

ELA Unit Planning Guide

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What's in Each Section of the ELA Unit Planning Guide

Before You Plan Your Unit

Section 1: Start with Yourself

A guided self-reflection to help you consider your identities, your students' identities, and your own ideas about teaching and learning.

Planning the Unit Structure

Section 2: Choose an Anchor Text

A question-driven protocol to support the text selection process, as well as questions to help you help students fully engage with the world of the text.

Section 3: Determine Learning Objectives and Outcomes

A guide to Facing History learning objectives and learning outcomes that can be paired with state and local standards or used on their own to identify enduring areas of understanding, important ideas, and key concepts in the unit.

Section 4: Craft the Essential Question

A guide to writing compelling essential questions for a unit that can help students explore the curriculum in greater depth, as well as an activity to help you test-drive your essential question. Plus, a bank of essential questions aligned with each of Facing History's thematic ELA collections.

Section 5: Design the Summative Assessment

Ten summative assessment ideas that support you in creating an engaging culminating task that is aligned to your learning objectives, outcomes, anchor text, and essential question, as well as a summative assessment guide for a coming-of-age unit.

Planning the Daily Lessons

Section 6: Incorporate Facing History Journal Prompts

Creative ways to incorporate journals into your unit and lesson plans, plus a bank of Facing History journal prompts aligned with each of our thematic ELA collections.

Section 7: Plan Instruction and Activities

A guide to using Facing History learning experiences, which are student-centered, classroom-ready activities aligned to our learning objectives and outcomes that you can incorporate into your lesson plans.

Getting Started

Introducing the ELA Unit Planning Guide

This ELA Unit Planning Guide supports the pre-planning and design process for ELA units and daily lesson plans that center students' identities and experiences as young adults in the world today. It features planning resources and prompts to help you apply Facing History & Ourselves' approach to the design of a unit for a book-length text, such as a novel or memoir. The guide also includes classroom-ready content such as essential questions, journal prompts, and customizable student activities.

Facing History's approach to a study of literature balances the mind, heart, and conscience. Applying this approach will help you to create a classroom environment and learning experiences that invite students to explore the complexities of human behavior and decision-making, nurture their reading and writing identities, and build their civic capacities and global perspectives.

Whether you are new to the profession or a 30-year veteran teacher, we have designed this guide with you in mind. The reflection questions and activities throughout the guide can support the work of individual teachers, department chairs, instructional coaches, and pre-service teachers when developing a Facing History ELA unit. Whether planning alone or with a team, creating a new unit or refreshing one that is tried and true, we invite you into the creative process of designing a unit that invites close reading, critical thinking, and conversations around issues of identity, belonging, choice, and agency. Let's get started!

Using This Guide Flexibly

We have designed this unit guide, which incorporates key aspects of [Facing History's Approach to ELA](#) and follows the principles of [Understanding by Design](#), to offer structure and guidance that makes the unit planning process less overwhelming and challenging. You do not need to use all of the questions or resources in this guide to have a successful unit! Choose the ones that feel right for your context and available time as you consider the goals, desired outcomes, and structure of your unit.

Navigating This Guide

Each section of this guide provides a brief introduction followed by specific questions and activities to guide your planning process. These activities fall into four categories:

REFLECT

Think, write, and talk about your planning context, including your own mindsets, the characteristics of your community, and your students' identities and experiences.

Example: Reflect on your core beliefs about teaching and learning and the factors that helped shape them.

LEARN

Engage with content that informs the planning and implementation process.

Example: Deepen your understanding of the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral transformations of adolescence with an interactive slide deck.

EXPLORE

Interact with tools and resources to consider how they might apply to your planning process.

Example: Review several text selection tools and frameworks that you could use to support your decision-making process when choosing a book.

DO

Apply your learning and make decisions about your unit content and structure.

Example: Test-drive your essential question by identifying key scenes in your anchor text that offer students opportunities to engage with the complexity of the question through classroom learning experiences, discussion, and writing.

These categories are used flexibly throughout the guide; they will not always appear in the same order or in every section.

Before You Begin

- Make a copy of the [ELA Unit Planning Template](#). Starting in Section 2: Choose an Anchor Text, you will be prompted to add information about your unit to this template. If you have a preferred or required unit planning template, we welcome you to use that instead.
- View a [Sample ELA Unit Planning Template](#) for *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo that follows the Unit Planning Template structure.
- Collect any district or school planning materials (e.g., local or state standards, planning templates, scope and sequence documents).

Determine how you plan to capture your personal reflections and notes as you move through this guide. For those of you who like to keep everything in one place, we provide space in this guide for you to write. Alternatively, you might prefer to use a paper journal, create a digital journal, or use a voice recorder app or device to capture your thinking.

Before You Plan Your Unit

SECTION 1

Start with Yourself

Students learn best when their teachers are purposeful in their planning and responsive to their students' needs. This process starts before the planning even begins, with you taking time to reflect on your own identity and ideas about teaching and learning, as well as considering your students as unique individuals and learners.

At Facing History, we believe that when educators engage in this reflective process and develop a curriculum and pedagogy that are relevant and responsive to the individual and collective needs of their class, the classroom becomes a space that fosters curiosity about the self and others, empathy, and a sense of agency—all tools that students need to enact positive change in their communities and the world.

This section of the Unit Planning Guide will help you consider your identities, your students' identities, and your own ideas about teaching and learning to support you in planning responsively for the specific community of your classroom.

The Importance of Personal Reflection to Mitigate Bias

We recognize that this section of the guide may feel long, but at Facing History, we understand that taking time to self-reflect at the outset of the design process not only saves time later but can also reduce the likelihood of harm that can be caused unintentionally by implicit, unchallenged personal biases in text selection, curriculum design, and classroom implementation.

Part 1: Reflect on Yourself

The reflection questions and learning activities in this section of the guide invite you into a process of personal and professional reflection designed to help you become more self-aware, more purposeful, and more capable of crafting relevant curricula and building authentic and supportive relationships with all students. As you move through the unit planning process, periodically return to your responses in this section to consider how they can inform the unit you are designing.

REFLECT

Consider Your Purpose and Experiences as a Reader and Writer

Directions: Choose from the following questions for a personal reflection. Record your response in the space below or in your own journal.

- What are your core beliefs about teaching and learning? What factors helped to shape these core beliefs?
- How did the literature you read during adolescence expand your worldview and help you engage with life experiences different from your own? How did it fall short of providing these growth opportunities?
- You now teach ELA or humanities classes or are supporting teachers in these roles. Did you enjoy these classes when you were in school? Why or why not? How did your experiences as a student shape your beliefs and practices as a teacher?



Response:

LEARN

At the Intersection of Identity and Power in the Classroom

Directions: Choose one or more of the following activities to explore. Record your responses to the corresponding questions in the space below or in your own journal.



WATCH A VIDEO: [John Amaechi Discusses the Importance of Being Present](#)

In this video, psychologist John Amaechi talks about the impact of educators' interactions with students and the importance of educators acknowledging their power.

Reflect:

- What feelings does this video bring up for you? Why do you think you may be having this response?
- Amaechi discusses the inherent power that administrators and teachers have in their interactions with students. What are the implications of underestimating your power? What are the implications of overestimating your power?
- What steps can you take to create an environment in which you can be present and use the power of your attention equitably for your students?



Response:



WATCH A VIDEO: [The Danger of Silence](#)

In this TED Talk, teacher, poet, and activist Clint Smith reflects on finding the courage to use his voice to speak up for truth and justice. You can also read [the transcript](#).

Reflect:

- What feelings does this video bring up for you? Why do you think you may be having this response?
- In his TED Talk, Smith shares the principles of his classroom: “I have four core principles posted on the board that sits in the front of my class, which every student signs at the beginning of the year: read critically, write consciously, speak clearly, tell your truth.” What are the core principles of your classroom? How might you invite students into the process of creating them?
- What might it look like, sound like, and feel like for students in your classroom to have time and space to explore the silences in their lives through the texts they read and the opportunities they have to write?



Response:



READ: [A Letter to the Students of Colour Who Were in My History Classes](#)

Dylan Wray reflects on his time in the classroom as a white educator teaching a racially diverse group of students in South Africa.

Reflect:

- What feelings does this reading bring up for you? Why do you think you may be having this response?
- In what ways can you relate to Wray's experiences and perspective? In what ways do you not relate? What might account for the difference?
- In his letter, Wray writes: “I stood before you saying I was colourblind because it was easier than facing the uncomfortable truth that, because of how I was raised, the society I grew up in and the schooling I received, I might hold unconscious biases that probably impacted on my teaching.” When you consider the society you grew up in and the schooling you received, what unconscious biases might you hold that could impact your unit planning and your teaching?



Response:

DO

Apply Big Ideas to Your Classroom Context

Directions: Choose one of the following activities to complete on a separate paper or in your journal to help you apply the big ideas from this section of the ELA Unit Planning Guide to your context.

Map Your Educational Journey

What key moments have shaped your educational journey, and how would you represent them symbolically or visually? First, reflect on memorable experiences you had during your own schooling, such as pivotal moments that shaped you as a reader and writer, influential mentors, and professional development you found meaningful. Then adapt the [Life Road Maps](#) teaching strategy to create your educational journey map. Consider its shape (a line, zigzag, spiral, etc.) and where to include potholes, highways, hills and valleys, detours, and other journey metaphors using images, symbols, color, words, and phrases to map your journey.

Think: What does your educational journey map reveal, and how can it help to inform the decisions you make in your classroom?

Create a Social Identity Wheel

A “social identity wheel”¹ can help you consider the multiple dimensions of your identity and how your sense of who you are may or may not align with how others perceive you. It can also help you consider how certain aspects of your identity can become more felt or visible in certain contexts, and the ways in which you may or may not be able to enact power through your intersecting identities. For this activity, you will complete the [Social Identity Wheel](#) and reflect on how your membership in certain social groups, whether by choice or because you were born into them, can impact your sense of who you are and your interactions with others, specifically the students in your classroom.

1 Activity adapted from “[Social Identity Wheel](#),” LSA Inclusive Teaching Initiative, University of Michigan.

Think: When you consider your identities in your school context and in relation to your students, in what ways might you have power and privilege in your relationships and choice-making at your school because of one or more aspects of your identity?

Part 2: Consider Your Students

Knowing your students as unique individuals, as well as understanding their relationship to reading and writing, can help you support them intellectually and emotionally. Before developing your unit, consider what you know and can learn about the students in your classroom. For example, what can you learn about the many transformations that young people experience during their adolescence, and how can you use these new understandings to support them? The activities in this section of the guide are designed to support these lines of inquiry.

REFLECT

Consider Your Students' Identities and Experiences

Directions: Choose from the following questions for a personal reflection. Record your responses in the space provided or in your own journal. Consider how your responses can inform the unit you will be designing.

