



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

to strengthen teaching in public schools®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2020 Volume II: Teaching about Race and Racism Across the Disciplines

Seeing the World through Race-Colored Glasses: Guiding High-School Journalism Students to Report in a Race-Conscious Way to Create a Race-Conscious World

Curriculum Unit 20.02.07, published September 2020
by Ray Salazar

Introduction:

I teach in a Chicago public school on the city's Southwest side that has historically served first-generation Latino students. In 2014, our district decided to change our school from a neighborhood school to a Selective Enrollment, a magnet school. Starting in 2015, students have had to test in. Still, our school continues to serve mostly students from the surrounding Zip codes. While our low-income population has decreased to 82% from 96%, we continue to serve students from mostly working-class backgrounds, most of whom will be the first to attend college (if they decide to).

When I started teaching there in 2011, I resurrected the journalism class with the support of the principal. But students were used to writing superficial stories about school dances and captioning lots of photos. As I pushed students to write authentic, accurate news articles and editorials for the school newspaper, one student asked (before the term became popular), "Why can't we just print fake news?"

I explained how irresponsible this is.

The student said, "No, we can write 'This is not true' at the bottom."

"Uh, no," I said.

The school newspaper included no evidence of the six principles of news literacy, as articulated by SchoolJournalism.org. For instance, the newspaper content showed little to no "synthesis of multiple sources into meaningful context and comprehension of its impact."¹

Every semester, I find that 30-50% of the 11th and 12th graders in our journalism class requested it. The rest were enrolled by the school programmer. I do not have overzealous high-school journalists wanting to break new ground with an investigation. Many of them don't have much of an idea of journalism as a career. Because of this situation, most of the writing is completed in class.

Still, I want our school newspaper--as any school paper should--to represent our students' voices and cover

issues and experiences that matter to them. I want students to see themselves in the school paper--to see themselves in terms of agency, not oppression.

In "Reclaiming Multicultural Education: Course Redesign as a Tool for Transformation," Mae Chaplin explains how a "transformative" approach to multicultural education must include learning experiences that address "systems of oppression," a "means for social transformation," and "multiple counternarratives."²

I continuously ask myself, "What's the role of a high-school journalist?"

Now, in 2020, in an era of a pandemic, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo, the answer--now, more than ever--is clear: students must create texts grounded in a socially responsible consciousness of race so their ideas contribute to a more equitable world.

Rationale:

This unit helps guide teachers with some and little experience with journalism to help high-school students find stories that challenge preconceived notions of race while developing their skills with research and writing. Essentially, students will be able to gather, evaluate, and synthesize information to produce news articles that provide their school communities with socially conscious insights.

So how is a high-school journalist supposed to accomplish this?

"Pose that question to most members of the public, and you might get an answer something like this: 'Just tell me the bare facts. Leave your interpretation out of it. And don't be on anyone's side,'" explains Margaret Sullivan in a June 2020 *Washington Post* editorial. But as, Sullivan explains, "Journalism is not stenography."³ In the eyes of many high-school journalism teachers (and, therefore, their students), objectivity has been equated with fairness and quality.

High-school students in journalism class and with non-fiction writing assignments have been taught that every situation has two sides and each side must be presented fairly. Furthermore, these budding journalists--and journalism teachers--avoid controversy by avoiding issues of race.

As Sonya Aleman discusses in "A Critical Race Counterstory: Chicana/o Subjectivities vs. Journalism Objectivity," "institutionally prescribed journalism curriculum suppresses the contributions of aspiring Chicana/o student journalists."⁴

In October 2019, Chicago Public Radio reported on the flaring racial issues at one of the city's elite public schools.⁵ The story shares how "a teacher thought the situation was so bad that last year she wrote an open letter that she sent to all faculty and blind-copied students."⁶

