

LESSON

What Is Belonging | Introductory Lesson

Overview

About This Lesson

As human beings, our need to connect, to find our place within groups and communities, is fundamental. This need for connection, to figure out where and how we belong, takes on special importance during middle and high school. Adolescents are deeply attuned to their peers. They seek respect and belonging in groups where they can be supported, heard, and understood. By surfacing themes of belonging, and the many borders that can shape it, ELA teachers can empower students to explore these concepts through the texts they read, in their interactions with others, in their schools, and in their lives.

Students will begin this lesson by completing an anticipation guide, which offers the opportunity to develop schema and assess initial understandings of belonging. Then, through an analysis of short passages by thought leaders Geoffrey Cohen, the Othering & Belonging Institute, and Brené Brown, students will engage in conversations to challenge preconceptions and develop new insights. Finally, they will reflect on new understandings of how belonging can shape our lives and the world around us.

Essential Question

- How can the borders we experience in our lives shape our sense of who we are and where we belong?

Guiding Questions

- Why do we need to belong?
- What is the difference between belonging and fitting in?

What's Included

This lesson uses the following student materials, which you can access in this [Google Folder](#).

- **Handout: What Is Belonging? Anticipation Guide**
- **Handout: Perspectives on Belonging**

Preparing to Teach

Teaching Notes

1. Introducing the Conceptual Framing for a Borders and Belonging Unit

We have designed these introductory lessons (this lesson and What Is Belonging?) to prepare students to engage with the resources and activities in Facing History's Borders and Belonging collection. The purpose of these lessons is to develop students' conceptual understanding of the ways in which the tangible and intangible borders we encounter in our lives can shape our sense of belonging in the world. We encourage you to teach both introductory lessons before engaging students with other resources in the collection.

2. Adapting This Lesson for Your Context

The resources in this lesson are adaptable for students in grades 6-12, and we encourage you to modify them for your context. For younger students, or if you have a shorter class period, you may need to reduce the number of images students discuss in the first activity. For the second activity, we have provided two versions of an informational text with different levels of complexity for you to choose from.

3. 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.

Lesson Plan

Activities

1. Introduce the Concept of Belonging

- Let students know that they will spend the next two lessons considering what it means to belong, why belonging matters, and the barriers that can get in the way of belonging.

- Pass out the **What Is Belonging? 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 ideas with others in their corners before you facilitate the class discussion. Then have students complete Steps 3 and 4 on the handout. Move students into triads and invite them to share their definitions, adding any new ideas that resonate with them to their own handouts.

2. Read and Discuss Perspectives on Belonging

- With students still in groups of three, pass out the **Perspectives on Belonging** handout, which includes three perspectives on the concept of belonging, as well as discussion questions for each perspective. Read the instructions together, and then circulate to hear how groups are engaging with the perspectives.
- Debrief the activity by asking for volunteers to share highlights and questions from their discussions.

3. Reflect on New Understandings about Belonging

- Have students revisit their anticipation guide handout from the first activity to see if their perspectives have changed over the course of the lesson. Have them use a different color pen or pencil to indicate any shifts in Section 1 of the handout.
- Then share the following questions and have students respond on an [exit ticket](#) that they submit at the end of class or complete for homework.
 - What new, different, or deeper understandings do you have about belonging?
 - What questions about belonging did this lesson raise for you?