

Plan on a Page

Lesson 6: Navigating Social Hierarchies

Guiding Questions:

- What role do tangible and intangible borders play in determining who is “in” and “out” of a group or community? How do these borders influence our sense of who we are and where we belong?
- What are possible consequences when we prioritize our own sense of belonging over the well-being of others?

Activities (Day 1)

Activity 1: Share Homework Annotations for the First Half of the Story

- Remind students that in the previous lesson, they discussed how it can be challenging to thrive when we don’t feel like we belong. In this lesson, they will investigate what can happen when we are granted or denied access to groups based upon aspects of our identity, and how this can influence our sense of self, choices, and actions.
- Explain to students that part of belonging is feeling like we are known and valued. Making an effort to correctly pronounce each other’s names is an important step in this process. Names can be an extension of our identities, cultures, languages, and family histories. “Where I’m From” author, Misa Sugiura, shares the story of her name and provides tips for how to pronounce it correctly.
- Play the **40-second audio clip** to model the importance and respect our names deserve, even when we are not in the room to hear them.
- Then explain that in addition to the importance of accurate pronunciation when we say people’s names, careful consideration is also important when we encounter languages in texts other than the ones we already speak. As we discuss Sugiura’s “Where I’m From,” if we are reading aloud sections that include words and phrases in Japanese, we will pause a beat to scan the text to ourselves. Then we can pick up again with the English in the next sentence. When there is any uncertainty about how to pronounce something correctly, reading silently instead

of out loud is a gesture of respect to the languages and cultures reflected in the text.

- Move students into groups of 3-4 to share a heart or emoji annotation from their homework, the first half of the short story “Where I’m From,” and explain their reasoning. Then have them spend a few minutes discussing places where they felt confused and examples of evidence that helps them understand Eriko’s sense of belonging and desire to fit in. Circulate to get a sense of students’ understanding of the text and to address any issues with comprehension.

Activity 2: Work in Groups to Analyze Eriko’s Sense of Belonging

- Still working in their groups, let students know that they will be using evidence from the text, and their own understanding of the world, to analyze Eriko’s sense of belonging in the first part of the story.
- Take a few minutes to review the concept of *perspective*, the lens through which readers experience a text. In this story, secondary characters and events are described through Eriko’s perspective. The ways in which Eriko, our narrator, views other characters like Miho and experiences events like starting college can reveal important information about who she is, what she values, and her sense of belonging in the world. For example, Eriko is often cruel to Miho, because she, herself, feels insecure with aspects of her identity. We can ask ourselves why the author included this perspective and what it can teach us about the text, ourselves, and the world around us.
- Pass out the handout **Analyzing Eriko’s Sense of Belonging**. Explain that some sections of the handout have already been completed to help them understand what they are being asked to do. For each section, they should skim the text and then complete the row on the handout with a quotation, summary, or description of Eriko’s sense of belonging in the first part of the story. Then they can move to the next part of the handout and plot their ideas onto a Positive/Negative Line Graph.

Activity 3: Discuss the First Half of “Where I’m From” as a Class

- Facilitate a class discussion of the following questions. Prompt students to support their ideas with evidence from their handouts and the text.

- For Eriko, what are the potential dangers of being outside the boundaries of her peer group in 8th grade? How do these potential dangers shape her choices and actions?
- In your opinion, when does Eriko feel the strongest sense of belonging in the first part of the story? Who or what contributes to her feeling this way?
- What are some of the barriers to belonging that Eriko faces in the first part of the story? What kinds of choices does she make as she tries to negotiate these barriers?
- At this point in the story, why do you think Sugiura titled the story “Where I’m From”? What makes you say that?

Activity 4: Assign the Second Part of “Where I’m From” for Homework

- Instruct students to read and annotate the second half of the story (see the Homework section of the Lesson Plan).
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Activities (Day 2)

Activity 1: Day 2 Warm Up

- Have students sit in pairs and share a heart or emoji annotation from their homework and explain their reasoning. Then have them spend a few minutes discussing places where they felt confused and examples of evidence they found that helps them understand Eriko’s sense of belonging and desire to fit in at different points in her young adult life. Circulate to get a sense of students’ understanding of the text and to address any issues with comprehension.

Activity 2: Big Paper: Silent Discussion of “Where I’m From”

- Combine the pairs to create groups of four. Explain to students that they will use the **Big Paper: Silent Discussion** strategy to consider the following questions, which you should project or write on the board so students can see them throughout the activity.
 - What does this passage reveal about Eriko’s character: her values, how she views others, and how she views the world around her?
 - In “Where I’m From,” what role do visible and invisible borders play in determining who is “in” and “out” of a group or community? How do these

borders influence Eriko's sense of who she is and where she belongs in this scene?

- What are possible consequences when we prioritize our own sense of belonging over the well-being of others? How does this passage from "Where I'm From" help you answer this question?
- Explain the **Big Paper** strategy (see Lesson Plan for detailed instructions)

Activity 3: Facilitate a Closing Discussion of "Where I'm From"

- Conclude the lesson with a class discussion of the following questions:
 - What are some ways in which Eriko's strong desire to belong leads her to exclude others? What are possible consequences when we prioritize our own sense of belonging over the well-being of others?
 - Why do you think Eriko sometimes makes decisions that are not aligned with her values in order to increase her sense of belonging? How does she feel in these moments?
 - Eriko's answer to the question, "Where are you really from?" changes over the course of the story. Who or what shapes Eriko's beliefs about who she is and where she belongs?

Activity 4: Reflect on New Understandings

- Have students respond to the following questions in their **journals**. If time allows, ask volunteers to share an idea from their response with the class. *Why do you think Misa Sugiura wrote this story? What lessons can you take from it that might help reduce the barriers to belonging at your school?*