Administration also informed parents about two racial incidents. The school's newspaper didn't cover these issues; the PawPrint⁷ continues to publish the "sweetest news in the city." The lack of action by the school newspaper supports what George Lipsitz writes about in "The Sounds of Silence:" "Purporting *not* to see color is considered a virtue." In fact, colorblind acts like this end up "producing effects without having to declare

racial intent.”⁸ The story about these racial incidents garnered citywide attention. But they weren’t significant enough to cover in the school’s newspaper. The school paper, instead, followed up with stories about fantasy football, Thanksgiving, and gingerbread houses. In his article, Lipsitz cites a 2007 Supreme Court case where Chief Justice Roberts’s decision sent the message that “the best way to make racism disappear is to pretend that it does not exist.”⁹

Today, many journalists of color are pushing back on the facade of neutrality and uncovering how this false idea of equality promotes ideas of white supremacy. In fact, in a June 2020 *Washington Post* editorial, Margaret Sullivan explained that “Every piece of reporting — written or spoken, told in text or in images — is the product of choices. Every article approaches its subject from somebody’s perspective.”¹⁰

This unit was designed for a high-school journalism class to accomplish what Cati de los Ríos and other authors articulate in “Critical Ethnic Studies in High School Classrooms: Academic Achievement via Social Action:” projects should “promote academic literacy development, civic engagement, and critical racial consciousness for the young people involved.”¹¹

Students will learn how to see race and produce accurate articles and editorials. As students engage with mentor texts that present a race-conscious perspective grounded in facts and committed to accuracy over fairness, they’ll learn how to write about situations in a way that promotes empathy and insight about the systemic issues that perpetuate inequality. More importantly, they’ll learn about the importance of including a person’s agency in their reporting.

Learning Activity #1: Understand Internalized Systems and Social Implications

Without an emotional or personal connection to a learning experience, students can easily detach or find the learning experience irrelevant. Creating this experience is especially important if we’re working with more privileged students. While my students are mostly Latino, because we’re a Selective Enrollment school (a magnet school), these students have a history of academic success. This can blind them to the realities that students who are disadvantaged academically face. Plus, they might feel themselves superior to internalized racism and sexism because they might claim to know better. Or they might question, as I’ve been told by skeptical teens many times, “Does everything have to be about race?”

As Paula Iacone discusses in “Negotiating Students’ Affective Resistances,” “In-group bias, particularly at implicit levels, is more pronounced in people who belong to advantaged, socially valued groups than those who belong to disadvantaged ones.”¹² Whether a student population can be considered more advantaged or more disadvantaged in terms of academic success, income, experience, housing security, this exercise allows students to examine how they internalize attitudes towards race.

To help students build self-awareness about their own bias--which will likely be representative of larger social biases--students complete an online experience at Harvard’s Project Implicit, “a non-profit organization and international collaboration between researchers who are interested in implicit social cognition,”¹³ as described on their Website.

For this unit, students should take the Race IAT (Implicit Assessment Test), which will help them understand why “most Americans have an automatic preference for white over black.”¹⁴

They don’t need to share their results; in fact, it’s better that they do not. These are some self-reflections questions to help students process the experience.

1. Were you surprised by the results of the assessment or were they what you expected?
2. What are experiences that you’ve had or situations that you’ve seen or read about that might contribute to your bias?
3. According to the assessment, what are a couple of steps you can take to decrease your bias? What might be difficult about doing this?

Then, to see how these internalized systems of preference for white over black, students can view the following texts with these guiding questions:

1. Who are the researchers and what situation(s) did they study?
2. How did the researchers gather information?
3. What are insights from the research that re-affirm ideas you previously had?
4. What are insights from the research that give you new information?
5. What questions about opportunity and obstacles does this raise for our community?

From the Brookings Institute, “Is American Dreaming?: Understanding Social Mobility.”

From *Slate*, “A Roshanda by Any Other Name: How do babies with super-black names fare?” by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner.

A caveat to both of these texts: Neither text argues that a person’s potential is pre-determined by the social status one is born into or the name one is given. Instead, we need to be aware of the obstacles and opportunities that inherently accompany a person’s social status and name at birth.

