

LESSON

Finding One's Voice

Overview

About This Lesson

Bethany Morrow's "As You Were" contains examples of human behavior that are traumatic and unsettling as well as empowered and brave. While one could spend many class periods exploring different aspects of this rich text—internal and external characterization, the role of internal monologue, the juxtaposition of two settings with different moral universes—for this text set, we will continue to shine a light on the relationship between power, agency, and voice. In the second half of the story, Ebony is silenced by fear, uttering only a few short sentences out loud; however, ultimately, she finds her voice and speaks up, even though she risks jeopardizing her relationship with Josiah, Jessie, and her bandmates. This lesson invites students to process their ideas and feelings about the story in different ways as they consider the factors that can impact one's power and agency in moments of decision-making, the importance of perspective-taking, and the possibilities and limitations of justice and reconciliation.

Essential Questions

- How do I empower myself to take action on behalf of myself and others?

Guiding Questions

- What factors can influence an individual or group's agency in moments of decision-making?
- Why do people so often do nothing even when they know something happening around them is wrong?

Facing History Learning Outcomes

- Engage with real and imagined stories that help them understand their own coming-of-age experiences and how others experience the world.
- Analyze the author's representation of individual and collective agency in the text and compare and contrast it to their own beliefs and experiences in the world.
- Recognize that their decisions matter, impact others, and shape their communities and the world.

What's Included

This lesson uses the following texts and materials. Access materials and a lesson Plan-on-a-Page in this [Google Folder](#).

- **Plan on a Page:** Finding One's Voice
- **Reading:** As You Were
- **Handout:** Analyzing Actions and Outcomes

Preparing to Teach

A Note to Teachers

1. Preparing for a Barometer Discussion

Before teaching this lesson, familiarize yourself with the [Barometer](#) teaching strategy and hang two signs on either side of the classroom: "I understand Ebony's decision" and "I don't understand Ebony's decision."

2. Pacing This Lesson

If you would like to give your students more time to discuss "As You Were," you can spread this lesson over two class periods. On the first day, do the Barometer and Musical Shares activities, extending the time students spend in each round of Musical Shares and then discussing the questions as a class. Devote the second class period to the class discussion in Activity 3 and the final reflection.

Lesson Plan

Activities

1. Discuss Ebony's Final Decision

Give students a few minutes at the start of class to either think about or reflect in their journals about the following questions:

- What is at stake for Ebony at the end of "As You Were"?
- What choices does she have? What are the risks and rewards of each choice?

Explain to students that in this activity, they are not judging Ebony; rather, they are trying to come to a better understanding of her choices and decision-making process. Then use the [Barometer](#) strategy to have students explain why they do or don't understand Ebony's decision to reject Josiah's homecoming proposal.

Encourage students to support their ideas with the text. If you find that students are all falling to one side or the other, you could write the following sentence starter on the board and invite students to think about their own agency in moments of decision-making: "Taking into account the factors that impact my own agency, I feel like I would / would not have made the same choice as Ebony because . . ."

2. Play Musical Shares¹

For this activity, students walk around the room while you play music, perhaps a Power Playlist from the first lesson in the text set. When the music stops, students should sit next to the person closest to them. Project the question for the round and give pairs two minutes to discuss it. After the time is up, have everyone stand and circulate as music plays, repeating the process until they have discussed all of the questions. Students should carry their copies of "As You Were" and the **Analyzing Actions and Outcomes** handouts they completed for homework so they can refer to them as needed during their conversations.

- **Round 1:** There is an old saying: "You can't understand someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes." What do you think it feels like to walk in Ebony's shoes? What do you think she would want you, the reader, to understand about her? What makes you say that?
- **Round 2:** What character did you focus on for last night's homework: Ebony, Josiah, or the police officer? How might your character's identity influence the choices available to them and the choices they ultimately make in the second part of the story? How does their identity impact how much power and agency they feel like they have?
- **Round 3:** What role do the two police officers play in the outcome of the story? Why do people so often do nothing even when they know something happening around them is wrong?
- **Round 4:** Bethany Morrow, the author of "As You Were," doesn't disclose the racial identity of the main characters until page 10. Why do you think she chooses to wait to reveal their racial identities? How might their membership in different racial groups impact how Ebony and Josiah view and experience the events in the second half of the story?
- **Round 5:** What injustice or injustices have occurred in "As You Were"? For there to be justice for Ebony, what do you think needs to happen? Who should be held responsible? Who needs to be involved?

¹ Rosie Reid, "[9 Strategies for Getting More Students to Talk](#)," *Edutopia*, April 25, 2019.

3. Facilitate a Class Discussion

If your classroom configuration allows, have students arrange their desks in a circle so they can see one another. Then facilitate a class discussion of the Musical Shares questions. Students might rank them from most interesting to least so they have agency in deciding which ones to address first. Here are some additional questions to consider for the discussion if you have time or if you teach the lesson over two class periods. Prompt students to support their answers with examples from the text and their own lived experiences.

- **Power:** What are the different ways that characters or groups of characters have or experience power in “As You Were”? How might their proximity to power influence their choices, decisions, and actions?
- **Agency:** Review the reading **Introducing Agency**. How does “As You Were” confirm or challenge the ideas presented in the reading about the factors that can impact a person’s, especially a young person’s, agency? How might characters’ identities influence the decisions they make in the story?
- **Personal and Contemporary Connections:** How might reading fictional and real-life stories help us to better understand other people in our communities and the world? How might they help us understand human behavior, why people do what they do? How can reading fictional and real-life stories challenge us to consider our choices and role in creating a more fair and just society?

4. Engage in a Final Reflection

In their journals or on a separate piece of paper that you collect, invite students to choose one of the Personal and Contemporary Connections questions (above) for a written reflection. Encourage them to draw evidence from “As You Were,” other texts in this text set and your course, and their lived experiences when answering the question(s).