

{ } LESSON

Change the Ending, Take Back Your Power

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MSP

GRADES 9–12

TYPE
NARRATIVE
POETRY
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
LEARNING

COMMITMENT
3 SESSIONS: 1 HOUR
EACH

Over the course of this lesson, students will read two short stories and explore the boundaries of the historical and speculative fiction genre. They will work together to define common terms, some identity-based and others genre-based, and use those definitions in their own writing, which will span both genres. Their final writing piece will reimagine a time where they felt powerless as a time where they were powerful and fully in control of their narrative. This lesson is just one part of the longer journey that is building a culture of trust and community within the classroom; it also serves as a conduit for students from historically marginalized communities to see themselves and their stories represented as a reminder of how powerful they are as individuals.

SESSION 1: HISTORICAL FICTION

Students will work together to create word banks for identity-related themes, dive into a short story and make connections to

today's world, and write about the dominant narrative of their ancestors versus their personal narrative of their ancestors.

YOU WILL NEED

- 4 pieces of butcher paper or poster board
- Markers
- Enough copies of your selected short story for each of your students (we recommend: [“They Have Given Us the Land” by Juan Rulfo](#) and the first chapter of [The Clay Marble](#) by Minfong Ho)

A way for your students to write—lined paper, computers, tablets, etc.

BEFORE YOU START

Set up four pieces of butcher paper or poster boards around the classroom with the markers easily accessible. Every paper should be labeled with one of the following themes: identity; culture; family; and community. You will also need to select a short story that represents your students—two examples are listed below—and make enough copies for each of your students.

HOW TO BEGIN (15 MINUTES)

Divide the class into small groups, with each group starting at a different theme identified on the pieces of butcher paper. Encourage students to write down any words that they associate with their starting theme; these topics should hopefully evoke strong responses from students. Allow them to self-identify as much as possible, rather than supplying ideas. There are no wrong answers, but there should be honest answers.

After 3-4 minutes at a station, have the groups rotate. Repeat the process until all groups have visited all the theme stations. The lists they have now made will likely reveal their values, beliefs, and loves. Many classmates might find similarities that had been previously unknown or unspoken—this is a simple, energizing way to revitalize the classroom community and prepare your students for the rest of the session.

The themes and words they came up with will serve as the word banks for the students as they continue to work through this session; if they're ever stuck or lacking inspiration, they can use the word banks to help them find their footing.

STEP 1 (25 MINUTES)

Introduction to Historical Fiction

Before diving into the short story, ask your students to define historical fiction. The definition they should give (or that you should give, if they're stumped) is:

Historical fiction imagines how characters might have acted during a historical event or time period. These characters might be invented, or based on real people who existed during that time.

The short story you read is entirely up to you, but it will work best if the themes and people depicted in the story are representative of your students—they will have a deeper connection to the text if they can see themselves in it. Two examples are [“They Have Given Us This Land” by Juan Rulfo](#) and the first chapter of [The Clay Marble](#) by Minfong Ho. Rulfo's story follows a group of farmers in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution; Ho's novel is a Cambodian refugee narrative.

Have your students read the story in small groups—after they finish, give them a few discussion points to talk about in their groups:

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Ask your students to share a detail from the story that they related to or that helped them understand it more clearly. Why did this detail stand out to them?

- What does this story remind them of in terms of community, political, or social issues? For “They Have Given Us This Land,” many students identified themes of immigration and deportation (such as the migrant caravan of 2018-19), as well as disputed sovereign treaty rights between Native nations and the US government.

If you have time, discuss the questions as a class.

STEP 2 (20 MINUTES)

Writing Activity

Have your students revisit the prompt they started during the first session. Reflecting on the work of the previous prompt and the work so far from this session, give them the following prompt:

Imagine that it is 100 years in our future. But this future looks more like our ancestors’ time. There is less innovation, less freedom, and even fewer resources than we have today. Why is that? What does it feel like? How did it happen?

If you have time, have your students share their writing with a partner or the class.

SESSION 2: SPECULATIVE FICTION

Students will define speculative fiction through modern-day media examples, dive into a speculative short story, and then write their own speculative fiction narrative set in the future.

YOU WILL NEED

- Enough copies of the short story for each of your students
- A way for your students to write—lined paper, computers, tablets, etc.

BEFORE YOU START

You will need to select a short story—three examples are listed below—and make enough copies for each of your students.

HOW TO BEGIN (10 MINUTES)

As with the first session, take a moment to define speculative fiction. Speculative fiction essentially asks, “what if?” “What if the world was like X because of Y?” Some examples of popular speculative fiction:

- The Hunger Games: What if we lost a great war? What if the punishment was children having to fight to the death?
- Black Panther: What if Africa had a secret, technologically advanced kingdom that survived colonialism?
- Deadpool: What if you could force someone to develop superpowers by putting them through great stress?