To wrap up this introduction, students can write a reflection paragraph to this prompt inspired by Lipsitz’s article: How does the information in these texts reveal the “the indecent and unjust social order of our society?”¹⁵

Reading Journalism:

To see how organizations or individuals are working to address systems that promote racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, students can read one of these texts and respond to this question inspired by Lipsitz’s article: How are people interviewed or profiled in these articles working to address “the indecent and unjust social order of our society?”

To help guide students’ understanding, they can complete these guiding questions:

1. What’s the conflict or problem that needs to be addressed, according to the article?
2. Who is the person or people most affected by this in the article?
3. Who are the experts or what is the research cited? What is this intended to help readers understand?
4. What stereotypes, myths, or misconceptions is the article challenging?
5. What are the implications or next possible steps indicated or suggested?
6. Should we accept the journalist’s bias? Whose side does the journalist appear to be on? If readers

accept this information, will this contribute to a more decent and just social order in our society or no?

“How a Young Activist Set Off a #MeToo Avalanche in Mexico” by Paulina Villegas, *New York Times*, March 28, 2019

“‘They know what they see’: Chicago educators reach out to students about racism, police brutality after George Floyd’s death” by Cassie Walker Burke and Samantha Smylie, *Chalkbeat Chicago*, June 3, 2020

“How to Help Teenage Girls Reframe Anxiety and Strengthen Resilience” by Deborah Farmer Kris, *MindShift*, February 12, 2019

“Unfortunatley, Anger Is Still the Default Emotion for Men” by Joseph Lamour, Mic, August 12, 2020

Learning Activity #2: Seeing the World through Race-Colored Glasses

“Both race-gender-sexuality--conscious knowledge . . . and emotional engagement . . . are central to reducing expressions of gendered racism,” according to Paula Ioanide in “Negotiating Privileged Students’ Affective Resistances.”¹⁶ In this article, the author cites the work of Gary Olson and Lynn Worsham who claim, “We do not observe the world and then believe what we see. We have beliefs and then observe or hallucinate the truth of our beliefs in our observation of the world. In this case, ‘believing is seeing.’”¹⁷

But how do we get high-school students to understand the concept of believing is seeing--especially when adolescents are figuring out their own belief system and how it applies to the world?

In April, a group of African American young people organized a house party, defying Illinois’s Shelter-at-Home order. TMZ reported, “1,000 people attended the Chicago house party during the coronavirus pandemic.”¹⁸ Police raided the home. The attendees were labeled as selfish and irresponsible because of the reporting.

Students can write reflections that include responses to these questions:

1. In the article, who is presented as an authority, an expert, or as a person with wisdom or insight?
2. Does the article present behavior that most people will sympathize with or question?
3. How might a reader feel about the people in the news story after reading this?
4. If a reader could walk up to a person in this news article, what might he or she or they say?
5. What might readers say about these people’s decision-making processes?
6. What could be the consequences of these people’s actions and how might readers feel about those?

Next, students can read an article in Chicago’s independent news source the *Tribe*, which presented a different perspective. The reporter interviewed one of the party organizers who revealed one thing, according to the reporter: “a major disconnect between government officials, news media, and younger Black Chicago residents regarding information on COVID-19.”¹⁹

An Illinois state representative also explained, “Every young person that was at that party, I would be willing to bet that they know 10 to 20 people that have been killed, and they are suffering from post-traumatic stress.”²⁰

What resulted was a more nuanced conversation about media consumption, COVID-19 messaging, personal responsibility, and the role of income and life experiences during the pandemic.

Students can then answer these questions and discuss their reactions to these two articles about the same party.

1. In this article, who is presented as an authority, an expert, or as a person with wisdom or insight?
2. What information allows readers to understand or sympathize with the people's behavior?
3. How might this article make a readers feel differently about the party goers?
4. If a reader could walk up to a person in this news article, what might he or she or they say?
5. What might readers say now about these people's decision-making processes?
6. How might these people's actions result in some change to the actions of people in power?