- How might your students' identities and experiences shape their encounters with the texts and learning experiences in your unit? As you reflect, consider the demographics of the students in your classroom (e.g., age, ethnicity, socioeconomic factors, gender identity, home languages, ability and disability), as well as information you have about their interests, experiences, and passions.
- When have you observed your students to be most motivated or engaged in your classroom? When have you observed your students' motivation or engagement waning?
- What important skills and knowledge do your students already have? How can this unit incorporate the expertise and passion they bring to the classroom?



Response:

LEARN

Deepen Your Understanding of Adolescent Development

Directions: Engage with an interactive slide deck and choose from the questions for a personal reflection. Record your response in the space provided or in your own journal. Consider how your response can inform the unit you will be designing.



VIEW SLIDES: [Adolescent Development and the Facing History Approach](#)

Explore key insights from current research on adolescence in this short, interactive slide deck.

Reflect:

- How are your school and classroom set up in ways that reflect and support this information about adolescent development? How are they set up in ways that may not be informed by research on adolescent development?
- What are the implications of this information on your text and topic selection, instructional approaches, and classroom routines and culture?
- Consider Dr. John Amaechi's video from the previous section: How is your understanding of the power dynamics of your school and classroom influenced by this information about adolescent development?



Response:

Design a Plan to Foster Classroom Community

Directions: Review the Contracting teaching strategy below. Then create a plan to develop (or revisit) a classroom contract at the outset of your unit. Outline your approach for developing a contract with your students in the space below or in your own journal. Note: There are ideas for approaches and other classroom support in the Contracting strategy.

At Facing History, we understand that before students can engage in courageous conversations, they need to feel confident that they are part of a brave and reflective classroom community where they are seen, known, valued, and supported by their teachers and peers. This ongoing process starts with personal reflection on the part of the teacher and invites students to help establish and uphold the core principles for how everyone will treat one another.

You can prepare students to engage, take risks, and support one another by following the steps of our [Contracting](#) teaching strategy with agreed-upon norms and behaviors that allow every student to feel seen, heard, and valued. If you have already created a contract, set aside time to revisit it at the outset of this unit to recommit to your group's agreed-upon norms and behaviors.



Response:

Planning the Unit Structure

Where to Begin: Text Selection or Learning Objectives?

We can think of compelling arguments for starting with text selection and for starting with desired outcomes. Sometimes, knowing the enduring understandings, key concepts, and target skills of a unit can help guide your text selection process. Other times, knowing the anchor text helps determine your objectives and outcomes.

We have organized this guide to start with text selection, but if you'd prefer to identify your learning objectives and outcomes first, skip to [Section 3: Determine Learning Objectives and Outcomes](#) and then return to Section 2: Choose an Anchor Text when you've finished.

SECTION 2

Choose an Anchor Text

Literature has the power to help students understand different perspectives, question their surroundings, and build empathy in meaningful and communal ways. While stories can be identity affirming and broaden students' thinking about themselves and others, stories can also marginalize, simplify, and even erase groups of people from the curriculum. So it is important to consider a text's purpose, as well as the students in your classroom, when engaging in the text selection process.

Choosing an anchor text, and considering how it contributes to the course as a whole, is an important part of purposeful and responsive planning. For this reason, we do not include a curated list of books in this guide. Our goal is to provide you with learning resources, text selection tools, and activities to help you engage in a meaningful text selection process that is aligned to your unique context and meets the needs of your individual students.

We recognize that you may be required to teach particular texts or have limited choices. For those of you with the freedom to choose, making a thoughtful choice is an important step in the unit planning process. For those who can't choose, there may be space in your unit for supplemental texts that expand the range of voices and experiences students encounter in the texts they are required to read in your classroom.

Regardless of whether you are empowered to choose your own anchor text or are supplementing one that is chosen for you, the resources in this section of the ELA Unit Planning Guide provide guidance for you, your planning team, and your department throughout the text selection process.

REFLECT

Consider Your Course as a Whole

Directions: Choose from the following questions for a personal reflection. Record your responses in the space provided or in your own journal. Consider how your responses can inform the unit you will be designing.

- What are the larger themes and big questions that you want your students to engage with in this unit? How do they fit into your course as a whole?
- What are the skills, dispositions, and habits that you want your students to develop in this unit? How do they fit into your course as a whole?
- What priority are you trying to address with this text selection process—what is the opportunity, challenge, need, or new direction you would like to pursue?



Response:

EXPLORE

Inclusive Text Collections

For those of you who are at a loss for where to begin looking for titles, we recommend that you spend some time exploring the following organizations. Their commitment to inclusive and representative text selection and curated collections of texts reflect a wide range of identities, voices, and experiences that provide a solid foundation from which to start your selection process.

- [#DisruptTexts](#)
- [NCTE Build Your Stack](#)
- [Social Justice Books: A Teaching for Change Project](#)
- [We Need Diverse Books](#)

The Importance of Pre-Reading the Entire Text

Regardless of whether your anchor text is chosen for you or by you, it is important that you read any text you plan to teach in its entirety before moving forward with the unit design process. This word of caution applies not only to anchor books but also to shorter and/or supplemental texts—readings, videos, audio, images, artwork—you are considering for your classroom. While you don't need to read every book you are considering in its entirety at the start of the text selection process, as you narrow down the finalists and choose your anchor book, be sure not to skip this step!

DO

Create a Big List of Books

Directions: Respond to the prompt in the space provided or in your own journal. As you move through the activities in this section of the guide, you will have opportunities to narrow your anchor text options. Even if your anchor text is chosen for you by your district or department, there is value in engaging with these activities to help identify supplemental texts that expand the range of stories and voices your students experience.

Record a list of possible anchor texts in the space below or in your own journal. If your anchor text is chosen for you, generate a list of supplemental texts to pair with your anchor text to help you create a more representative and inclusive unit.



Response:

LEARN

At the Intersection of Curriculum Planning and Self-Reflection

Directions: Choose one or both of the following videos to watch. Then respond to the corresponding questions in a personal reflection. Record your response in the space provided or in your own journal. Consider how your response can inform the unit you will be designing.



WATCH A VIDEO: [Curriculum Planning Begins with Self-Reflection](#)

Dr. Kimberly Parker discusses the internal work that teachers need to do during the curriculum development process to engage and support students in their learning.

Reflect:

- What feelings does this video bring up for you? Why do you think you may be having this response?
- Who are your students, both in and outside of school? How can you learn more about their interests?
- What do you need to know in order to be culturally competent in your identity and with your students? In other words, who are you and how has your identity been shaped by the groups to which you belong? What do you need to learn about your own identity, your students' cultures, and their communities in order to develop pedagogy and a curriculum that meets their needs?
- Where are your own reading gaps? In which spaces do you need to do more reading? Consider genres, topics, and social identity markers in your reflection.



Response:



WATCH A VIDEO: [Where Do You Start with Text Selection?](#)

Dr. Kimberly Parker shares steps educators can take to ensure that their curriculum choices make room for student voice and reflect a broad range of stories and experiences.

Reflect:

- What feelings does this video bring up for you? Why do you think you may be having this response?
- What books are your students currently reading that they enjoy? How can you learn more about the books, podcasts, music, poetry, videos, and other texts that they enjoy?
- What identities, points of view, experiences, and voices—of both authors and characters—do you include in your course? What is missing?
- What might a tool like a literature equity audit affirm or reveal about the texts in your course?



Response:

LEARN

Facing History Key Principles to Guide Text Selection

Directions: Read the following key principles and highlight or record in your journal two to three that stand out to you, perhaps because they feel new, because they are relevant to your text selection process for this unit, or because they help you think about your list of potential anchor texts in a new way. Then choose from the corresponding questions for a personal reflection. Record your responses in the space provided or in your own journal. Consider how your responses can inform your text selection process and the unit you will be designing.

1. Consider your own identity.

As readers and as educators, our identities and experiences shape our understanding of and appreciation for the texts we select. Growing up, we may have encountered texts that we found affirming, validating, or even life-changing. Or we may have searched to no avail for a sense of belonging on the page. Before choosing texts, it is important that you take time to reflect on your experiences as a reader and a writer. For example, when you explore your relationship to certain texts, you may realize that what made them life-changing for you may not resonate with your students. For them to have a similarly transformative literary experience, you may need to consider different titles. When you engage in this reflection process, you are better equipped to be responsive to your students' individual and collective needs, as well as more aware of why you may gravitate toward certain curricular choices.

2. Consider your students' identities.

When students believe that what they are learning is meaningful and relevant, they are more likely to engage with the content and with each other. Knowing your students as unique individuals, as well as understanding their relationship to reading and writing, can help you support them intellectually and emotionally. Furthermore, when you consider how your ideas about adolescence and adolescents may influence your interactions and expectations, you can become aware of any stereotypes and biases that may get in the way of upholding fair and equitable classroom policies and procedures. As a result, you may identify new opportunities to help your students connect to what they are learning.

3. Know your purpose.

As an educator, you need to consider your core beliefs about teaching and learning. This process starts with understanding your “why,” the key principles that guide your planning and pedagogy for the students in your classrooms each year. Grappling with challenging questions, like why you teach a particular text, can spark important conversations about the texts you teach year after year, the new ones you may add, and whether or not the diversity and interests of your students and their experiences are reflected in your core curriculum.

4. Examine text complexity (in a new way).

When you look at text complexity as more than a Lexile number—as something that exists in a text's substance and style, as well as in how students engage with its ideas and themes—you can broaden your criteria for text selection in meaningful ways. This approach recognizes that your students benefit from reading cognitively powerful texts that provide insights into the human experience. When you support your students in critically engaging with the characters, conflicts, and themes of complex texts through meaningful reflection, discussion, and writing tasks, they have opportunities to imagine people and places outside of their lived experiences. Furthermore, they can form opinions about very real concepts, such as power, systems of inequity, and the multiple ways of being human in the world today.

5. Identify the text's purpose.

Deeply reading and discussing a text as a class can be a community-building activity, one that provides students with opportunities to grow in ways they might not when reading on their own. Given the important work of whole-class texts, it's essential to consider how each text fits into the larger themes of the course. In a Facing History ELA unit, the text invites students to engage with the world and its people in all their messy complexity. It provides opportunities for students to explore philosophical questions and ideas about what it means to be human. The text may introduce ideas and themes that are unsettling and lead to a state of productive disequilibrium. And in the end, through personal reflection, critical analysis, and collaborative learning experiences, it provides a catalyst for students to reach new, different, or deeper understandings of themselves and others.

6. Consider the representation of adolescents and adolescence.

Adolescence is a dynamic time of growth, change, and possibility, a time when young people explore their identities, seek new experiences and relationships, and form values, passions, and goals that will shape their futures. When you select texts with complex characters and themes, you can help students make connections between what they are reading and their own developing ideals and principles. This process can involve inviting students to evaluate how a text portrays adolescence and adolescents and to critically examine how representations of young adults and their experiences may or may not reflect their own lives. This kind of analysis can feel especially relevant and engaging to students, who are experts in what it means to experience adolescence in this moment.

