

Lesson 1 - Teacher Resource Sheet

Lesson 1: The Question of Identity - Race, Ethnicity, and the Self

Key Concepts to Emphasize

Human Personality

- Universal capacity to question, solve problems, govern ourselves, make moral choices
- Foundation of human dignity that transcends all other differences
- What Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. identified as the basis for ethical reasoning

Race

- A social construct based primarily on perceived physical characteristics like skin color, facial features, and hair texture
- Categories created by humans for social purposes, not reflecting meaningful genetic differences
- Important: There's more genetic diversity within racial groups than between them
- Includes bi/multiracial identities (33.8 million Americans identify as multiracial - 276% increase since 2010). Remember that many students have multiracial backgrounds or complex racial identities.
- Multiracial Americans challenge simple racial categorization

Multiracial Identity

- Challenges simple racial categorization, increasingly common in America
- Highlights the limitations of seeing racial identity as fixed or singular
- Shows how America's racial landscape is increasingly complex
- Multiracial identity demonstrates that identities are often complex intersections of different cultural and ancestral streams

Ethnicity

- Shared cultural factors including traditions, language, religion, ancestry, food, music, and customs that connect a person to a particular cultural heritage and community
- Cultural heritage passed down from ancestors (what you inherit)
- Connects people to particular cultural heritage and provides sense of belonging
- What anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss called "collective answers to human questions"
- Distinguish that: Ethnicity is typically chosen/embraced from within cultural communities, unlike racial categories which are often imposed from outside
- Examples: Mexican American, Italian American, Navajo, Vietnamese American, Irish American
- Ethnicity provides cultural belonging and helps preserve heritage across generations
- Unlike race, ethnicity focuses on cultural practices and shared traditions

Culture

- The shared beliefs, practices, values, and ways of life that groups develop and pass on
- Cultural practices and contexts you actively participate in now (what you live)

- Unlike ethnicity (ancestral heritage), culture can be learned, chosen, and changed
- Examples: family culture, school culture, regional culture, digital culture, sports team culture

Ethnoracial

- Characteristics that combine both ethnic and racial elements
- The term recognizes that ethnicity and race often overlap and interact in complex ways, rather than being completely separate categories
- Example: "Latino/Hispanic" is often considered an ethnoracial category because it can include people of various racial backgrounds who share certain cultural or linguistic heritage

National Identity

- Your sense of belonging to and identification with a particular nation
- Includes shared civic values, historical experiences, participation in national culture
- For students: "To what extent do you feel American? How does being American shape who you are?"

Religious/Spiritual Identity

- Your personal faith traditions, spiritual beliefs, or relationship with religion
- Includes participation in religious communities, spiritual practices, and faith-based values
- For students: "How do your faith traditions or spiritual beliefs influence who you are? What role does religion or spirituality play in your daily life?"

Political Affiliation

- Your political views, civic beliefs, and engagement with public issues
- Includes party identification, political values, and positions on social/political issues
- For students: "How do your political views or civic beliefs shape your identity? What issues or causes are most important to you?"

Social Construct

- A concept or category created by humans for social purposes
- Not reflecting a natural or biological reality
- Has real consequences in people's lives even though it's a human invention

Key Distinctions to Clarify

Race vs. Ethnicity

Common confusion: Both are often used interchangeably or conflated

Clarification:

- Race = social construct based on perceived physical characteristics (imposed categories)
- Ethnicity = shared cultural heritage, traditions, and practices (typically embraced from within communities)

Key differences:

- Race focuses on physical appearance and social categorization
- Ethnicity focuses on cultural practices, traditions, and shared heritage
- Racial categories were often imposed externally; ethnic identities are typically chosen/embraced from within cultural communities

Ethnicity vs. Culture

Common confusion: Both involve "cultural" elements

Clarification:

- Ethnicity = cultural heritage passed down from ancestors (what you inherit)
- Culture = cultural practices and contexts you live in daily (what you participate in)

Helpful analogy: "Your ethnicity is your family's cultural background that was passed down to you, while culture includes all the different groups and contexts you're part of right now. You inherit ethnicity, but you participate in multiple cultures."

Helpful example: "Someone might have Mexican American ethnicity (inherited heritage with traditions like Día de los Muertos) while also participating in gaming culture, school culture, and regional California/Pacific Northwest culture."

Race vs. Ethnoracial Categories

Common confusion: Terms like "Latino/Hispanic" seem to blur racial and ethnic lines

Clarification:

- Ethnoracial categories combine both ethnic and racial elements
- These recognize that ethnicity and race often overlap and interact in complex ways
- Example: "Latino/Hispanic" can include people of various racial backgrounds who share certain cultural or linguistic heritage

Discussion Prompts by Category

Identity Aspects to Explore

- **Social roles** (family member, student, etc.)
- **Character traits** (virtues, values)
- **Race** (social construct based on physical traits; includes bi/multiracial identities)
- **Ethnicity** (cultural patterns, traditions, language)
- **Gender** (male/female as experienced and expressed)
- **Culture** (practices and contexts you participate in now)
- **National Identity** (sense of belonging to and identification with America)
- **Intellect** (ability to understand and articulate ideas)
- **Imagination** (creative capacity)
- **Voice** (unique way of expressing oneself)
- **Talents/Affinities** (interests, hobbies, preferences)
- **Anything else** that students think is important about them

Culture-Focused Questions

- "What cultures do you participate in beyond your ethnic background?"
- "How do different cultural contexts shape how you behave or express yourself?"
- "Do you ever feel like you're part of multiple cultures simultaneously?"

National Identity Questions

- "To what extent is being American part of your identity?"
- "How does your American identity interact with your ethnic or cultural backgrounds?"
- "What does being American mean to you personally?"

General Reflection Prompts

- "Which elements feel most essential to who you are?"
- "Which aspects are most visible to others?"
- "Which are most valued by you?"
- "What would it look like if you were defined by only one aspect of your identity?"

Identity Journaling Guidance

- Personal space for reflection throughout the unit
- Helps connect abstract concepts to lived experiences
- Students will revisit journals in each class

Mapping Process

- Place aspects of identity in relation to each other
- More important elements near the center
- Related elements clustered together
- Use different colors, symbols, or sizes to represent different aspects

Key Mapping Considerations

- Consider ethnicity vs. culture separately
- Think about cultures you've inherited vs. cultures you've chosen
- Map how different aspects interact with each other

Important Quotes and Examples

Carl Sagan Quote

"Every one of us is, in the cosmic perspective, precious. In a hundred billion galaxies, you will not find another."

Use to emphasize: Both our shared humanity and our unique individual value

- Examples for Over-identification Discussion
- Someone defined only by their ethnicity might have difficulty connecting with people from different backgrounds
- Someone defined only by their achievements might struggle when facing setbacks
- Someone defined only by their social roles might feel lost if those roles change

Reminders for Sensitive Discussions

Ground Rules

- Respect diverse perspectives
- Speak from your own experience
- Listen actively to others
- Goal is understanding different perspectives, not reaching consensus

Important Notes

- Some students may be uncomfortable discussing identity aspects in class
- Provide options for private reflection when appropriate
- Emphasize that no single aspect of identity can fully capture who a person is
- Identity journaling is personal - students only share what they choose to share