Caveat: Maybe students will still judge the partygoers' behavior as completely irresponsible and selfish. The point is that readers should see that the TMZ's article sensationalizes the situation while the *Tribe's* article shows how we need systemic changes to the way the government communicates or engages with communities of color who are the most affected by the pandemic.

Learning Activity #2: Find Someone Challenging a System

This experience accomplishes what Cati de los Ríos and others articulate in "Critical Ethnic Studies in High School Classrooms: Academic Achievement via Social Action:" projects should "promote academic literacy development, civic engagement, and critical racial consciousness for the young people involved."²¹

Students should look around their community to find someone who is challenging institutionalized systems of racism, sexism, ageism, or simply someone who is challenging some stereotype or norm.

To help students see how systems can be challenged, students can read these articles and use these guiding questions:

1. How are the people seeking change presented as experts who deserve attention from society? What are phrases, descriptions, or quotes the journalist uses to aim for this?
2. In the article, which systems create "the indecent and unjust social order of our society," in Lipsitz's terms?
3. Should we accept the journalist's bias? If readers accept this information, will this contribute to a more decent and just social order in our society or no?
4. Examine the structure of the articles: Where does the lead end and the background begin? Where does the background end and the perspectives begin to be presented? Where do the perspectives transition to a turning point or ultimate challenge? Where does the conclusion begin?

"Students boycott [Chicago Public Schools] school lunch" by Bill Daley, *Chicago Tribune*, December 7, 2015

"Youth activists march to Lightfoot's home to demand removal of police from schools" by Matt Masterson, WTTW, August 13, 2020

“Latinas in L.A. become street vendors to pay for college” by Brittany Valentine, *Al Día Social*, August 12, 2020

“Chicago Teen Struggles With Fear of Having His Parents Deported” by Ray Salazar, *Latino USA*, April 6, 2017

“Chicago Sons Help Father Keep Dream of Neighborhood Gym Alive” by Ray Salazar, *Latino USA*, June 13, 2017

More confident and outgoing students might feel comfortable focusing on a community organization or interviewing someone in the community with a reputation for leading major efforts for social justice. More reserved students, however, can find individuals in the school or in their families who are taking small but significant steps to change racist or sexist social structures: the first Latina in the family who has not dropped out of high school, the young man who helps care for an elderly family member, the first male cheerleader of the school, one of the only African American males in a mostly Latino school.

In de los Rios’s article, we see how “students were guided in setting up interviews with community cultural treasures, individuals who have made positive contributions to the culture and people of East Los Angeles.”²² This is important because “seeing positive images of community members who are transforming and expanding the cultural landscape is critical for the development of empowered youth.”

Students should follow this guiding principle from the Solutions Journalism Network: “encourage journalists to report on how people are responding to social problems in such a way that it generates more knowledge for society.”

To ensure a thought-provoking and evocative piece, students should generate questions about the person’s background, knowledge of the situation, behavior before and after the experience, their values because of this, and their feelings about themselves and the situation.

Of course, students need to follow standard journalism guidelines when conducting the interview: ask for the person’s willingness to share the story, articulate that is for publication, request permission from parents if required by school policy.

Students will produce a two-page profile of the person’s experience. This profile follows the structure we see in most magazine features: introduction with the conflict, background, the experience, an emotional high point, and some indication of implications.

While students prepare for and audio record interviews, learning in the classroom can move on to the next learning experience.

A note on transcription of interviews: I never have students transcribe the entire interview. Instead, they listen to it once and summarize what the person said, pausing the interview every so often.

Then, they listen to the recording again. This time, they pull out quotes they’d like to use in the article.

To encourage accuracy, students show these transcriptions--not the article draft--to the person interviewed to ensure they captured the person’s ideas accurately.

Along with an audio recording, a resource they might use is the “Voice Typing” feature in a Google Doc. Go to Tools, then Voice Typing. This will require some editing, but it saves time transcribing.