7. Assess your readiness to address racist and other derogatory language.

An important step in the text selection process is to read, watch, or listen to any text in its entirety that you are considering for your class. Only then can you know where an author may have used racist slurs, derogatory words, and/or anachronistic language. If, after previewing a text, you identify instances of racist and dehumanizing language, you need to assess your readiness to address these problematic circumstances with intention and care.

Upon reflection, you may realize that you lack the tools to teach that particular text in a responsible way and choose a different text. Or, given your identities and relationship with the words in the text, your community and its norms, and/or your professional experience, you may feel prepared to lay the groundwork to facilitate the brave conversations necessary for your students to fully engage with the text and its language.

Note: The next Learn activity in this guide provides additional guidance if you are considering a text that includes dehumanizing language.

Reflect:

- Which of these key principles resonate with you? How do they help you think about your text selection process in new, different, or deeper ways?
- What is your own relationship to the texts you are considering? How might your relationship to these texts influence your decision about whether or not to choose one of them for this unit?
- How do the texts you are considering connect your students to perspectives, experiences, and values that both challenge and resonate with their own?
- How do the texts you are considering introduce your students to new places, people, and events outside of their own contexts? How do they provide insight into the human experience?



Response:

DO

Determine Your Top Contenders

Directions: Based on new understandings from Dr. Kimberly Parker and Facing History's Key Principles to Guide Text Selection, narrow your big list of potential anchor texts to your top three to five contenders. Record your responses in the space provided or in your own journal.



Response:

If You Are Considering a Text with Dehumanizing Language

Teaching a text that includes racist slurs, derogatory words, and/or anachronous language can elicit anxiety and a moral dilemma for teachers and students alike. Literary texts often include such language in order to critique it or explore its impact as part of authentic human experiences and interactions. However, unless you are prepared to address such language with intention and care, you risk causing harm and creating an inhospitable classroom environment where students may feel like they don't belong and where they cannot learn. An important first step in any planning process is to read, watch, or listen to every text in its entirety that you plan to use with students. If you realize that you will be asking students to encounter, process, and discuss text with dehumanizing language, it is important that you consider the purpose of the text and its potential cost to students' emotional well-being.

The following guidelines can help guide your text selection process if you are considering a text that includes dehumanizing language:

1. Start with yourself.

Consider your own identity and relationship to the words in the text, acknowledging that approaches and strategies that may work for another teacher may not work for you. Try to educate yourself and develop your own classroom approach to guide your text selection process and implementation by consulting with colleagues, administrators, community members, or parents so that it becomes a collaborative effort, as appropriate for your context.

Some racist and dehumanizing terms, such as the n-word, have the power to destabilize a classroom environment if they are encountered without adequate preparation or groundwork. If you are looking for a starting place for your own learning, we recommend Dr. Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor's powerful TED Talk, [Why it's so hard to talk about the N-word](#). In her presentation, which models what "Start with Yourself" can look and feel like, Dr. Stordeur Pryor reflects on her own experiences as a college professor: "I hear from students that when the word is said during a lesson without discussion and context, it poisons the entire classroom environment. The trust between student and teacher is broken" (11:31). She goes on to share her own classroom guidelines, which you might consider as a starting point for your own deep thinking and reflection.

2. Learn from a leader in the field of ELA.

When looking for strategies to help guide our text selection process, we turn to teacher, author, and #DisruptTexts cofounder Kimberly Parker, who reminds us of the importance of teachers doing their homework so we can make choices that allow us, and our students in the classroom, to recognize one another as full human beings.



WATCH A VIDEO: [Humanizing Text Selection](#)

Dr. Kimberly Parker discusses the importance of teachers making intentional choices about text selection that support students' intellectual and social-emotional development.

Reflect:

- What feelings does this video bring up for you? Why do you think you may be having this response?
- How might your students be entering this unit emotionally? What stories do your students need at this moment?
- Where in your curriculum have you included texts that express joy, love, and humanity? Can you identify spaces to include even more of these texts in the future?
- What historical or contemporary issues do the texts you are considering raise that your students need to understand in order to fully engage with the unit? If a text is not contemporary, what new ideas, insights, and imperatives have emerged since its publication? If a text is contemporary, what context do you feel connected to and what context do you need to research deeply?
- How will you prepare to address any racial slurs, derogatory words, and/or anachronistic language with intention and care?



Response:

EXPLORE

Review Two Text Selection Tools

Our friends at Learning for Justice produced [two text selection tools](#) that you may find helpful in determining your anchor text. One tool is a one-page questionnaire designed for “busy teachers and anyone looking to assess a text’s diversity.” The other tool is a comprehensive multipage guide “ideal for curriculum coordinators, literacy coaches, book-selection committees, and pre-service teachers.” Review these tools to determine whether or not you’d like to use one or both to support your text selection process.

DO

Choose Your Anchor Text

You’ve put in the work, and now it’s time to choose an anchor text for the unit you are designing! Review the resources in this section of the guide, including Facing History’s Key Principles to Guide Text Selection and your reflections, alongside your three to five top contenders. Consider applying one of the Learning for Justice [text selection tools](#) to your top two choices to help you identify your anchor text.



Go to the [ELA Unit Planning Template](#) or your own template to enter the following information:

- Course title and grade level
- Book title and author of your anchor text
- Start and end dates of your unit

SECTION 3

Determine Learning Objectives and Outcomes

Facing History learning objectives and outcomes integrate intellectual inquiry with ethical reflection and emotional engagement. Drawing from the frameworks provided by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the International Literacy Association (ILA), and the Common Core, our learning objectives and outcomes name the skills and dispositions crucial for the lives your students are leading now and into the future.

Examples include considering opposing viewpoints, practicing perspective-taking, supporting ideas with evidence, and developing the capacity to change one's mind.

For many teachers, state or local standards may be the starting point for determining the expectations of what students should know and be able to do as they move through a course and the units within it. Facing History's learning objectives and learning outcomes are designed to stand alone or supplement these state or local standards. They take into account not only your students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills development but also their ethical and emotional growth.

The resources in this section support you identifying the enduring areas of understanding, key concepts, and target skills for your unit before selecting Facing History learning objectives and outcomes and/or standards to frame your unit.

REFLECT

Identify Big Understandings

Directions: Choose from the following questions for a personal reflection. Record your responses in the space provided or in your own journal. Consider how your responses can inform the unit you will be designing.

- What ELA skills and dispositions do you want your students to practice in this unit? How do they build on the skills and dispositions that students developed in the previous unit? If you have already selected your anchor text, which of these skills and dispositions do you feel your anchor text is especially well-suited for?
- What opportunities does your text provide for students to explore aspects of key Facing History concepts like the complexity of identity, moral decision-making, and agency?
- What state or local standards are you accountable for with this unit?



Response:

LEARN

Define Key Terms

The following terms are defined in many different ways in education literature, schools, and even departments. In this ELA Unit Planning Guide, we define them as follows:

- **Learning Objectives:** General statements about the larger goals of a Facing History unit. Facing History learning objectives focus on skills and habits of mind that students develop over time when educators plan and teach using our [pedagogical approach](#) and [resources](#).
- **Learning Outcomes:** Specific, measurable statements of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that students develop over the course of a Facing History ELA unit. They are aligned to our learning objectives.
- **Learning Experiences:** A flexible collection of Facing History classroom activities, materials, and instructional strategies. Our learning experiences are designed to be incorporated into daily lesson plans in order to support students' development of specific Facing History learning outcomes and objectives. You can find a collection of Facing History learning experiences in Section 7 of this ELA Unit Planning Guide.

EXPLORE

Facing History Learning Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Directions: Read about Facing History's learning objectives and outcomes. Keeping your course goals, anchor text, and any state or local standards in mind, decide which Facing History learning objectives and outcomes you might choose for your unit. Then highlight or record in your own journal the objectives and outcomes that resonate with you for your unit.

Read: Facing History's Learning Objectives

Facing History's three ELA learning objectives provide a framework for a course and/or unit that addresses the cognitive, emotional, and ethical growth of the whole student. They are designed to articulate the skills and dispositions that students are developing over the span of a year in a course that integrates our [pedagogical approach](#) and [ELA resources](#).

- **Learning Objective 1:** Explore the Complexity of Identity
- **Learning Objective 2:** Process Texts through a Critical and Ethical Lens
- **Learning Objective 3:** Develop a Sense of Civic Agency

These learning objectives can help you articulate a rationale and goals for your course, as well as a unit, and communicate what you believe students should know and be able to do in the broadest sense. A pedagogy that centers Facing History learning objectives honors students' identities and experiences while cultivating their capacity for informed and engaged citizenship.

Read: Facing History's Learning Outcomes

Facing History's learning outcomes describe the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions students develop over the course of a Facing History ELA unit. These observable and measurable outcomes can help you design daily lesson plans, select passages for close reading and analysis, and assess your students' growth over the course of a unit. Our learning outcomes integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills development with perspective-taking, ethical reflection, empathic thinking, and agency.

- **Learning Objective 1: Explore the Complexity of Identity**

In order to deepen their understanding of the text, themselves, each other, and the world, students will . . .

- Value the complexity of identity in themselves and others.
- Examine the many factors that can shape an individual's identity.
- Engage with real and imagined stories that help them understand their own experiences and how others experience the world.
- Describe the factors that influence their moral development, such as their personal experiences, their interactions with others, and their surroundings, and reflect on how these factors influence their sense of right and wrong.
- Recognize the power that comes with telling their own story and engaging with the stories of others.

- **Learning Objective 2: Process Texts through a Critical and Ethical Lens**

In order to deepen their understanding of the text, themselves, each other, and the world, students will . . .

- Critically and ethically analyze thematic development and literary craft in order to draw connections between the text and their lives.
- Practice perspective-taking in order to develop empathy and recognize the limits of any one person's point of view.
- Evaluate a text for the ways in which it upholds and/or challenges stereotypes of individuals and groups.
- Analyze the internal and external conflicts that characters face and the impact these conflicts can have on an individual's choices and actions, both in the text and in the real world.
- Identify examples of injustice and unfairness in the literature they read and in the world today. Examine how an individual's identity, group membership, and relationship to systems of inequity can impact their sense of who they are and their agency when faced with a moral dilemma or choice.
- Make real-world connections that explore historical and contemporary contexts in literature.

- **Learning Objective 3: Develop a Sense of Civic Agency**

In order to deepen their understanding of the text, themselves, each other, and the world, students will . . .

