

Lesson

The Dangers of Being an Outsider

Overview

About This Lesson

In the introduction to this lesson's episode of *The Slowdown* podcast, poet Ada Limón asks listeners: "How can we thrive if we do not know where we belong?" Building on the foundational work in previous lessons to introduce the concepts of belonging, group membership, fitting in, and values, in this lesson, students will analyze a short audio essay by Limón and a poem by Hazem Fahmy in order to consider what is at stake for some individuals when they feel like their belonging is threatened. Both Limón and the speaker of Fahmy's poem straddle borders of nationality, language, and culture. Their stories provide an opportunity to cultivate empathy for individuals who may feel the need to change aspects of who they are in order to experience safety and belonging in American society.

Essential Questions

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

Guiding Questions

- What are the potential dangers of being outside the boundaries of a group?
- What can happen when we sacrifice our values or change aspects of who we are in order to fit in? In what situations might it be beneficial or even necessary?

Facing History Learning Outcomes

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

- Engage with real and imagined stories that help them understand their own experiences and how others experience the world.
- Critically and ethically analyze thematic development and literary craft in order to draw connections between the text and their lives.

Lesson 5 | From Fitting In to Belonging Text Set

What's Included

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

- **Audio:** ["Rehearsal for the New World," with Introduction by Ada Limón](#)
- **Reading:** "Rehearsal for the New World" Transcript
- **Reading:** "Where I'm From" by Misa Sugiura

Preparing to Teach

A Note to Teachers

1. Revisiting Your Classroom Contract

In this lesson, students will engage with a podcast and a poem that explore the question "How can we thrive if we do not know where we belong?" through the lens of human migration. You can set the tone for this exploration with intentional framing that includes revisiting your [classroom contract](#) to recommit to the norms for behavior and communication that your group established. This step can serve as an important reminder of the community's responsibility to uphold a brave and reflective classroom space.

2. Modifying Activity 3 for Your Context to Boost Comprehension

In the third activity, students will listen to and discuss a poem by Hazem Fahmy. We have designed this activity for students to respond individually to the poem and then work in small groups to explore shifts in the speaker's feelings before discussing the big ideas as a class.

Depending on your students' comfort and confidence with reading and discussing poetry, they may benefit from more active facilitation throughout this activity. A circle discussion can be a powerful way to discuss poetry, especially when the teacher is sitting among their students and serving as a guide and active participant in the learning.

You might also choose, or let your students choose, to focus on just one of the two questions at the end of the activity to explore the idea in more depth. To support comprehension, consider reading the question out loud and having students reflect for a few minutes in their journals before discussing together.

3. Looking Ahead: Reading "Where I'm From" by Misa Sugiura in Two Parts

In the next two lessons, students will discuss Misa Sugiura's short story "Where I'm From," published in the young-adult collection *Come On In: 15 Stories about*

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Immigration and Finding Home. We have designed these lessons so that students read half of the story each night for homework. If you are not able to assign this story for homework, you will need to add additional time to this text set so students can read it in class.

It is, of course, always essential for teachers to carefully review all materials in the planning process, and this lesson is no exception. In the short story “Where I’m From,” the protagonist, Eriko, is cruel at times to Miho, a new Japanese student in the class. Because Eriko is Japanese American, the teacher pairs these two students. Eriko, despite having friends, doesn’t feel a strong sense of belonging in her grade. She is insecure about aspects of her identity and is cruel to Miho in her thoughts, words, and actions. We have created opportunities in the lesson’s activities for students to consider what Sugiura reveals about Eriko’s perspective and the ways in which fear and insecurity can lead us to make decisions that hurt others in our community. As readers, we come to understand that Eriko learns these lessons and, by the end of the story, has a clear and complex answer to the question “Where are you really from?”

As you review the story during your planning process, consider any extra contracting you may need to do with your students so that anyone who may see Miho as a “mirror,” perhaps because they are new to the school or share aspects of her identity or middle school experiences, feels safe and is not singled out or targeted by peers who may share Eriko’s insecurities and make decisions that are harmful to boost their own self-esteem.

Lesson Plan

Activities

1. Make Predictions about Today’s Poem

Let students know that today’s lesson will focus on a poem called “Rehearsal for the New World” by poet Hazem Fahmy. Record the title of the poem on the board and have students do a quick pair-share to predict what the poem may be about. Solicit a few ideas from the class.

2. Listen to Ada Limón’s Introduction

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Explain to students that the poem was recorded by poet Ada Limón for a podcast called *The Slowdown*. Before reading Hazem Fahmy's poem, students will listen to Limón's introduction, in which she reflects on the question "How can we thrive if we do not know where we belong?"