Learning Activity #4: Leading with a Social Consciousness

Arguably, the most important part of the news story is the lead--how the story begins. While students are working on interviewing people for the previous learning experience, this study of leads can help students prepare to write more socially conscious openings to their profiles. The experience allows students to see how the beginning of the lead affects the reader's perception of the conflict and those involved.

These guiding questions should be used to examine the opening of the articles about the 1968 Democratic Convention Protests:

1. Based on the lead, whom does the reporting seem to favor?
2. What words or phrases in the headline or lead provide evidence of this?

These are headlines and leads from the conservative leaning *Chicago Tribune*:

"Police Repel Jeering Mob of Peaceniks," *Chicago Tribune* Aug 26, 1968; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune pg. 1

"Swarms anti-war, anti-administration "peaceniks," some carrying Viet Cong Flags, swept from Lincoln Park South toward the loop last night but were stopped by Chicago police at the Michigan Avenue Bridge at midnight. Club-wielding police managed to disperse bands of hippies, yippies, and other radical groups early today on the city's near North Side. Police estimated nearly 1,000 peaceniks got as far as the Michigan Avenue Bridge before a line of 100 police drove them back. No one was injured."

"2,000 Flee to Park in Tear Gas Attacks: 29000 Flee to Park in Tear Gas Attacks" *Chicago Tribune* (1963-1996); Aug 30, 1968; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune pg. 1

"Anti-war demonstrators, hippies, yippies, and numerous disgruntled Democratic convention delegates appeared to have finally come down early today in the Grant Park trouble area across from the Conrad Hilton Hotel. However, quiet settled over the park only after another night of demonstrations in which an estimated two thousand protesters confronted police and national guardsmen. The guardsmen discharged tear gas repeatedly and slowly pushed the clouds back into Grant Park."

"Daley Backs Cops' Action: Planned Disruption Is Cited" by Schreiber, Edward, *Chicago Tribune* (1963-1996); Aug 30, 1968; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune pg. 1

"Mayor Daley yesterday defended the Chicago Police Department's actions in the disturbances during the Democratic National Convention. After reading a statement in a press conference, Daley abruptly left without answering questions. He noted that the demonstrators' tactics and strategy had been disclosed before the convention opened and charged that the protesters had openly displayed their intention to disrupt the Democratic meeting. 'On behalf of the City of Chicago and its people and the police department, I would like to issue this statement and I expect in the sense of fair play, it will be given the same kind of distribution on press, radio, and television as the mob of rioters were given yesterday,' Daley said."

These are headlines and leads from reporting by the *Chicago Defender*, a more progressive African American publication, the same week as the ones above:

"It Is Time ... Right Now ... For Dems To Act," *Chicago Daily Defender* (1966-1973); Aug 24, 1968; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender pg. 1

The eyes of Black America will be focused on this city and Democratic Party leaders next week. What transpires here will determine the fate of this nation for years to come. Big words? Yes! Significant decisions? It must be made! Black America will be watching the posture of black delegates (175) and black alternates (125). Black delegates will come to the convention well-organized. The same black delegates will come to the convention under strong united leadership. These same black delegates will be able to evaluate their strength and to demand recognition commensurate with their ability to be a 'balance of power' in many states."

"Police Can't Stop Us, Says Abernathy: Poor Group Joins Yippies At Park Rally" by Faith Christmas, Daily Defender Staff Writer, *Chicago Daily Defender* (1966-1973); Aug 31, 1968; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender pg. 1

The Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, told some 2,000 cheering yippies and spectators at Grant Park Thursday to write a letter to Mayor Richard J. Daley and tell him that the police and troops cannot stop a black-and-white movement. Standing on a makeshift platform, Rev. Abernathy declared: 'You are having the first Democratic convention ever to be held in a park because nothing is taking place over there in the Amphitheatre. We are going to continue this movement until something meaningful takes place and we're letting them know we're going to 'Sock it to them, baby.'"Abernathy said black people have been tricked by the Republicans and robbed for the Democrats but stated he still has hope for America."