- 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.
- Compare and contrast the motivations and actions of upstanders, bystanders, and perpetrators in the text and draw connections to the human condition and social issues in the world today.
- Recognize that their decisions matter, impact others, and shape their communities and the world.
- Develop the tools, efficacy, and voice to envision and enact positive changes in their personal lives, communities, and the world.
- Demonstrate an increased sense of confidence in their ability to communicate their ideas orally and in writing.

Select Facing History Learning Outcomes and/or Focus Standards



Go to the [ELA Unit Planning Template](#) or your own template. Record the following information in the space provided:

- Facing History learning outcomes that capture the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that students will develop over the course of your unit
- Focus standards for your unit

SECTION 4

Craft the Essential Question

Essential questions invite students to grapple with complexity, deepen their understanding of a topic or theme, and explore connections between the text, themselves, and the world. According to *Understanding by Design* co-author Grant Wiggins, an essential question “causes genuine and relevant inquiry into the big ideas.”² In the same vein, Harvard professor David Perkins describes these “big questions” as inspiring wonder and curiosity about the human condition and our world.³

With these ideas in mind, Facing History essential questions invite students to use their imagination and experiences as they explore the complexities of identity, human behavior, and decision-making. These questions are designed to foster deep thinking and spark discussion as students deepen their understanding of the literature they read and the world in which they live.

The resources in this section of the ELA Unit Planning Guide support you in developing a thought-provoking essential question that students will find engaging and relevant and that provides a meaningful arc of inquiry for the unit you are planning.

REFLECT

Consider the Big Ideas You Want Students to Explore

Directions: Choose from the following questions for a personal reflection. Record your responses in the space provided or in your own journal. Consider how your responses can inform the unit you will be designing.

Reflect:

- What big ideas or concepts do you want students to explore in this unit? How does your text provide avenues for this exploration?
- What big understandings do you hope students will take away from this unit and apply to other aspects of their lives? These big understandings might delve into human behavior, cultivate ethical thinking, promote empathy, or offer insights into the workings of the world around them.

² Grant Wiggins, “[What is an essential question?](#),” Authentic Education, accessed January 10, 2024.

³ David N. Perkins, *Future Wise: Educating Our Children for a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 73–74.



Response:

LEARN

What Is an Essential Question?

In their 2013 publication *Essential Questions: Opening Doors to Student Understanding*, Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins offer the following defining characteristics of an essential question:

1. Is *open-ended*; that is, it typically will not have a single, final, and correct answer.
2. Is *thought-provoking* and *intellectually engaging*, often sparking discussion and debate.
3. Calls for *higher-order thinking*, such as analysis, inference, evaluation, or prediction. It cannot be effectively answered by recall alone.
4. Points toward *important, transferable ideas* within (and sometimes across) disciplines.
5. Raises *additional questions* and sparks further inquiry.
6. Requires *support and justification*, not just an answer.
7. Recurs over time; that is, the question can and should be revisited again and again.⁴

When writing essential questions for Facing History text sets and units, our curriculum developers keep these characteristics in mind, alongside the tenets of our unique [pedagogical approach](#), specifically our pedagogical triangle. We strive to develop questions that balance intellectual curiosity, empathic thinking, and ethical reflection. When students bring their minds, hearts, and consciences to conversations about literature and life, it allows them to broaden their understanding of the text, themselves, and their world. We believe that discussions are richer when students are grappling with questions that matter—questions that are open-ended, intellectually engaging, and transferable to their own lives.

⁴ Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, *Essential Questions: Opening Doors to Student Understanding* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2013), 3.

EXPLORE

Facing History ELA Unit Essential Questions

Directions: Read examples of Facing History essential questions aligned to our ELA collections. Highlight or record in your journal any essential questions that resonate with you for the unit you are designing. If your unit explores a different topic, consider how you might craft an essential question that invites students to wrestle with complexity and to engage their minds, hearts, and consciences in an exploration of the text and a reflection on their own lived experiences.

- [Essential Questions for a Coming-of-Age Unit](#)
- [Essential Questions for a Borders & Belonging Unit](#)

Reflect:

- What, if any, Facing History essential questions resonate with you for your unit and why?
- Where do you see opportunities for students to tap into their minds, hearts, and consciences with the Facing History essential questions? How might this experience feel engaging and relevant for students?
- Where do you see examples of McTighe's and Wiggins's defining characteristics of essential questions in the examples you explored? How might you use these examples to help generate your own original essential questions?



Response:

Choose or Craft the Essential Questions

Directions: This activity is designed to help you choose or craft one or two essential questions for your unit. Follow the instructions for each step and record your ideas in the space provided or in your own journal.

Step 1: Choose Possible Essential Questions

Drawing from the theme-specific essential questions (see Explore above) or your own ideas, write three to five potential essential questions in the space provided or in your own journal.



Response:

Step 2: Test-Drive Your Essential Questions

Directions: Follow the prompt to test-drive your top two essential questions to help determine whether or not they pair well with your anchor text. If you are able to identify a number of key scenes that your students can explore together through classroom learning experiences and thought-provoking discussions, it's a good sign that the essential question will work well for your text. Move down the list of potential essential questions, as needed, if you struggle to find key scenes that align with the first two essential questions you test-drive.

Prompt: Identify five to seven key scenes in the text that explore, complicate, or add nuance to your essential question. Mark the pages with sticky notes, perhaps using a different color for each question you test-drive.

Step 3: Select an Essential Question for Your Unit



Go to the [ELA Unit Planning Template](#) or your own template.
Record one or two unit essential questions in the space provided.

SECTION 5

Design the Summative Assessment

Facing History understands that assessments are most effective when students find them meaningful and relevant, and when they help students to clarify their ideas, engage with real-world problems, and reach a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them.

When designing assessments for our literature guides, such as [Teaching Brown Girl Dreaming](#) or [Teaching Night](#), we seek to provide students with opportunities to synthesize new knowledge and understanding, explore a unit's essential questions, and make connections between the book and their own lives. We develop our assessment criteria before designing lesson plans so we can be intentional about the following decisions: selecting passages for close reading and discussion, creating mini-lessons to teach target skills and concepts, and designing learning experiences and formative assessments that help students engage with the text and assessment task in meaningful ways over the course of the unit.

The resources in this section of the ELA Unit Planning Guide are designed to help you create a summative assessment that is aligned to your learning objectives, learning outcomes, anchor text, and essential question. To support a range of different goals and classroom contexts, we are providing a menu of 10 assessment ideas that can be adapted and developed for your specific unit, as well as one fully developed assessment for a coming-of-age book unit to use as is or as a model for your own design. The assessment ideas are organized into the following categories:

- **Analytical and Evaluative Assessment Ideas**
- **Creative Writing Assessment Ideas**
- **Action Project Assessment Ideas**
- **“This I Believe” Personal Narrative Essay or Podcast Project for a Coming-of-Age Unit**

We hope these ideas will inspire and support you in creating a summative experience that engages your students intellectually, ethically, and emotionally, while also providing opportunities for them to practice the key skills and dispositions you have identified for your unit.

REFLECT

Consider Your Assessment Goals

Directions: Before engaging with the questions in this section of the guide, review your earlier reflections to remind yourself of your course goals and the skills and dispositions students will develop in this unit. Then choose from the following questions for a personal reflection. Record your responses in the space below or in your own journal. Consider how your responses can inform the assessment you will be designing.

- What are your main goals for this summative assessment? How do they align with the goals you outlined for your course in [Section 2: Choose an Anchor Text](#) and [Section 3: Determine Learning Objectives and Outcomes](#)?
- How will this summative assessment build on what students have already learned in the course? How will it help to prepare them for what comes next?
- What aspects of your unit's essential question(s), learning objectives, learning outcomes, and any state or local standards are most important to assess in this culminating task? What do you want to learn about your students' thinking at the end of the unit?



Response:

EXPLORE

A Menu of Facing History ELA Assessment Ideas

Directions: Read examples of Facing History assessment ideas for a book unit, designed to spark your thinking as you plan your summative assessment. Highlight or record in your journal the titles of any assessment ideas that resonate as a starting point for your own summative assessment.

Some of the assessment ideas include links to Facing History learning experiences, which you will learn more about in [Section 7](#) of this guide. Our learning experiences are flexible, modular classroom activities and resources that you can incorporate

into your lesson plans. They are designed to help students engage deeply with the text as they explore core Facing History concepts or themes while also building key literacy skills.

For a downloadable version of all the Facing History summative assessment ideas, make a copy of [A Menu of Facing History ELA Assessment Ideas](#).

Analytical and Evaluative Assessment Ideas

Book Review

Students engage critically with the text in order to evaluate it and incorporate their own perspective as a reader in an original book review.

Book reviews support students in considering a text as a whole through the lens of their own reading experiences, while also providing opportunities to practice summarizing and critically analyzing a text in order to form opinions about its strengths and weaknesses.

Activities and resources from our [Voice and Choice in Literature](#) learning experience can help students analyze authorial choice and examine the voices present in and absent from the anchor text they are reviewing. They will also benefit from multiple opportunities to evaluate mentor texts from sites like *Kirkus Reviews*, the *New York Times*, or *Book Riot*. Your students may also enjoy exploring book reviews on TikTok and YouTube, and you might be inspired to provide them with choice in how they present their final product. For example, they could choose to write a book review for the school newspaper, create a video review with a tool like Flip, or publish a blog entry. All of these options require outlining, drafting, revising, editing, and the production of a final product, so no matter which medium they choose, students will be reading, writing, and thinking critically!

When developing your summative task, consider how the following questions can prompt students to evaluate the text through their own reading lens:

- Who is telling the story? How does seeing this character's perspective impact your understanding of what is happening? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story from this perspective?
- Whose perspectives are missing from the story? Are there any characters who don't have a voice or who the reader only sees through the eyes of other characters? Why do you think the author chose not to develop their perspectives?
- In your opinion, what aspects of the book were effective or noteworthy? What aspects were not? What makes you say that?

Essay That Explores the Essential Question

Students reflect on new understandings of the unit's essential question in a piece of writing that draws evidence from the text and their own experiences to support their claims.

When you incorporate journaling and Facing History learning experiences into your unit, students have multiple opportunities to engage with the big understandings and questions you are asking them to consider. For this assessment idea to be successful, it's important that the essential question doesn't get lost once you start the unit, only to reemerge when it's time for students to start writing. To help keep the essential question top of mind, we recommend strategies like creating a big [graffiti board](#) along a wall in your classroom and providing opportunities each week for students to add to it. Additionally, you might end each week with 15 minutes of journal writing that explores the essential question through the lens of the chapters and learning experiences students encountered that week.

To help students synthesize their thinking at the end of the unit, have them highlight or use sticky notes to mark places in their journals, class notes, and handouts where they see their understanding about the essential question deepen, change, or get challenged. This step can provide raw material for their outlines and first drafts.

