reading for homework. Each lesson is aligned to guiding questions and Facing History learning outcomes, with activities to help students engage with the texts critically, emotionally, and ethically. While the activities are deliberately sequenced to bring students with care into and out of conversations about belonging and the borders that can shape it, you may need to adapt these activities, as well as the summative assessment, for your unique classroom context.

5. The Foundation of a Reflective Classroom Community

At Facing History, we understand that before students can engage with challenging topics, they need to feel confident that they are part of a brave and reflective community where they are known, valued, and supported by their teachers and peers. This ongoing process starts with personal reflection on the part of the teacher and invites students to help establish and uphold norms for how everyone will treat one another.

The following resources and activities can support you and your students in cultivating a brave and reflective community. While we understand that you may not be able to make time to incorporate all of them as you teach this text set, contracting and journaling are core to any Facing History experience, so if you need to prioritize, those are the two to start with.

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- **Build the Foundation:** Learn about the importance of engaging in your own personal reflection before teaching this text set by exploring the resources and teacher-facing activities in **Section 1: Start with Yourself** of **Facing History's ELA Unit Planning Guide**.
- **Create a Classroom Contract:** Prepare students to engage, take risks, and support one another by creating a [classroom contract](#) with agreed-upon norms and behaviors that allow every student to feel seen, heard, and valued. If you have already created a contract, set aside time to revisit it at the outset of this unit to recommit to your group's agreed-upon norms and behaviors.
- **Incorporate Daily Journaling:** In addition to creating and upholding the classroom contract, [journaling](#) is an instrumental tool for helping students develop their ability to process what they are learning, practice perspective-taking, and make informed judgments about what they see and hear. Providing students with time and space to reflect on complex issues and questions allows them to formulate their ideas before sharing those ideas with their peers.
- **Write Alongside Your Students:** When teachers write along with their students and share their writing, no matter how messy or scattered, it sends a powerful message that writing matters, writing is hard, and even teachers don't get it right the first time. You will create a stronger community of thinkers and writers if you participate in the learning process. If you don't do so already, consider starting your own journal and joining your students in this exploration of power, agency, and voice.

6. Differentiation Strategies

Differentiation is an approach to teaching and learning that involves purposeful planning and instruction that is responsive to students' identities and needs as individual learners and members of a larger classroom community. It starts with creating a welcoming environment and includes a high-quality curriculum that all students can access in order to engage with the targeted concepts and skills.

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After reviewing the materials in this text set, we recommend that you incorporate some or all of the following differentiation strategies to help ensure that the content and concepts are accessible to all of your students:

- Use a strategy like [Think Aloud](#) to make your process visible when reading and annotating texts. Start by modeling the process for your class, naming the invisible literacy moves that you are making and your reasoning behind each annotation. Then have students practice these moves in pairs before asking them to work alone.
- Provide students with models to help them understand your expectations for annotating texts, responding to discussion questions, and completing assessments.
- Create a [Word Wall](#) to help students keep track of key terms. Encourage students to sketch the terms, perhaps using a teaching strategy like [Sketch to Stretch](#), and to incorporate the terms into their conversations and writing.
- Use adapted versions of readings when available. In this text set, we provide adapted versions of two informational texts with reduced text complexity, definitions of key terms, sentence stems, and embedded graphic organizers.
- Create purposeful groupings of students where possible, perhaps pairing English Learners with students who share their home language, to work through new material before creating heterogeneous language groups for discussions. For [Jigsaw](#) or similar activities, consider the text complexity, length, and relevance of each reading when creating groups. Some students may have the schema to tackle a more challenging reading if it connects to an interest or aspect of their identity.