"Judge Cracks Down On Police Abuse," *Chicago Daily Defender* (1966-1973); Aug 31, 1968; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender pg. 1

Chicago policemen's recent attacks on anti-war demonstrators and newsmen 'show very clearly to the rest of the nation if not the world the kind of harassing treatment that black people have been subjected to for a long time in Chicago.' That opinion was voiced by Kermit Coleman, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's ghetto project, in the wake of a ruling by U.S. Appeals Court Judge Elmer J. Schnackenberg that Chicago policemen may no longer abuse newsmen and photographers. In attacking newsmen, delegates at the Democratic National Convention, and other whites, police struck out at 'people who have voices and who will respond from positions of power,' Coleman said."

Key takeaways: While there might be some debate and discussion with the learning experience, the *Chicago Tribune* clearly uses language that leans toward justifying the attacks on protestors. The *Chicago Defender*, on the other hand, shows protestors acting to advance a more just society and gain some needed political power.

Learning Activity #5: Finding the Counternarrative

In the introduction to *Seeing Race Again*, we are reminded that "people with problems thus become identified as problems."²³ So the stories about people of color need to focus on agency, not oppression. As loanide discovered when her mentor reviewed her syllabus, "I had failed to structurally integrate oppressed people's

agency.”²⁴

We must follow Aleman’s guidance so our high-school journalism classrooms become places of “counterstorytelling.” Like counternarratives, which Aleman summarizes as, challenges to “White, male, heterosexual, middle class identity as the norm,” a counterstory “centers the experiences of minoritized communities and individuals” to question the dominant stereotypes, misconceptions, and lowered expectations.²⁵

Aleman’s research leads us to help students produce “writing so it [resounds] with the disenfranchisement experienced by members of [the student’s] community and is laced with messages of empowerment and advocacy” thereby confronting traditional norms of maintaining objectivity. In fact, Aleman argues, we need to confront the idea that objectivity is a “reinscription of white discourse and white dominance.”

During NPR’s *Weekend Edition*’s July 19 program, Lulu Garcia-Navarro tweeted this about her news story: “This is a story about agency and how what happened to the poultry workers forced an historic first in the United States.”²⁶

The story titled “Virginia Poultry Workers See Victory In New COVID-19 Protection Rules”

is riveting. Garcia-Navarro’s reporting addresses the problem, the oppression, but focuses on what the immigrant workers did to challenge their bosses’ unfair labor practices.²⁷

One way to begin this learning experience is to ask students, “When you hear that the news story is about low-wage Latino immigrant workers, what do you expect to read or hear?”

Let the stereotypes come out. This can be done anonymously by having students write down their responses. Or the teacher can use something like Padlet for Teachers to gather students’ responses. Students need to be reminded that these are the common narratives that exist, what people expect to hear about this group.

As journalists, our students should aim to find the counternarrative so we can identify, in loanide’s words, “aspirational ideals for building more equitable worlds and social relations.”²⁸

As students read Lulu Garcia Navarro’s piece and other pieces, they can use the Universal News Drivers²⁹ to explain how the reporting challenges the common narratives about Latinos. In other words, how does the journalist use the news drivers to present a counternarrative?

These are the news drivers and how they are described on the Digital Resource Center’s Website:

Importance: Stories such as those on long standing wars or international outbreaks of disease are deemed important for the public to know as it could have direct implications on their lives right at that point in time.

Prominence: A public figure of some sort is involved. That public figure could be a politician, or an entertainer. The fact that many know who this person is makes news about them something that draws the audience in.

Human interest: A unique or universal experience explores the human condition. These are usually stories of the everyday man/woman who is caught up in a situation that most of the audience can relate or empathize with.

Conflict: Clashes of people, institutions or ideas. Just like we mentioned with wars in the "importance" driver, conflicts between political parties are constantly in the news.

Change: For good or ill, the world has changed. This is denoted by the fact that a belief, a law, or scientific discovery has changed the "face" of the nation. The debate over Same Sex Marriage has been the most prominent demonstration of "change" in the news.