Pass out copies of the reading "**Rehearsal for the New World**" Transcript. Let students know that for this activity, they will focus on the first part of the episode. Play the three-minute introduction section of *The Slowdown* episode 508, ["Rehearsal for the New World," with Introduction by Ada Limón](#).

Then have students reread the introduction on their handouts and make the following annotations:

- **Place a star (☆) alongside an idea that resonates with you.** It might connect to who you are or your experiences, teach you something about yourself or the world, or strike you as beautiful or thought-provoking.
- **Underline a phrase or sentence that connects to something you have learned or discussed in recent lessons.** This might be something about values, fitting in, the importance of belonging, or group membership.
- **Reread the third paragraph.** How do you think Ada Limón would answer the question she poses: "How can we thrive if we do not know where we belong?" How do you answer this question? **Jot down your response in the space underneath the introduction.**

If time allows, have students do a quick pair-share or ask for a few volunteers to share ideas from their annotations.

3. Read and Discuss the Poem "Rehearsal for the New World"

Play the second part of the audio clip ["Rehearsal for the New World," with Introduction by Ada Limón](#) two times so that students can hear Hazem Fahmy's poem read aloud. The poem begins at 3:07.

Have students read the poem a third time to themselves. Project the following questions for a quick [journal](#) reflection. Let students know that they will share their responses in small groups.

- How does this poem make you feel?

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- What does this poem remind you of?
- What's going on in "Rehearsal for a New World"? In other words, what is the story of the poem?

Move students into small groups of three or four. Instruct students to start by sharing ideas from their journal responses. Circulate to get a sense of how they are thinking about the poem. Then invite students to discuss the first two connection questions on their handouts. Let them know that they will be discussing questions 3 and 4 as a class, so they should just focus on the first two for now.

- **Review the first four stanzas of the poem.** Circle words and phrases that help you answer the question: *How do you think the speaker feels as they teach themselves how to speak English? How do you know?*
- **Starting with "Later" in the fourth stanza, review the second half of the poem.** Circle words and phrases that help you answer the question: *How do you think the speaker feels at the end of the poem? What makes you say that?*

Bring the class together and project the poem on the board. Have a few students share their ideas for the first two questions. Then discuss questions 3 and 4 as a whole class. If needed, define the word "thrive" together before discussing question. Capture students' ideas by annotating the text on the board when they provide evidence, pose questions, or share insights.

Question 3: When reflecting on the challenge of "thriving in the in-between," Ada Limón explains: "It is not that we try on the essential American culture simply to fit in, but it is also about safety. The more we blend, the more we don't cause a scene, the more we quietly stay out of the way, the safer we might be."

- What are the potential dangers of being outside the boundaries of a group? How do Ada Limón's reflections and Hazem Fahmy's poem help you answer this question?
- What can happen when we sacrifice our values or change aspects of who we are in order to fit in? In what situations might it be beneficial or even necessary? How do Ada Limón and Hazem Fahmy's poem help you answer these questions?
- How do other texts you've read recently, such as "Chameleon," "The Importance of Belonging," or Julio Noboa Polanco's poem "Identity," help you answer these questions?

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Question 4: In the introduction to the podcast episode, Ada Limón asks: “How can we thrive if we do not know where we belong?”

- How do you think Limón and the speaker of the poem would answer this question? Do you agree or disagree with their perspectives?
- How do you answer this question?

4. Assign Pages 1-5 of “Where I’m From” for Homework

Let students know that for the next two lessons, they will be reading and discussing the short fiction piece **“Where I’m From” by Misa Sugiura** to consider how the desire to belong can impact a young person’s decision-making process. Instruct students to read and annotate the first half of the story (see the “Homework” section in the extension activities). You may have taught specific annotation strategies that you want your students to use, or they can use the ones suggested in the assignment.

Homework

1. Read “Where I’m From,” Pages 1-5

Have students read the first half of the short story **“Where I’m From” by Misa Sugiura**. This section includes the following short “chapters”: “Rude,” “Guardian Angel,” “Chopsticks, Age 13,” “American Citizen,” “Chopsticks, Age 18,” and “Double.”

As students read, they should jot down the following annotations in the margin:

- **Place a heart (♥)** by moments in the story that resonate with you, perhaps because of who you are or your experiences in the world.
- **Place a question mark (?)** in places where you feel confused, perhaps because you don’t understand a word or the author assumes you know something that you don’t know.
- **Place an emoji** (smiling, frowning, angry, etc.) by moments where you have an emotional response.
- **Underline** places where you see Eriko, the narrator, trying to fit in, feeling like she belongs, or feeling like she doesn’t belong.

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Extension Activities

1. Create a Found Poem

Working alone, in pairs, or in triads, have students create a [found poem](#) that uses words and phrases from this lesson's texts (the introduction and the poem) and responds to one of the guiding questions. Invite volunteers to share their poems with the class.