If you have time, ask your students what other examples of popular media they can think of that fits into the speculative fiction genre!

STEP 1 (30 MINUTES)**Introduction to Speculative Fiction**

Like with session one, have your students read the short story in small groups. The choice is ultimately yours, but three great examples of speculative fiction are “Harison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut, “What Happens When a Man Falls from the Sky” by Lesley Nneka Arimah, and “Childfinder” by Octavia Butler. All three examples are readily available online or as a podcast to listen along.

After they finish reading, give them a few discussion points to talk about in their groups:

- Ask your students to share a detail from the story that they related to or that helped them understand it more clearly. Why did this detail stand out to them?
- What does this story remind them of in terms of community, political, or social issues?

If you have time, discuss the questions as a class.

STEP 2 (20 MINUTES)**Writing Activity**

Have your students revisit the prompt they started during the first session. Reflecting on the work of the previous prompt and the work so far from this session, give them the following prompt:

Imagine that it is 100 years in our future. But this future looks more like our ancestors’ time. There is less innovation, less freedom, and even fewer resources than we have today. Why is that? What does it feel like? How did it happen?

If you have time, have your students share their writing with a partner or the class.

SESSION 3: FROM “OTHERING” TO TAKING BACK POWER

Students will define what it means to be “othered”, write about a time that they were othered, and then rewrite the ending of that story so they are no longer powerless.

YOU WILL NEED

- A way for your students to write—lined paper, computers, tablets, etc.

BEFORE YOU START

Ensure that whatever means you have for your students to write is readily accessible. Have extra copies of the stories from both earlier sessions on hand in case students want to look through them for inspiration during the final writing portion.

HOW TO BEGIN (10 MINUTES)

Have your students write down what they think is the definition of feeling “othered.” Give them about 5 minutes to write their initial thoughts, and then have volunteers share their definitions with the class.

Share with your students a dictionary definition of the term; Merriam-Webster defines othering as, “to treat that culture as fundamentally different from another class of individuals, often by emphasizing its apartness.”

Use the remaining time to discuss what that definition means and how it applies to students, breaking down words or phrases as necessary. A simpler definition to build together is, “to treat someone like

they're less than you just because they are a different race, gender, sexuality, etc.”

STEP 1 (25 MINUTES)

Reflecting on Being Othered

With the shared definition in hand, ask your students to reflect on a time that they might have felt othered. Be sure to tell your students that this writing doesn't need to be shared with the class; this writing is deeply personal, and potentially holds traumatizing memories for your students. This part is just for them and their reflections.

If you have a moment of othering to share from your own life, this would be an appropriate time to share it. Be real with your students and model the honesty that you hope they will convey in their writing. Giving a personal example—and opening up a short dialogue with your class about that example—will not only help your students understand the prompt more clearly, it will also remind them that the classroom is a safe place to share their personal stories.

If your students seem stuck, here are some scaffolding questions you could give them:

- *Can you think of a time that it happened to a friend or a family member?*
- *It doesn't have to be an issue of discrimination; it can be as simple as feeling left out by friends or siblings.*
- *Maybe it wasn't a person, but a system or an organization that you felt “othered” by, like the police or a religious institution.*

As your students wrap up this portion of writing, vocally thank and commend them for doing this work. This writing takes a huge effort, and it's important to show your appreciation that your students are willing to put themselves out there. It can be really difficult to write about a time when you felt

powerless, but it can also be a release.

STEP 2 (25 MINUTES)

Change the Ending, Take Back Your Power

This last part of the session will give your students a chance to change the ending of their othering story. Encourage your students to change the ending in a way that makes them feel powerful—especially in a fantastical way (meaning making the seemingly impossible, possible; dragons, aliens, super powers: nothing is off limits here!).

Encourage, too, that your students draw inspiration from the short stories read earlier in this lesson. This is also a great opportunity for the word banks to come back into play. Have your students remember what they learned in the historical and speculative fiction lessons—what were the power dynamics of those stories? What details and literary devices did the authors add to help you understand those dynamics?

Some examples from modern literature, if they are needed:

- *Eve Ewing, a Chicago-based writer, has her characters in Electric Arches gain the ability to fly or become possessed by spirits as a consequence of an othering interaction*
- *Rey Antonio Saice, in his short story included in Indigenous Originated: Walking in Two Worlds, switches the power dynamic around not getting picked for a basketball team with the help of some aliens and his best friends*

Redirect your students to avoid using violence in their new endings; instead of beat-ups and weapons, encourage your students to “be more creative than that,” and explore other, more whimsical and fantastic possibilities.

There will be laughter and reticence as you and your students go through this work; but, with patience, the work they create will grow to be incredibly profound.

STEP 3

Conclusion

If necessary, hold additional sessions for your students to continue to write and edit their changed endings. You can also add an additional session for students to illustrate and add literary devices to their stories. And, of course, having your students share their work to a larger audience would be incredibly powerful as well.