



LESSON 1

Getting to Know Each Other

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can we work together to create an open, supportive, and reflective learning community?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How do our names relate to our identities?
- What is important to know about each other in order to learn together this year?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will start to examine the sometimes conflicting factors that make up identity and discuss ways that they can participate in creating a welcoming classroom community for all.

OVERVIEW

Many teachers are in the habit of starting the school year with classroom rules, the syllabus, and name games. All too often, this teacher-centered approach results in disengaged students who sit through similar lessons in their other classes. The Back-to-School Toolkit offers an alternative approach by providing opportunities for individual reflection and meaningful collaboration before inviting students to help establish the norms and expectations that will guide their interactions. As a result, you will get to know them at a deeper level, and students will begin to recognize this space as something different and exciting—a space where they are known and they matter. This lesson uses names to help students consider the relationship between their identities and their communities. When we meet someone new, our name is usually the first piece of information about ourselves that we share. It is often one of the first markers of our identity that others learn. To begin, students reflect on their relationship with their names before considering the many ways in which a community, especially a classroom community, can impact an individual's sense of identity and belonging. Finally, they will discuss what specific actions everyone can take to foster an inclusive and welcoming classroom space.

DURATION

50-minute class period

MATERIALS

- **Reading:** "Orientation Day"
- **Handout:** What Do You Need? Exit Card

TEACHING STRATEGIES

- Journals in a Facing History Classroom
- Think, Pair, Share
- Identity Charts
- Exit Cards

SEL COMPETENCIES AND PEDAGOGICAL MOVES

1. Encourage positive academic mindsets by creating a welcoming environment.

The first day of a school year can be anxiety-producing for many students. You can help reduce their anxiety by avoiding games that put students on the spot to be creative or witty or recall information in front of peers who they may not know well (or at all). While it is important in every classroom community that students know and can correctly pronounce each other's names, rather than playing games that can make some students feel labeled as slow, not smart, or not interesting, you can provide opportunities in each class period for students to introduce themselves to each other in more inclusive paired and small-group configurations while you circulate to join them.

2. Promote self-awareness through reflective writing.

Students benefit from having time and space to process complex concepts, understand their emotions, and examine issues from multiple perspectives before having to share their ideas with others. For these reasons, it is important to provide regular opportunities for quiet journal reflection (see the Notes to Teacher section for important information about the role of journals in a Facing History classroom). Writing freely without giving thought to grammar and syntax helps students develop fluency

as writers, build self-confidence in their ideas, and internalize the language of reflection. It sends a powerful message to students when their teacher pulls up a chair during journaling time and writes alongside them before they share their thoughts and reflections with the class during the debrief.

3. Differentiate instruction by offering students choice.

Your students will come to your class with a range of content knowledge, skills, and understanding about history. It is important to provide a range of “on-ramps” so they can access the content in meaningful ways that are appropriate for their academic development. This lesson provides multiple “on-ramps” to the opening journal reflection, where students can choose from four different prompts about names. Providing students with choices for how they process ideas and demonstrate their understanding allows for differentiation in response to their readiness and interest. And when students are interested and engaged, they are more likely to focus their attention on the material and retain information.

4. Reduce tension and create a welcoming environment by choosing appropriate read-aloud strategies.

When reading a text as a whole class, it is important to remember that for many students, reading in front of an audience, especially an audience of their peers, can be anxiety-producing. Students may fear ridicule or feel embarrassed by how they sound when they read. Others are fluent “out loud” readers but don't compre-

hend the text unless they hear it or read it to themselves. While students need to practice reading aloud, in the opening weeks of the school year, choose your read aloud strategies with care while you get to know your students and begin to gather information about them through your observations and formative assessments. In this lesson, we recommend that you read the main text to the class and then invite students read it to themselves. In later lessons, students will start to read aloud in pairs and small groups, and you can circulate and take note of anyone who would benefit from additional reading support and anyone who seems ready for more challenging texts.

5. Use formative assessment data to plan for differentiation.

All of the lessons in this unit offer a range of opportunities to formatively assess your students' progress. Regular formative assessments provide valuable information that can help teachers meet each student's academic and SEL needs, while also providing opportunities for students to reflect on and share their own learning processes. Formative assessment expert Dylan Wiliam argues that an assessment only qualifies as formative when the teacher uses it to gather and interpret data about student performance that they then use for the purpose of teaching differently and more effectively.² There are a number of ways to collect data during a lesson. You can observe students while they are writing to gauge their fluency: Who has a blank

page? Who is scribbling furiously? Who writes and erases until there is a hole in the paper? You can use this information for future check-ins with students to set attainable short- and long-term writing goals. Also, when you circulate during paired and group activities to hear students' conversations, you can observe how they are interacting with the text, while also spot-checking their handouts and notes. Then you can compile the information from students' exit card responses, handouts, assessments, and check-ins and use it to inform your planning and instruction.

