

LESSON PLAN

Lesson 1: What Is Power?

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

Guiding Questions:

- What is power?
- What are the different ways that an individual or group can have or experience power?

Facing History Learning Outcomes:

- Practice perspective-taking in order to develop empathy and recognize the limits of any one person's point of view.
- Identify examples of injustice and unfairness in the literature they read and in the world today. Examine how an individual's identity, group membership, and relationship to systems of inequity can impact their sense of who they are and their agency when faced with a moral dilemma or choice.

Overview

The initial response for many students to the question, “When have you felt powerful?” is “Never.” Feeling powerless is common for young people, especially when it seems like the adults in their lives—parents, guardians, teachers, school administrators, coaches, employers—are making all of the important decisions and these decisions don’t always address the unique needs of youth. In this lesson, students define power and then examine a range of perspectives that shed light on where power lies, the different ways that individuals and groups experience power, and the responsibility that comes with power. The close reading, discussion, and reflection activities will equip students with the vocabulary and confidence to engage in a more nuanced exploration of the relationship between power and agency in the next lesson.

Notes to Teachers

1. Preparing for Four Corners

Before class, familiarize yourself with the [Four Corners](#) teaching strategy, which you will use in the first activity. Make four signs—Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree—and hang them in the corners of the classroom.

2. Preparing for a Big Paper Silent Discussion

Before teaching this lesson, familiarize yourself with the [Big Paper: Building a Silent Discussion](#) strategy, which you will use in Activity 2. The activity calls for students to reflect on five quotations that you can find on the **Perspectives on Power: Big Paper Quotations** handout. Affix each quotation onto a big piece of paper before the lesson.

Texts and Materials

- **Plan on a Page: What Is Power?**
- **Handout: Perspectives on Power: Big Paper Quotations**
- **Handout: What Is Power? Anticipation Guide**

Activities

1. Consider What Power Is and Isn't

Pass out the **What Is Power? Anticipation Guide** handout and have students complete Steps 1 and 2. Then debrief using the [Four Corners](#) teaching strategy. To provide opportunities for everyone to voice their opinions, have students share with others in their corners before facilitating the class discussion. Then have students complete Steps 3 and 4 on the handout. They can share their definitions in pairs or small groups, adding any new ideas that arise.

2. Engage in a Silent Discussion of Power

Let students know that they will read and reflect on five different perspectives about power and consider the ways in which each one confirms, challenges, or changes their initial thinking about the concept. Explain the [Big Paper](#) strategy and provide students with markers. Give them time to circulate silently, read, annotate, and write their ideas, connections, and questions on each paper. Consider projecting the following questions for students to refer to as they interact with the quotations:

- What, if any, ideas about power from the anticipation guide does the quotation explore? What new ideas does it add to a conversation about power?
- How does the quotation change, challenge, or confirm your own thinking about power?

- What questions does the quotation raise for you? What does it make you wonder?

3. Facilitate a Class Discussion

Hang the big papers on the board so students can see them alongside one another. Give students a few minutes to review them as a whole. Then discuss the following questions as a class:

- When considering the five perspectives on power, which one do you find the most valuable? What makes you say that?
- What are the different ways that an individual or group can have or experience power? How do one or more of the quotations help you answer this question? How about your own experiences?
- What are the different ways that an individual or group can have or experience disempowerment?
- What responsibilities do you think come with power? For adults? For young people?

4. End with a Two-Minute Power Wrap

Use the [Wraparound](#) strategy to bring the lesson to a close. Have each student complete the following sentence stem with a word or short phrase: *Power is . . .*

Homework: Create a Power Playlist

Invite students to create a Power Playlist composed of five songs that convey what it's like to feel powerful, or that might help when they feel powerless and are looking for inspiration. They should list their songs, give their playlist a title, choose an image for the playlist, and write a brief description (three or four sentences). Let them know that they will share their Power Playlists in the next class period. If you plan to allow students to play their music in class, it is important that you provide content and language guidelines for the songs they choose that reflect your classroom norms and school handbook. Consider creating your own playlist to model the activity for your students.