

Lesson 2: Introducing Agency

Essential Question: How do I empower myself to take action on behalf of myself and others?

Guiding Questions:

- What is agency? What is the relationship between power and agency?
- What factors might impact an individual or group's agency in a given moment?

Facing History Learning Outcomes:

- Examine how their identity is a combination of who they say they are, who others say they are, and who they hope to be in the future.
- Analyze the author's representation of individual and collective agency in the text and compare and contrast it to their own beliefs and experiences in the world.

Overview

Part of being human is facing choices and making decisions, both independently and in concert with others. Sometimes these choices and decisions are of little consequence; other times they have a large impact on our lives and quite possibly the lives of others, such as family, friends, or members of our communities. The activities in this lesson build on students' exploration of power and call their attention to the concept of *agency*, both in literature and in life, to help them understand that they are not only acted upon: they themselves, in a variety of ways, are actors in their own lives and in the spaces they inhabit. Students will examine the societal forces that can play a role in increasing or limiting an individual's agency, as well as reflect on what's at stake and what they risk when they take action, because we always want them to be mindful of their safety as they explore their agency and decision-making process.

Texts and Materials

- **Plan on a Page:** [Introducing Agency](#)
- **Reading:** **Introducing Agency**
- **Handout:** "How Many Bars?" Exit Card

Notes to Teachers

1. A Caution about Sharing Power Playlists

If students are playing songs from their playlists in the first activity, review your classroom norms regarding profanity and language that targets aspects of identity or dehumanizes people. Facing History's [Strategies for Addressing Racist and Dehumanizing Language](#) offers additional support.

Activities

1. Warm Up with Power Playlists

Start the class by inviting students to share their Power Playlists in pairs or small groups. If your classroom has a document camera, you might invite one or more volunteers to project their playlists and read their descriptions. Encourage students to create Power Playlists in a music app to remind them of their sources of power when they are feeling vulnerable or powerless.

2. Introduce the Concept of Agency

Explain to students that in this lesson, they will be learning about the concept of individual and collective *agency*. Pass out the **Introducing Agency** handout. Depending on your students' familiarity with the concept and their reading skills, you might read aloud as a class or have students work in pairs. Then have students work in pairs or small groups to come up with one question and one comment about the reading to share with the class.¹ Have students share their comments in a [Wraparound](#) and then discuss their questions as a whole group.

3. Reflect on Personal Agency in Journals

Ask students to reflect on the following questions one at a time in their journals, and then see if any volunteers would like to share any of their insights with the class.

- Where or when do you feel like you have agency? What factors impact your agency in a given moment?
- Where and when do you feel like you lack agency? What factors contribute to your lack of agency in a given moment?
- What is one step you could take to increase your agency?
- What is one step someone else could take to increase your agency?

4. Complete an Exit Card

¹ From Kelly Gallagher, *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts, 4–12* (Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2004), 48–49.

This text set builds on a foundational understanding of agency. To assess students' understanding and determine what, if any, concepts you need to revisit in the next lesson, have them complete and then submit a **"How Many Bars?" Exit Card**² handout.

² Adapted from Kristina J. Doubet and Jessica A. Hockett, *Differentiation in Middle and High School* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2015), 168.