Essay That Explores Characterization

Students identify significant moments of agency and choice in a character's journey in order to examine the many factors that can shape an individual's decision-making process, both in the text and in their own lives.

Charting a character's growth and development over the course of a book can be an engaging and meaning-making enterprise for students. The text can provide distance from situations that can feel quite real; a focus on characterization helps students consider the factors that can shape a character's sense of who they are, where they belong, the choices they have, and the decisions they make in the text. Along the way, students deepen their understanding of their own lives.

Facing History has a number of learning experiences and resources that can help students analyze a character's growth, such as [Map the Internal World of a Character](#) and [Agency and Action](#). Identity charts, like the four options we provide in [Exploring Identity in Literature and Life](#), also help students gather textual evidence that supports their thinking about the complexity of a character's identity. And finally, [Analyzing "Aha" Moments](#) helps students identify pivotal moments when a character learns something important about themselves, others, and their real or fictional world.

The activities in these learning experiences provide students with opportunities to read closely, reflect in their journals, and draw evidence from the text to support their claims, both in classroom discussions and in their final written analysis that explores a character's growth and development over the course of the text.

When developing your summative task, consider how the following questions can prompt a piece of writing about the factors that can shape a character's growth and development over the course of the text:

- How are the main characters' identities shaped and reshaped by the people and circumstances they encounter?
- How do characters navigate the tension between their desire to fit in and their need to express their own identities?
- What are the factors that impact the choices that one or more characters in your text have and how they make decisions? To what degree do you think these factors reflect what it's like to make decisions in the world today?
- Where do you see characters making the choice to act as perpetrators of injustice? Where do you see them acting as bystanders? Allies? Upstanders? What do you think motivates their behavior?

Essay That Explores Setting

Students consider the ways in which the spoken and unspoken rules of a place, as well as the complex network of intergroup relationships, can shape how characters understand, experience, and navigate the world of the text.

All too often, the teaching of setting is limited to “the time and place where the story occurs.” This approach fails to engage students with the complexity of setting and the ways in which where we are can impact our sense of who we are and where we belong. The activities in our [Exploring the Moral Universe of Setting](#) and [Understanding Social Systems as an Element of Setting](#) learning experiences invite students to consider the ways in which the context of a place can shape the choices and the moral decision-making processes of its inhabitants. These learning experiences can become the foundation for a larger writing experience that invites students to examine the moral universe of a text and/or consider how characters understand, interact with, and feel about the social systems they must navigate in the world of the text.

When developing your summative task, consider how the following questions can prompt a piece of writing about the ways in which setting can shape a character's identity and experiences:

- How does your moral universe map depict spoken and unspoken rules of a setting in the text? How does the moral universe of the setting shape one or more of the characters' decision-making processes? Discuss at least three specific choices you made when creating your map.
- How do individuals and groups in this space determine who does and doesn't belong? How are those messages conveyed?
- What impact does this social system have on one or more of the characters' sense of who they are, their opportunities, and their experiences? How do you know?
- What do you think the author wants you to think about or understand about this text's setting and the spoken and unspoken rules that govern it?

You could also adapt these questions so students can connect the concept of "moral universe" to their own lives by mapping the moral universe of their school or local community and then reflecting on what the map reveals in a piece of writing.

Socratic Seminar

Students use the text and resources from the unit to reflect on new understandings of the essential question in a graded discussion.

In order to internalize what they are learning, students need to participate in intellectual communities that value speaking and listening as much as reading, writing, and "staying on task." Perhaps best said by philosopher Hannah Arendt, "However much we are affected by the things of the world . . . they become human for us only when we discuss them with our fellows. . . . We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of it we learn to be human."⁵ Choosing a [Socratic Seminar](#) as a summative assessment task is a powerful way for students to "humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves" while in dialogue with their peers. However, for this assessment idea to be successful, students need regular opportunities to grapple with complex ideas in small and large groups, and for you to prioritize talk as a community-building and meaning-making activity.

To help students engage in rich conversations that allow them to practice deep listening and support their thinking with textual evidence, we recommend that you take time to explicitly teach discussion moves. You can model these moves with a small group of students using the [Think Aloud](#) strategy to help make visible the choices you and the group members are making. Also, the activities and

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1968), 24–25.

resources in the [Asking Compelling Questions](#) learning experience include a bank of Facing History questions that invite students to draw evidence from the text to support their thinking, engage in conversation with their peers, and make real-life connections to what they are reading. It also provides a framework to help students [Keep the Discussion Alive!](#), a skill they will need to practice for their seminar. Finally, Facing History has a collection of [Socratic Seminar Stems](#) to help students enter conversations with their peers and build the capacity for sustained text-based discussions.

When it's time for students to prepare their Socratic Seminar at the end of the unit, you can have them review the essential question, anchor text, journal responses, and other unit materials to identify three to five moments that stand out in some way. These can be great starting points for them to enter into the discussion. For example:

- A place where they arrived at a new, different, or deeper understanding about the essential question
- A place that explored a question they are still grappling with
- A place that raised new questions for them
- A place they would want to revise because their thinking about the topic has changed
- A place where they had an “aha” moment about themselves or their world

The [Asking Compelling Questions](#) learning experience includes an “Extend” activity to create a Literary “One-Pager,” which can be a powerful follow-up activity for a seminar if you’d like your students to also capture their thinking in writing.

Creative Writing Assessment Ideas

Poetry Anthology Project

Students craft three original poems inspired by the anchor text with a full writing and revision process.

Nestled within a larger book unit, poetry can help students explore and connect with issues of identity and belonging, prejudice, and social justice, as well as provide inspiration for how they might use their voice to communicate their ideas in unique and powerful ways. With the rising popularity of books in verse, a poetry anthology project can be an engaging and meaningful way for your students to study craft while creating their own original verses.

If you are designing a poetry project for your unit, we suggest that you consult our [Teaching Brown Girl Dreaming](#) guide (pages 84–88) for an example of how you can incorporate poetry writing into a literature unit alongside a study of craft.

Throughout the guide, you will also find creative writing activities that respond to specific poems in *Brown Girl Dreaming* and formative assessment ideas for each section of Jacqueline Woodson’s memoir that you could adapt for your own unit, especially if your anchor text is a book in verse.

Furthermore, the activities and resources in our [Poetry and Power](#) learning experience, which includes a TED Talk by Amanda Gorman, offer a number of creative ways to craft original poems that respond to the anchor text. For example, your students might write characterization, setting, theme, or conflict [Found Poems](#), or you can photocopy a page of the text and invite them to create blackout poems that respond to the essential question or a lesson guiding question. There are also activities in the Poetry and Power learning experience for identity poems and a “mind map” handout to help students generate ideas for a spoken-word poem.

Re-Story an Aspect of the Text

Students reimagine a character, scene, or setting in the text in an original piece of writing that reflects their perspective and the ideas that matter to them.

Recasting an aspect of a text can spark student creativity and agency. Through this process, students can come to understand that there are different perspectives that the author deliberately constructs to convey what they want the reader to think about or know, and that readers have agency to imagine these in a new way if they wish.

For this assessment idea, we recommend incorporating activities and resources from the [Voice and Choice in Literature](#) learning experience, which supports students in looking critically at the anchor text in order to analyze the perspectives, voices, and representation included in and missing from the story. From there, you might have students choose one of the following ideas for their summative piece of writing:

- Re-story the setting to locate a scene from the text in the present day or in a familiar place like the student’s community or school. Or, imagine a different moral universe for a setting in the text and the ways in which it shapes characters’ identities, choices, agency, and decision-making.
- Retell a scene from the point of view of a character that represents an aspect of their identity or from their own perspective so as to broaden the perspectives represented in the text.
- Recast the story in a different genre that the student cares about to better reflect their unique voice. For example, write a scene as a spoken-word poem. Reimagine a dialogue as a series of text messages. Recast an internal monologue as a blog post.

A word of caution about perspective-taking. The second option (above) calls for students to craft an original piece of writing that imagines *their own unique identity, perspective, and voice* into the text they are studying. This exercise can provide many students with a meaningful experience to write themselves and their point of view into a story where it might not have been included. At the same time, the exercise can become harmful if students write from identities that are not their own, ones they may fall into the trap of stereotyping. So it is important that you are aware of what students are writing so you can guide them to make responsible choices.

Finally, as with any perspective-taking activity, it is important that students have choice and are never asked to write about traumatic experiences or assume the character of a perpetrator or target of violence or oppression.

Action Project Assessment Ideas

Students learn best when what they are learning feels relevant. Assessments can provide authentic opportunities for students to make meaningful connections between the universal themes that emerge in the text and the contemporary issues that matter to them. For example, for a book that explores the relationship between justice and fairness, students might engage in research that helps them draw connections to contemporary issues such as racial or gender discrimination, disability rights, or mass incarceration.

Assignments that invite students to write for an audience beyond you, their teacher, feel authentic and engaging to students. This approach requires careful selection of mentor texts to analyze content and craft, as well as opportunities for students to practice and receive feedback over the course of the unit. Regardless of the assessment you develop, it is always important to keep your course and unit goals in mind, as well as your target literacy skills.

When developing your summative task, consider how the following questions can prompt students to start making contemporary connections to the big ideas you explored in your anchor text over the course of the unit:

- What contemporary issues does the book explore? How does the book help to shed light on these issues? What do you think the author wants you to consider?
- What social issues are explored in the text (for example, racial injustice, gender discrimination, disability rights, voting rights, refugee crisis, LGBTQ+ rights, gun violence, income inequality, housing and food insecurity, the ethics of science and technology, climate change)? What message does the text send about one or more of these issues?
- What social issue in the book most interests you? Or, what social issue outside of the book most interests you? What strengths, talents, and passions do you have that could help you engage with this issue?
- How might you think about the world differently as a result of reading and discussing this book?

Opinion Piece That Explores Contemporary Connections to the Text

Students identify a topic in the text that they feel passionate about and explore contemporary connections to it in an opinion piece that they submit to their school or local paper or an online publication.

This assessment idea is a good fit if one of your unit goals is for students to craft strong arguments. Adolescents have opinions, and crafting an opinion piece about a topic they choose for an outside audience can make the task feel relevant and engaging. Opinion pieces present opportunities for students to conduct research, explore a topic of interest, and develop their voice as they craft their arguments for publication.

Facing History's mini-lesson [How to Read the News Like a Fact Checker](#) prepares students to evaluate the credibility of their sources, and the activities and resources in the Facing History learning experiences [Making Contemporary Connections to Literature](#) and [Research Three Ways](#) can help students identify a topic they feel passionate about for their opinion piece and provide scaffolding for their research. We recommend incorporating plenty of mentor texts and practice opportunities for students to write and workshop short argumentative pieces of writing over the course of the unit. You will find additional support for this assessment idea in the following related resources.

