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Tupac the Poet and Lyricist: The State of Texas vs. Emergent Bilinguals

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After ten years of teaching, I have found myself in a position where none of my students look like me or share my culture, race, or heritage. I teach in the community I grew up in, where I graduated from. I am a product of this community, so giving back is more than just teaching to me. For me, it is personal, very personal. I want to see my students win in school and life. I don't make the rules of life, but as their teacher, I can give them the metaphorical game to succeed in whatever endeavor they choose. Even after noticing the apparent difference, we appreciate hip-hop music, specifically a particular hip-hop artist, Tupac Shakur. When I realized this, the one question I asked myself was, how is it that my Honduran student doesn't speak any English at all but knows about Tupac? The second question I asked myself is, how can I capitalize on this and use it to my advantage when teaching? The curriculum unit I intend to write will answer both questions. I cannot ignore the fact that my students are embarrassed to speak in their native language or feel less than others because of it. After speaking with Feisal, he surmised that the shame could stem from their native language, which could be interpreted as the language of the poor. Tupac was poor and often rapped about his financial constraints. If he could take his circumstances and use his words to identify himself as a rapper, poet, and lyricist, why can my students not do the same?

(Developed for Emergent Bilinguals and ESL, grades 7-12; recommended for Emergent Bilinguals and ESL, grades K-6)

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