² Dylan Wiliam, quoted in David A. Sousa and Carol Ann Tomlinson, *Differentiation and the Brain: How Neuroscience Supports the Learner-Friendly Classroom* (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2011), 77.

NOTES TO TEACHER

1. Journaling in a Facing History Classroom

- Journals are an important means of participation for each student in a Facing History classroom. Before teaching this lesson, review the teaching strategy **Journals in a Facing History Classroom** for suggestions about how to incorporate them into your course. Decide if you will provide journals for your students or if they need to bring their own to class. Some teachers have students use composition books or exam blue books for journals. Students can also designate a section of their notebooks to their journals or staple 10 to 20 pieces of lined paper together. Regardless, it is important that their journal entries are kept together in one place and that students bring them to every class.
- Student journals are not considered public. However, informally reviewing students' journal entries can help you know the questions that are on students' minds and provide topics for individual conversations between you and each student. If you choose to periodically review students' journals, it is important to inform them (and remind them throughout the year) that you plan to do so and to give them a choice about which entries they would like to share and which ones they would like to keep private by stapling a page over the entry or taping pages of their journal together. You can also ask students to mark one to three entries that they would like to share with you with a star or sticky note. We recommend that you don't grade

journals, because they are places where students are developing their thinking and writing, not demonstrations of skill or content mastery.

2. Using Identity Charts as a Teaching Strategy

Identity charts are a graphic organizing tool that can help students consider the many factors that shape the identities of both individuals and communities. Start by modeling the **Identity Charts** teaching strategy on the board in the second activity of this lesson before asking students to complete the activity with a partner. You can find a sample identity chart on the Facing History website. Students will be creating their own identity charts in the next lesson after practicing the strategy in this lesson.

3. Introducing New Vocabulary

It is important that you review this lesson's reading before teaching the lesson. You may need to create a key or pre-teach some of the vocabulary terms that Jennifer Wang uses in her reflection. If your students are more advanced readers or you have time for a longer reading, can find the full text of Jennifer Wang's essay on the Facing History website.

ACTIVITIES

1. Reflect on Names and Identity

- After taking attendance and introducing yourself to the class, jump into the first activity by introducing journaling to the students, perhaps by sharing your own experience with keeping a journal. Let students know *why* you would like them to write in journals, *who* will be reading them, and *how* journals differ from more formal kinds of writing, like essays. Let students know that while they will be sharing ideas from their first journal response with a partner, they will not have to read aloud from their writing. They can choose what to share and what to keep private.
- Project the following sentence starters and have students choose one or more to explore in a journal reflection:
 - » I was given my name because . . .
 - » I like / I dislike my name because . . .
 - » My name is / isn't a good fit for my personality because . . .
 - » People assume _____ about me because of my name . . .
- Before having students apply the **Think, Pair, Share** strategy with a partner, acknowledge that it can be hard to share our ideas with others, and then model risk-taking by sharing something from your journal reflection about names with the class.
- Then have students introduce themselves to their partners and share one idea that they explored in their journals. Next, have everyone stand up, and instruct pairs to combine into groups of four. Each student should introduce their partner by name

and explain what they learned in their pair-share. Time allowing, you can have pairs repeat this process a few times, creating new groups of four and meeting more students in the class.

2. Read about a Student's Experience on the First Day of Class

- Have students return to their seats, and pass out the reading "**Orientation Day**". Explain to students that they will be reading part of an essay written by a 17-year-old Chinese American girl named Jennifer Wang, who came to the United States from Beijing, China, when she was seven years old. In her essay, Wang reflects on how she felt when her teacher asked her to introduce herself to a group of strangers at a new school.
- Read the essay out loud to the class while students underline phrases that Wang uses to describe her identity. To help students understand Wang's imagery in the final sentence of the essay, you can have pairs work together to visually represent the idea of being stretched between opposing parts of one's identity. Then have one or two students re-create their pictures on the board.
- Use the **Identity Charts** teaching strategy to help students visually depict Wang's identity using the words and phrases that they underlined while you were reading. Model the strategy by starting to create Wang's identity chart on the board, using examples from the first part of the reading.
- Finally, have students work in pairs to finish the identity charts in their notebooks. When they have finished, have them share ideas with the class while you add them to the identity chart on the board.

