

Lesson

Exploring Identity and Belonging through Poetry

Overview**About This Lesson**

Whether it's deciding where to sit, whether or not to raise their hand, which clothes to wear, or which post to like, the students in your classroom negotiate belonging on a daily basis in real life and online. Questions like "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" are at the forefront of their minds. Inviting students to examine who they are and the forces that shape their sense of belonging can feel relevant and engaging to them, especially when they have opportunities to draw connections between what they learn in school and their own lives.

With these ideas in mind, this lesson introduces the concepts that students will explore throughout this text set. Through a choral reading of a poem and personal reflection, students will have opportunities to connect their experiences to the text in order to consider the factors that shape their sense of belonging in the spaces they occupy and the choices they make to fit in or stand out.

Essential Questions

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

Guiding Questions

- Where does our desire to belong in a group come from?
- What are some of the trade-offs between fitting in and standing out?

Facing History 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 order to draw connections between the text and their lives.

Lesson 1 | 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](#).

- **Reading:** "Identity" by Julio Noboa Polanco
- **Image:** Flower or Weed?

Preparing to Teach

A Note to Teachers

1. Setting the Tone for the Text Set

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce the text set's key concepts and pique students' interest for what is to come. They will do more in-depth literary analysis of multi-genre texts in later lessons; however, for this lesson, we aim to spark creativity and collaboration as they prepare a choral reading of Julio Noboa Polanco's engaging poem. In a choral reading, students play with volume, tone, and the speed of their voices to convey the ideas and feelings of the poem, as well as the speaker's attitude toward the subject of the poem.

Lesson Plan

Activities

1. Reflect in Journals

Begin the lesson by telling students that today, they are starting a short unit called "From Fitting In to Belonging." Over the course of the next two weeks, they will be reading, discussing, and writing about a wide range of texts that will help them deepen their thinking about how they would answer the unit's essential questions: *What are the forces that can shape belonging? How can we reduce barriers to belonging for ourselves and others?*

To develop schema for the poem in this lesson, project the image **Flower or Weed?** and have students respond to the following question in their journals: *Given the choice, would you rather be a flower or a weed? What are the pros and cons of each option?*

Give students a few minutes to share their ideas with a partner, and then invite one student for each option, flower and weed, to share with the class.

2. Read and Prepare a Choral Reading of a Poem

Pass out copies of the reading **“Identity” by Julio Noboa Polanco**. Prompt students to think about what they wrote in their journals as they read the poem. Then read the poem out loud. If time allows, read it aloud a second time.

Have students read the poem again to themselves and then write a quick [journal](#) reflection in response to the following questions:

- How does the poem make you feel?
- What does the poem remind you of?

Move students into groups of three or four to discuss the connection questions that appear below the poem. Circulate to check for students’ understanding of the speaker’s attitude toward the flower and the weed. When most students have had a chance to discuss all three questions, ask for volunteers to share their ideas about the speaker’s attitude toward the flower and weed and what evidence in the poem supports their ideas.

Explain to students that they will now prepare a choral reading of the poem. Read the instructions as a class. Students can find them underneath the connection questions on the reading. The student instructions are as follows:

- Your group will now prepare a choral reading of the poem. Don’t worry, you don’t have to perform it for the class! To prepare, discuss why you think certain words and phrases are more or less important. Then decide how you can use your individual and collective voices to convey this distinction. Try to capture the speaker’s attitude toward the flowers and the weed in the poem. You can play with the volume, tone, and speed of your voices to express the ideas and feelings in the poem.
- Work with your group members to reread the poem stanza by stanza. For each stanza, discuss the following questions:
 - Which words, phrases, or lines are most important and should be read by all of us? (Circle the words, phrases, or lines that you will all read.)
 - How should we distribute the others words, phrases, or lines in this

Lesson 1 | From Fitting In to Belonging Text Set

stanza among our group members? (Use other annotations like margin notes, underlines, squiggly lines, dotted lines, or boxes to explain who will read the other lines.)

- Practice. Revise. Practice. Have fun!

Bring the class together and ask if there are any groups that would like to volunteer to perform their choral reading. Then discuss the following questions:

- In what ways does the poem explore the concept of belonging and the trade-offs between fitting in and standing out?
- Do you agree or disagree with the speaker's attitude toward the flower and weed in the poem? What makes you say that?

3. Reflect On New Understanding

Give students a few minutes to consider any shifts in their thinking as a result of analyzing the poem. They can respond to the following prompt in their journals or on an [exit ticket](#) if you'd like to check for understanding:

- Review the journal response that you wrote at the beginning of the lesson. How has reading and discussing the poem "Identity" by Julio Noboa Polanco changed, challenged, or confirmed your decision to be a flower or a weed? What makes you say that?