Related Resources

- [Information about writing op-eds](#), including student and adult mentor texts, from the *Washington Post*
- [Argumentative Writing Unit](#) from the New York Times Learning Network

Podcast That Explores Contemporary Connections to the Text

Students use the text as a launching point for an exploration of a contemporary issue that they are passionate about discussing in a short podcast episode.

There is no denying the popularity of podcasts these days, from long-form interviews to casual conversations to in-depth news stories to topical roundups. You may be surprised at how much writing is involved in podcasting, from recording research notes to outlining the episode to drafting, revising, and editing a script or key talking points.

The activities and resources in the Facing History learning experiences [Making Contemporary Connections to Literature](#) and [Research Three Ways](#) provide students with the tools and scaffolding to support them in identifying a podcast topic,

deepening their understanding of the topic, and drawing connections between the text and the world around them. We recommend checking out the related resources below to learn more about how you can develop a successful podcast project for your students and to help find powerful mentor texts that you can incorporate into your unit to prepare students for this summative experience.

Related Resources

- [This Teenage Life](#) podcast and resources
- [Writing for Podcasts](#) from the New York Times Learning Network
- [The Students' Podcast](#) from NPR

PSA That Explores Contemporary Connections to the Text

Students identify a social issue from the text and create an instructional public service announcement (PSA) that builds awareness within their school community.

A PSA can take many forms: an infographic or poster, a short video, a radio announcement, a storyboard, a print advertisement, or a plan for a social media campaign. Regardless of the form, students will most likely be familiar with PSAs and have plenty of opinions about ones they find effective and ones that don't capture their interest. It's a multimodal genre that can involve reading, writing, audio, design, and digital literacy—all twenty-first-century skills students need to develop to navigate the world today. Similar to the other assessment ideas in this section, PSAs allow students to develop a product for a wider audience than just you, their teacher.

In addition to the activities in the [Making Contemporary Connections to Literature](#) and [Research Three Ways](#) learning experiences, Facing History's [Getting to Know the 10 Questions](#) lesson can help students begin thinking intentionally about civic engagement in terms of their own identities, passions, and interests. Designed to support online campaigns, the [10 Questions for Young Changemakers](#) could be adapted to help students consider the purpose of their PSA, the potential upsides and downsides of engaging a large audience, and where they might find allies in the work. Concluding the project with a short reflective writing piece that explores new, different, or deeper understandings of their topic or the efficacy and challenges of PSAs is a meaningful way for students to consider their own learning, growth, and goals. You will find additional support for this assessment idea in the following related resources.

Related Resources

- [Democratic Knowledge Project](#) at Harvard University
- [Teaching New Genres: The PSA in ELA Class](#) from K-12 Talk

The Power of an “Author’s Note” Reflection

Providing students with an opportunity to share their thinking and writing process with you before submitting any summative assessment can be a powerful experience. We call these reflections Author’s Notes. Author’s Notes aren’t graded. Think of them as conversations between you and your students that provide windows into their writing processes and assessment experiences. Trust us—you will enjoy reading them!

Here is a sampling of Author’s Note questions “and prompts” that can work for any Facing History assessment idea. Choose a few for an Author’s Note handout that students complete in class and attach to their final products before submitting them to you.

- What new, different, or deeper understanding do you have about _____ [the essential question; the anchor book] after _____ [writing this essay; creating this podcast; writing this book review]?
- “For me, the most valuable idea in my _____ [essay, book review, story] is _____ because _____ . . .”
- “I used to think _____ about _____ [the essential question; the anchor book; a character’s decision], but now I think _____. My thinking changed as a result of . . .”
- Where is there evidence of your revision processes? What strategies did you use to strengthen your _____ [essay, podcast, PSA]?
- If you could revise one paragraph or section of this assessment one more time, what would you choose and why?
- When reflecting on your creation process and final product, what are you most proud of and why?

EXPLORE

“This I Believe” Personal Narrative Essay or Podcast Project for a Coming-of-Age Unit

For our [Coming of Age in a Complex World](#) collection, we designed a summative assessment guide with instructions, links to mentor texts, and classroom activities to support a “This I Believe . . .” personal narrative essay or podcast project. In the spirit of the original 1950s *This I Believe* radio series, students can join thousands of others who have shared their guiding principles in written and recorded statements that respond to the sentence starter: “This I believe . . .” This coming-of-age unit assessment includes tools to help students explore their core beliefs and values in order to consider how, when taken together, they reflect their personal philosophy of being in the world.

Directions: Explore Facing History’s [“This I Believe . . .” Personal Narrative Guide](#) to see an example of a fully developed Facing History ELA assessment tool. As you explore, notice the use of mentor texts, opportunities for students to develop their ideas in creative journaling activities, and the use of the writing process, including a comprehensive revision step. Consider which, if any, elements of this tool you might incorporate into your own assessment.

DO

Determine Your Summative Assessment

Directions: Record your responses to the following prompts in the space below or in your own journal. Consider how your responses can inform the assessment you will be designing. For this activity, we recommend that you respond to all of the prompts because they each play a role in the development of a purposeful summative assessment.

- Check any Facing History assessment ideas in this section that align with your learning objectives and outcomes, local and state standards, anchor text, and essential question(s) that you feel would be engaging and relevant for your students:
 - ☐ Book Review
 - ☐ Essay That Explores the Essential Question
 - ☐ Essay That Explores Characterization
 - ☐ Essay That Explores Setting
 - ☐ Socratic Seminar
 - ☐ Poetry Anthology Project
 - ☐ Re-story an Aspect of the Text
 - ☐ Opinion Piece That Explores Contemporary Connections to the Text

- Podcast That Explores Contemporary Connections to the Text
 - PSA That Explores Contemporary Connections to the Text
 - “This I Believe . . .” Personal Narrative or Podcast Project
- In three to five sentences, describe the summative assessment task. Consider how it will help students engage with the essential question and the main text as they practice the skills and dispositions they have learned over the course of the unit.
 - Next, write a one- or two- sentence prompt for your summative assessment. The prompt might be in the form of a question or a statement. It is important to use student-friendly language and to keep the prompt crisp and focused so students are clear about what they are expected to do.
 - What tool will you use to evaluate student performance on the summative assessment task? Will you create a rubric? Use a department rubric? Provide summative comments?
 - What types of mentor texts (e.g., poems, short stories, essays, podcasts, videos) do you think will enrich the assessment experience for your students? Where might you find them or where can you turn for help?
 - How will you use information from this assessment to help plan and implement your next unit?



Response:

DO

Record Your Summative Assessment Plan



Go to the [ELA Unit Planning Template](#) or your own template. Record your assessment prompt and a brief summary of your assessment, as well as information about the assessment timeline.

Planning the Daily Lessons

SECTION 6

Incorporate Facing History Journal Prompts

Journaling, whether to make personal connections to content, explore questions of human behavior, or respond to open-ended questions about a text, is at the heart of any Facing History classroom. A journal can be a powerful tool for helping students develop their ability to critically examine their surroundings from multiple perspectives and to make informed judgments about what they see, hear, and read. Many students find that writing or drawing in a journal helps them process ideas, formulate questions, and retain information.

Journals are also an assessment tool: you can use them to better understand what your students know, what they are struggling to understand, and how their thinking has changed over time. Furthermore, they provide a powerful opportunity for you to connect with each student as an individual when you read, pose questions, praise, and comment on their reflections.

Finally, journals are a community-building tool. When you write alongside your students and then share your writing, no matter how messy or scattered, it sends a powerful message to students that writing matters, writing is hard, and even teachers don't get it right the first time.

The resources in this section of the ELA Unit Planning Guide prepare you to incorporate journaling into your daily classroom practice, for this unit and beyond.

A Word about Sharing Journals

Because students may explore personal connections to what they are reading and learning in their journals, you should always let them know before they start writing if they will be expected to share. Students should never trade journals, and you should allow them to opt out of sharing if they've written about a personal topic.

When you collect journals, you can ask students to select three to five responses to mark with a sticky note for you to read and comment on. This gives students choice and agency over their journals and how you engage with their writing. You can also give them the option to clip together pages they don't want you to read. We recommend taking the time to establish these expectations before students start writing regularly in journals.

REFLECT

Consider Your Experience Journaling with Students

Directions: Choose from the following questions for a personal reflection. Record your responses in the space provided or in your own journal. Consider how your responses can inform the unit you will be designing.

Reflect:

- How have you incorporated journaling in your classroom? What has been useful? What has been challenging?
- What are different ways you could imagine students journaling during this unit? Consider how you might incorporate list responses, drawing, and other creative ways of responding in addition to written responses.



Response:

Facing History's Approach to Journaling

Directions: Read the [Journals in a Facing History Classroom](#) teaching strategy and, if you'd like to see journaling in action, choose a video to watch. Then choose from the following questions for a personal reflection. Record your response in the space below or in your own journal. Consider how your response can inform your classroom practice.



READ: [Journals in a Facing History Classroom Teaching Strategy](#)

Learn how to create a practice of student journaling in your classroom. This teaching strategy page includes helpful guidance for thinking about student privacy and evaluating journals, as well as 12 suggestions for how you can incorporate journaling into your daily lessons.



WATCH A VIDEO: [Using Journals at the Beginning and End of a Lesson](#)

In this classroom video, a high school history teacher uses journals with his students both at the beginning and end of a lesson on Reconstruction.

Reflect:

- What ideas from the teaching strategy and/or videos do you want to incorporate into your classroom practice in order to develop a routine of journaling during this unit?
- How will you respond to your students' journals in a way that feels meaningful to them, while also taking into account the competing demands on your time?



Response:

10 Creative Ways to Journal in the Classroom

Directions: Review the following ideas for how you can incorporate journaling into your ELA classroom to help students make text-to-self connections and explore ideas in the text that matter to them. Highlight or record in your journal the ideas that resonate with you that you'd like to include in your unit.

1. Open and/or close class with a journal reflection to help students come into the space and to help them synthesize and make connections between key ideas, concepts, and their own lives. You can also end each week with 10 minutes of journal writing to help students reflect on their new understanding of the big ideas you are studying.
2. Freewrite or sketch what is on your mind or in your heart.
3. Reflect on a scene or respond to a question from the point of view of a character.
4. Write a dialogue or social media exchange between yourself and a character where you give advice about a conflict or choice the character faces in the text.
5. Reflect on the unit's essential question for five minutes. Then write a new question that emerges from your exploration and respond to it for three minutes. Next, write a new question that emerges from the three-minute exploration to write about for one minute. Share new, different, or deeper ideas in pairs, small groups, or as a class.
6. Visualize and reflect on big ideas, concepts, or takeaways from a text with the [Sketch to Stretch](#) teaching strategy.
7. Develop ideas about a character or theme with the [Alphabet Brainstorm](#) teaching strategy.
8. Choose a passage or scene and examine what is surprising, interesting, and troubling about it using the [S-I-T](#) teaching strategy.
9. Explore a question, prompt, or scene in increasingly greater depth, or explore ideas for a piece of writing using the [Rapid Writing](#) teaching strategy.
10. If you teach more than one section of a course, create cross-class journals. Cross-section journals create meaningful opportunities for students to engage in rich written discussions across class sections. Staple together 5–10 sheets of lined paper and assign one student from each section to each journal. Write their names on the front cover. Create norms for how students will respond, which you can include on the back side of the cover page. It is important to spend time reviewing the norms as a class before students start writing to each other. Then have students respond to questions, prompts, and each other's ideas. The questions and prompts should focus on the text and never ask students to write about personal topics.