ASSESSMENTS

3. Discuss the Reading in Small Groups

- Divide the class into small groups of three to discuss the following questions. Circulate to observe how students are interacting with each other and the text.
 - » What could Wang's teacher have done to make her feel more welcome in the class?
 - » What could other students have done to make Wang feel like she belonged?
 - » What is important to know about each other in order to learn together this year?
- Ask each group to report on key points from their discussion. To model active listening, maintain eye contact with the speaker and then jot down their ideas on the board. Let students know that they should do the same: look at the student who is speaking and then write their ideas in their notebooks. Encourage different students from each group to contribute to the discussion.

4. Learn What Your Students Need

- Close the lesson by asking each student to complete the **What Do You Need? Exit Card** handout.
- Collect the exit cards and use the teacher reflection questions below to guide your thinking and planning process as you prepare for the next lesson in this unit.

- Use your observations from class and the exit card responses to start to understand your students' individual needs in the class. You can create an index card or notes on a computer for each student where you compile notes from the exit cards and observations from class. Use this information to guide your planning and instruction over the course of the year. Make note of any individual students who you want to follow up with this week.
- Listen carefully to students' contributions to their paired and group discussions in order to check for their understanding of the text and to hear the connections they are making between Wang's experiences and their own classroom environment.

TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS

After teaching this lesson or at the end of the day, take some time to reflect on the following questions. You can think about your answers as you plan for the next class period and/or record your ideas in writing on your lesson plan or in a teacher journal so you can refer to them later in the year and when planning next fall.

1. What do you feel went well today?

2. If you could teach this lesson again, what would you change?

3. What did you observe about students' reading skills today (individuals and the class as a whole)?

4. What did you observe about students' writing skills today (individuals and the class as a whole)?

5. What do the exit cards reveal about what your students need from you and from each other? How will you communicate to students that you understand their needs? How will you communicate to students what others need from them in this class?



Reading

“Orientation Day”

In this essay, 17-year-old Jennifer Way, who came to the United States from Beijing, China, when she was seven, reflects on a time when she had to introduce herself to a group of strangers at a new school. As you read, underline the words and phrase that Wang uses to describe her identity.

Something about myself? How do I summarize, in thirty seconds, everything which adds up and equals a neat little bundle called Me? Who am I, and why do I matter to any of you?

First of all, I am a girl who wandered the aisles of Toys “R” Us for two hours, hunting in vain for a doll with a yellowish skin tone. I am a girl who sat on the cold bathroom floor at seven in the morning, cutting out the eyes of Caucasian models in magazines, trying to fit them on my face . . .

While I was growing up, I did not understand what it meant to be “Chinese” or “American.” Do these terms link only to citizenship? Do they suggest that people fit the profile of either “typical Chinese” or “typical Americans”? And who or what determines when a person starts feeling American, and stops feeling Chinese?

I eventually shunned the Asian crowds. And I hated Chinatown. . . . I hated the noise, the crush of bodies, the yells of mothers to fathers to children to uncles to aunts to cousins. . . . I hated not understanding their language in depth—the language of my ancestors, which was also supposed to be mine to mold and master.

I am still not a citizen of the United States of America, this great nation, which is hailed as the destination for generations of people, the promised land for millions. . . . I stare blankly at my friends when they mention the 1980s or share stories of their parents as hippies. And I hate baseball.

The question lingers: Am I Chinese? Am I American? Or am I some unholy mixture of both, doomed to stay torn between the two?

I don’t know if I’ll ever find the answers. Meanwhile, it’s my turn to introduce myself . . . I stand up and say, “My name is Jennifer Wang,” and then I sit back down. There are no other words that define me as well as those do. No others show me being stretched between two very different cultures and places—the “Jennifer” clashing with the “Wang,” the “Wang” fighting with the “Jennifer.”³

³ Jennifer Wang, “Orientation Day,” in *YELL-Oh Girls! Emerging Voices Explore Culture, Identity, and Growing Up Asian American*, ed. Vickie Nam (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 199–200. Reproduced by permission from HarperCollins Publishers.



Handout

What Do You Need? Exit Card

EXIT CARD

Name:

1. What can I do as your teacher to help you be the best learner you can be in this class?
2. What can other students in the class do to help you be the best learner you can be?
3. How will you help other students in the class be the best learners they can be?

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Name:

1. What can I do as your teacher to help you be the best learner you can be in this class?
2. What can other students in the class do to help you be the best learner you can be?
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