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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2026 Volume I: The Kids are not the Threat

Lean on Me: Finding Voice, Honoring Difference, and Standing on Business

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This curriculum unit is designed for Emergent Bilingual students at Hearne High School and grew out of my participation in Rod Ferguson's seminar, The Kids Are Not the Threat. This unit asks students to consider who belongs, whose voices are heard, and why some young people are viewed as problems rather than possibilities. It asks students and educators to consider instead how young people are often misunderstood or blamed when the deeper failures are systemic and institutional.

Students will read selections from The Freedom Writers Diary, explore student narratives,examine the work of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Freedom Schools, and theCivil Rights Movement, and make connections to contemporary youth movements. They willconsider how ordinary young people have organized, challenged injustice, and created change.

Through close reading, collaborative discussion, reflective writing, multimedia analysis, Edwardde Bono's Six Thinking Hats, and evidence-based argument writing, students will strengthentheir literacy skills and learn to communicate their ideas with confidence. The unit concludeswith a civic action project in which students identify an issue that matters to them and develop anadvocacy campaign or proposal for change.

(Developed for English I and II, ESL, and ESOL, grades 9-12; recommended for English I and II, ESL, and ESOL, grades 9-12)

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