EXPLORE

Facing History Journal Prompts for the ELA Classroom

Directions: Read examples of Facing History journal prompts aligned to our ELA collections. As you read, highlight or record in your journal any prompts that you think would work well with your text, essential question, and unit as a whole.

- [Journal Prompts for a Coming-of-Age Unit](#)
- [Journal Prompts for a Borders & Belonging Unit](#)

DO

Identify Journal Prompts for Your Unit

Directions: Choose one of the following two tasks to help you generate engaging journal prompts for your unit that tap into students' hearts, minds, and consciences.

- **Option 1:** Make a copy of the [Journal Prompts for a Coming-of-Age Unit](#) or [Journal Prompts for a Borders & Belonging Unit](#), if applicable to the unit you are planning. Highlight prompts that align with your text, essential question, and learning goals for the unit. Make a note of chapters or scenes where you might use each prompt.
- **Option 2:** If you are not teaching a Coming-of-Age or Borders & Belonging unit, draft 8–10 prompts in the space provided or in your journal. Use the Facing History examples to help you develop prompts that invite students to explore big ideas about human behavior, choices, decision-making, agency, and action in the text and in their own lives.



Response:

SECTION 7

Plan Instructions and Activities

At Facing History, we understand the challenges that ELA teachers with two or more preps face as they juggle competing priorities of lesson planning, teaching, grading, advising, and more. We hope that our learning experiences and teaching strategies can support your instructional design process!

Facing History learning experiences are classroom-ready activities that you can incorporate into your daily lesson plans to support students' intellectual curiosity, prompt ethical thinking, and cultivate emotional connection. These resources are designed to be modular and adaptable, so you can use them over and over again with a wide range of texts to help students explore characterization, point of view, perspective-taking, setting, and thematic development through a Facing History lens.

Taking into account Facing History's unique pedagogical approach, our learning objectives and outcomes, and our commitment to fostering real-world literacy skills, our classroom learning experiences center students' identities and experiences and create space for them to explore complex ideas about human behavior, both individually and in collaboration with others. Our learning experiences support you in designing engaging lesson plans that invite students to explore the complexity of identity in literature and life, examine the moral universe of setting, play with perspective, ask compelling questions, and more.

The resources in this section of the guide provide you with activities and materials to help you design lesson plans and student learning experiences that explore Facing History concepts and themes. The activities are intended for you to copy into your lesson plan and then modify for your anchor text and context.

A Note about Teaching Full-Length Books

When teaching a whole-class book, part of the planning involves identifying moments with enough complexity and interest to warrant literary analysis and discussion. It would take months to read a book if we were to develop lesson plans for every chapter or scene, and we know that to become stronger readers, students need to read more, both independently and in collaborative settings like books clubs and as a class. Our learning experiences are designed to help teachers create rich lesson plans for those centerpiece chapters or sections that call for time and attention.

Prepare Students to Engage with the Language of the Text

Discussing Texts with Languages Other Than English (or Your Classroom Language), Hybrid Language, Dialect, or Accents

Texts that incorporate dialects, words, or phrases in languages other than English (or your classroom language), a hybrid language, or accents provide valuable opportunities to help students understand the ways in which these integral aspects of language are parts of people's identities and qualities worthy of respect and celebration. However, these texts can pose a risk if handled in a way that stigmatizes certain groups rather than appreciating their rich culture and heritage. Helping students navigate the language of these texts requires careful planning to ensure a positive learning environment for all.

The following recommendations can help you design classroom learning experiences that invite reflection, close reading, and analysis of authorial intent when encountering language in a text that may feel unfamiliar to some students:

1. Prepare students to encounter dialects and accents in a text.

Allowing students to consider why an author may have chosen to incorporate dialects or accents into a text is an important step in helping them appreciate the rich culture and heritage that dialects and accents communicate. When preparing to teach a text with dialects or accents, identify scenes where students can consider how these authorial choices make a character richer and more authentic, as well as scenes that help them understand how patterns of speech can be forms of political and cultural resistance. For students in your class who may move between languages and dialects, these conversations can be empowering when conducted with care and respect for their identities. Finally, a note of caution about reading aloud in class. To avoid instances where a student might turn a read-aloud of a passage or scene into a disrespectful performance piece, model with your own practiced reading or use an audiobook or a video of a professional performance.

2. Prepare students to encounter languages other than English (or the language of your classroom).

Whenever possible, we recommend using audiobooks for passages you'd like to read aloud that include a language you don't speak fluently. That being said, we realize that not all texts have audio versions, or you may not be able to acquire a copy for your classroom. In these cases, we recommend using a read-aloud strategy that invites students to process the original language in silence. We view this silence as a form of respect for the languages and cultures reflected in the text. Similar to our strategy for addressing dialects and accents, this approach helps avoid instances where a read-aloud might become disrespectful due to mispronunciation, exaggeration, or invocation of stereotypes.

For this strategy, when readers (students and teachers) encounter text in a different language, they should pause for a beat to scan the text to themselves. Then they can pick up again with the English (or main language of the text). You can establish a respectful tone by first explaining the purpose of the silence and then model the strategy. Before using this strategy, you should review your classroom contract and prepare students in advance to address these sections with intention and care.

3. Respect your multilingual students' sense of agency.

Finally, it is important to avoid singling out multilingual students to read words or phrases in the text that are in their home language. Without singling out any one student, offer an open invitation to anyone who may wish to help out with pronunciation. You may find that your multilingual students jump at the opportunity to help when you empower them with the choice to decide for themselves.

Discussing Texts with Dehumanizing Language

In [Section 2: Choose an Anchor Text](#), we include guidance for teachers considering texts with instances of racist slurs, derogatory words, and/or anachronous language. If you are using an anchor text that includes dehumanizing language, it is important to think carefully about how students will engage with the language and its implications. Many of these words have been, and continue to be, used to assert power, maintain social hierarchies, and stereotype and discriminate against individuals and groups of people. For some of your students, reading and hearing this kind of language in school may create an environment where they may feel like they don't belong and where they cannot learn. So it is important to prepare to address dehumanizing language with intention and care as you create your lesson plans.

The following recommendations can help you prepare to facilitate brave and reflective classroom learning experiences:

1. Before writing a lesson plan, carefully review your text(s).

Some students may find dehumanizing and derogatory language emotionally challenging to read and discuss: we can't emphasize enough the importance of previewing all readings and videos you are considering for a lesson to make sure they are appropriate for your students.

2. Review your classroom contract.

Always review your classroom contract before students will encounter dehumanizing language of any kind, whether it be when you distribute a new text or before reading and discussing a specific passage. For times when you are discussing a passage with language that could cause a student to feel unsafe, targeted, or anxious, we recommend establishing a protocol, such as allowing students to step out if they choose not to hear such language on a given day.

3. Establish a protocol for how the class will read and discuss passages with dehumanizing language.

- **Use audiobooks:** If you have determined that your approach will include a close reading of passages that contain dehumanizing language, consider using audiobooks rather than reading these sections aloud in class. If you use an audiobook, it is important to consider the identity of the actor reading the text and their relationship to the challenging language in the text. Preview the sections you plan to share with your students so that you know how the actor treats the language. Never play something in class that you have not already listened to and prepared to contextualize and guide your students in processing.
- **Guidelines for reading aloud and discussing dehumanizing words:**
The dehumanizing power of racial slurs and derogatory words cannot be ignored, nor can the impact this language can have on students if not handled sensitively. We advise against speaking these words out loud in the classroom. If they appear in texts or resources that are being used, it is necessary to acknowledge them, understand their problematic nature, and set guidelines for students when reading aloud or quoting from the text.

We recommend that teachers and students do not read aloud racial slurs and derogatory words when they encounter them in a text. Instead, readers (students and teachers) can pause for a beat to scan the text to themselves. Then they can pick up reading again with the subsequent word. Alternatively, they could use a reference to the word, such as “the n-word.” You can establish a respectful tone by first explaining the harm this language has on individuals’ and groups’ sense of identity and belonging and why it will be read in silence and then modeling the strategy. Before using this strategy, review your classroom contract and prepare students in advance to address these sections with intention and care.

4. Provide time and space for students to reflect on what they are reading and feeling.

Depending on your context, you may need to build in additional support for students if they find the text and its language emotionally challenging. For example, you could provide 10 minutes of breathing room for journaling at the end of each lesson and/or invite students to check in with you if they would like to talk more. You can also provide suggestions and support for how students can process their feelings as they read, such as by “talking to the text” with margin notes or reaching out to a friend or mentor.

Introducing Facing History Learning Experiences

Directions: Learn how Facing History learning experiences are structured and then read three scenarios in which teachers use them to support their teaching of an anchor book. As you read, think about the implications of what you are learning for your own lesson planning process.

Read: Navigating the Learning Experiences

Each Facing History learning experience is divided into three parts—**Introduce**, **Explore**, and **Extend**—and each part has classroom-ready activities that you can incorporate into your lesson plan and modify for your anchor text. The activities in each learning experience increase progressively in complexity and depth of analysis, but they do not need to be used in sequence. Here is a brief description of the activities in each part:

- **Introduce:** The first part of each learning experience *introduces* a key concept and helps students develop the schema they will need for deeper exploration in your text. The activities may involve vocabulary work, schema building, and opportunities for personal reflection and pair-shares.
- **Explore:** The second part engages students in a deeper *exploration* of the concept and helps them apply it to a text. It includes opportunities for close reading, literary analysis, collaboration with peers, and rich questions for small-group and whole-class discussion. “Explore” activities are designed to be used as routines within and across units.
- **Extend:** The third part supports students in producing a reflective, expository, analytical, or creative piece of writing (or another form of expression) in order to *extend* their learning. For example, the activities might have them draw connections between the text, key concepts from the learning experience, and their own lives in a short written response, one-pager, or visual.

The entry point for each learning experience depends on students’ familiarity with the concept and the level of complexity they are ready to tackle. Educators might choose to incorporate just one part of a learning experience into a lesson plan, teach all three parts over the course of one or two class periods, mix and match, or repeat one activity multiple times during a unit to create a routine that helps students track character or thematic development.

Read: Three Classroom Scenarios—Learning Experiences in Action

- **Teacher A** is interested in exploring a young protagonist’s growing sense of agency over the course of a novel, so they decide to use activities from the [Agency and Action](#) learning experience. This learning experience contains four activities:

Introduce: What Is Power?

Introduce: Introducing Agency

Explore: Examine Characters’ Decision-Making Processes

Extend: Agency and Action Today

Because agency is a new concept for their students, Teacher A creates a lesson plan to teach in the first week of the unit that incorporates the two **Introduce** activities: “What Is Power?” and “Introducing Agency.” Then, midway through the unit, they design a lesson using the **Explore** activity “Examine Characters’ Decision-Making Processes.” They use this activity again toward the end of the unit so students can analyze character development over time. Teacher A chooses to skip the **Extend** activity “Agency and Action Today” because it doesn’t align with their learning goals.

- For their previous unit, **Teacher B** was interested in deepening students’ thinking about setting, so they decided to use the **Introduce** and **Extend** activities from the [Exploring the Moral Universe of Setting](#) learning experience. This learning experience contains three activities:

Introduce: Reflect on the Written and Unwritten Rules of a Familiar Place

Explore: Create a “Moral Universe of Setting” Web

Extend: Map a Space in Your Community

One of Teacher B’s focus standards for this unit calls for students to make interpretations across texts. Because their students are already familiar with the concept of a moral universe, for this unit, Teacher B creates a lesson with the **Explore** activity “Create a ‘Moral Universe of Setting’ Web.” Students are able to dive right into the activity because they have already started to internalize the language to analyze and discuss a setting’s “moral universe.”

Students work in groups to create webs for two different settings in the book, which they share in a jigsaw activity. They continue to add to the webs as they read. At the end of the unit, students lead a Socratic Seminar where they use evidence captured on their webs from both units to compare and contrast the moral universes of the settings and the ways that the spoken and unspoken rules of a place shape characters’ choices and decision-making processes in both books.

- It's April, and **Teacher C** wants to celebrate National Poetry Month. Inspired by the work of Amanda Gorman, Teacher C decides to teach activities from each part of the [Poetry and Power](#) learning experience over the course of the month. This learning experience contains seven activities:

Introduce: Create a Personal Mantra

Introduce: Consider the Purpose of Poetry

Explore: Answer a Question with a Found Poem

Explore: Answer a Question with a Blackout Poem

Extend: Read Poetry about Identity, Belonging, and Change

Extend: Create a Poem about Identity

Extend: Create a Poem That Inspires Change

As Teacher C reviews the learning experience for the first time, they appreciate the Teacher Notes, which include tips for reading and workshopping poetry in the classroom. They decide to kick off National Poetry Month with two lessons that incorporate the **Introduce** activities: "Create a Personal Mantra" and "Consider the Purpose of Poetry." These activities set the tone for the unit, and students enjoy starting each class period by reciting their mantras to themselves.

Midway through the month, Teacher C creates a lesson using the **Explore** activity "Answer a Question with a Found Poem," where students work in pairs to choose three poems from the month that inspire them to create a new found poem, which they share in small groups. As their confidence grows, they become excited for the **Extend** activity "Create a Poem that Inspires Change," and at the end of the unit, they create visual representations of their poems and mantras to hang on a "Voices of Change" bulletin board in the foyer of their school.

EXPLORE

Preview the Learning Experiences

Directions: *Facing History's learning experiences offer classroom-ready activities and resources that support you in helping students explore core Facing History concepts or themes while also addressing literary analysis, key literary elements, and writing across genres. Explore our collection of learning experiences by reading the titles and brief descriptions and then choosing two to three that resonate with you to examine in greater detail on the Facing History website.*

Facing History Learning Experiences with Brief Summaries

Learning Experience	Brief Summary
<u>Agency and Action</u>	Analyze key moments of decision-making in the text in order to explore a character's agency and the societal factors that influence their decision-making process.
<u>Analyzing "Aha" Moments</u>	Identify pivotal moments where a central character learns something important about themselves, others, and their real or fictional world.
<u>Analyzing Assumptions</u>	Identify assumptions that are central to the text's internal and external conflicts, consider the consequences of those assumptions, and imagine what it would take at their school to build awareness of the impact of assumptions on individuals and the community.
<u>Anatomy of an Upstander</u>	Explore the factors that motivate real or fictional characters to take action, or not to take action, at key moments of decision-making in order to think critically about the choices, risks, and rewards that are involved when one is called upon to be an upstander.
<u>Asking Compelling Questions</u>	Engage in meaningful discussions about a text while using text-based evidence to support their thinking and making real-life connections to what they're reading.
<u>Create a Textual Lineage</u>	Consider the profound impact that the spoken and written word (as well as art and sound) can have on an individual's identity and sense of self, and create textual lineages with texts that spark their minds, hearts, and imaginations.
<u>Exploring Identity in Literature and Life</u>	Create identity charts (four options) to explore the complexity and fluidity of identity, both in the world of the text and in their own lives.
<u>Exploring the Moral Universe of Setting</u>	Determine how a fictional and real setting's "moral universe," the written and unwritten rules of a place, can help to determine characters' and individuals' interactions, choices, and courses of action.
<u>Making Contemporary Connections to Literature</u>	Draw connections between social issues in the text and their impact on our world today in order to practice perspective-taking, engage with big questions, and develop opinions about issues that impact not only themselves but others in their immediate communities and around the world.

<u>Map the Internal World of a Character</u>	Create evidence-based character maps in order to analyze a character's thoughts, feelings, motivations, and sense of belonging and consider the relationship between reading and empathy.
<u>Playing with Perspective</u>	Practice perspective-taking through close reading and analysis of a character's identity, sense of self, motivations, and feelings in order to consider the importance, as well as the limitations, of our ability to see things from another's perspective.
<u>Poetry and Power</u>	Craft short poetic mantras, found and blackout poems, and original poems in order to consider how poetry can serve as a powerful means of creative expression that can captivate an audience and inspire change.
<u>Read the Word, Read the World</u>	Practice a close-reading protocol that supports analysis of key literary elements in order to explore a text's central message and consider the ways in which it may or may not be of use in making sense of their own experiences and happenings in the world.
<u>Reflecting on Our Obligation to Others</u>	Apply the concept of <i>universe of obligation</i> to "in" and "out" group behavior in order to consider the benefits of being part of an "in" group and the consequences of being part of an "out" group, both in a work of literature and in their own lives.
<u>Research Three Ways</u>	Research a historical or contemporary issue in the text in order to hone their literary analysis skills, deepen their understanding of context, and gain insight into additional perspectives on the events taking place in the text and in their own world.
<u>Responding to Unfairness and Injustice</u>	Develop the vocabulary to talk about the range of human responses to injustice and then apply these labels to their analysis of a work of literature in order to grapple with the complexity of the choices and decisions they will encounter.
<u>Understanding Social Systems as an Element of Setting</u>	Analyze social systems as an element of setting and consider the ways in which characters and individuals may think, feel, and care differently about issues, choices, and actions based on their identity and relationship to these systems.
<u>Voice and Choice in Literature</u>	Evaluate a text in order to identify the perspectives that are represented and to see if there are other perspectives that they should take into consideration before reimagining their own perspective into the text.

DO

Make a Copy of Facing History Learning Experiences

Teachers plan differently, and we understand that your needs can change depending on where you are in the planning and implementation process. To help you navigate our learning experiences, we've organized them in three ways in a single document so you can always find what you need. We recommend that you make a copy of the document and save it to your desktop so you always have our classroom-ready activities at your fingertips!

- **Option 1:** Learning experiences organized alphabetically with a brief description of the activities
- **Option 2:** Learning experiences organized by Facing History learning objectives and outcomes
- **Option 3:** Learning experiences organized by key literary elements and ELA skills development

For a downloadable version of all three options, make a copy of the [Overview of Facing History ELA Learning Experiences](#) document.

LEARN

Pair Learning Experiences with Passages from the Text

Directions: Read tips for how to purposefully choose scenes in your anchor text to build learning experiences around. Highlight or record in your journal any tips that resonate with you for the unit you are designing.

Because ELA educators teach a wide range of texts, we have designed our learning experiences to be modular and adaptable. When developing a Facing History unit that centers on an anchor book, we recommend the following criteria for selecting passages and scenes for close reading, literary analysis, group activities, and class discussions.

Identify Passages with Facing History Themes and Concepts

Look for passages that explore the complexity of identity, membership and belonging in groups, universe of obligation, the moral universe of setting, moral decision-making, issues of fairness and justice, and examples of civic agency and participation. Such passages might include (but are not limited to) the following scenarios:

- A character has a realization about who they are, how others perceive them, or their perceptions of others.
- A character grapples with the costs and benefits of group membership, the desire to belong to a group, and/or the benefits and harms of conformity.
- A character is confronted with a choice or must make a decision about a right or wrong action.
- A range of factors complicate a character's decision-making process and influence their choice to take on the role of perpetrator, bystander, ally, or upstander.
- The "moral universe" of the setting impacts a character's identity, sense of belonging, agency, and choices.
- Characters' points of view invite students to practice perspective-taking in order to cultivate empathy and respect for others.
- The text offers opportunities for students to make historical and contemporary connections.
- The text offers opportunities for students to make personal connections and consider how it can help them understand others in their community and world and foster a sense of personal agency.

Integrate the Head, Heart, and Conscience

Choose passages that engage students' minds, hearts, and consciences. These kinds of passages invite students to consider what they know and how they know it, how they feel, and their ideas about right and wrong, fairness, and justice. This integration of head, heart, and conscience is always important to learning, and it's particularly important when students are grappling with complex questions about identity, choices, belonging, and agency in the world that literature—and life—can raise.

Take into Account Complexity and Craft

Choose passages with significant complexity to encourage rereading and meaning-making. These kinds of passages invite reflection and discussion about human behavior and the world we inhabit. Furthermore, they provide opportunities for students to examine craft and the choices authors make as they develop their characters and the world of a text.

Choose Learning Experiences for the Unit

Directions: With your text, learning objectives and outcomes, focus standards, and summative assessment in mind, identify three to five learning experiences that you feel will help students engage deeply with the text and progress toward your unit's learning goals. Remember that each learning experience has three parts, and the Explore section, which supports students as they engage with the text, is designed to be used as a routine within and across units.

Use sticky notes to mark key chapters or scenes in the text that you'd like to build lesson plans around and label the sticky note with the title of one or more learning experiences that might work well with the section of text.



Go to the [ELA Unit Planning Template](#) or your own template. In the space provided:

- Record the pages and/or chapters students will read each week.
- For each week, record the page numbers of key passages that you plan to build classroom learning experiences around. Identify Facing History or other student-centered learning experiences that will engage students in the text; provide opportunities for reflection, analysis, and deliberation; and help students engage with the essential question(s) and learning goals for the unit.