Proximity: NIMBY: News in My Back Yard -- News that happens in an area near the audience. We usually think about it as local news.

Timeliness: Anniversaries or holidays or deadlines, the calendar is the crucial context of these stories. Remember the time you saw that story about Santa Claus delivering gifts to kids in the hospital? You saw that in December, not July (usually...).

Magnitude: Numbers are the essence of this story. We've heard that this was the coldest winter on record -- or was it? How did it compare to previous winters? These kinds of stories deal in numbers.

Relevance: A story with wide impact. In this case, we think about the audience. If you're talking to college students, word that interest rates on new college loans are going up may be on the front page, since it will impact many of them.

Unusualness: Peculiarity- news that alerts and diverts. We use the example that "dog bites man" is usual, but man bites dog is unusual, and it becomes the story.

Another Way To Find Counternarratives

Another way to find a counternarrative is to follow up with people who've been profiled in a news article and ask them, "How do you feel about the way your experience was represented? Is there anything else you'd like to say?"

In 2017 in the *Chicago Tribune*, I came across "Loyola program opens college doors for vulnerable students" by Dawn Rhodes. The article struck me as perpetuating a messiah complex narrative where the low-income, first-generation college students needed to be saved, controlled, micro-managed according to the private school's standards if they were to succeed.

The use of "vulnerable" triggered my own memories of being a low-income, first-generation college student. I asked myself, "Did I ever think of myself as vulnerable?" I was definitely lost and broke--but vulnerable?

So I reached out to a student there, a student who had been my student, and asked her, "What did you think of the *Tribune* article?"

Liseth Perez--ambitious, intelligent, undocumented--told me she and many students said they felt misrepresented, looked down upon. So I asked if she'd like to tell her side of it. That's how this counternarrative story came to be a few weeks later: "Two Chicago Universities Establish Generous Scholarships for Undocumented Students" for *Latino USA*. When I give this to students, I'll remove my name

in the byline.

Students can go through the same news driver exercise with these two articles and then write a reflection:

1. Which article presents the people profiled more as individuals with agency?
2. How does the *Tribune* article use language that shows the students as disempowered people?
3. How does the Latino USA article use language that highlights the students' agency?

Learning Activity #3: Contextualize the Struggle

“In Critical Ethnic Studies in High School Classrooms: Academic Achievement via Social Action,” the authors “argue that a critical approach to the teaching of race not only has the potential to make curricula more relevant and engaging, but such an approach also has the potential to foster standards-based academic development across the disciplines.”³⁰

Race-conscious reporting, like the assignments mentioned in this article, can “attempt to counter that inequality by tapping into the untold and untapped knowledge production of communities of color that is often absent from mainstream curricula.”³¹

Skeptics might think it too drastic to have high-school students write about people's experiences with deportation, miscarriages, eating disorders, or other difficult life experiences. But, it turns out, having students recognize and communicate difficult experiences can help develop their own agency in life and fight against helicopter parenting--and teaching.

In the *Atlantic's* May 2020 issue, Kate Julian explains in the “The Anxious Child and the Crisis of Modern Parenting” how she was “struck by how many of [the clinicians she spoke with] talked about the importance of learning to endure emotional upset.” Furthermore, “If we want to prepare our kids for difficult times, we should let them . . . talk candidly about worrisome topics.” In the closing section of the article, Julian discusses a study done after California's 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. The researchers, who by chance were studying the relationship between stress and illness when the earthquake occurred, asked children to “draw the earthquake.” Some drawings proved to be “cheerful pictures--homes with minor damage, happy families, and smiling yellow suns.” Others, however, presented “destruction and injury, fear and sadness.” In the following weeks, the researchers found that “children who drew darker scenes tended to stay healthy . . . while those who drew sunny pictures were more likely to come down with infections and illnesses.”

While fiction has been highlighted for years as the main entry point into building empathy and developing reading and writing skills, we must remember the power of non-fiction. Learning about others' real-life experiences with difficult situations, therefore, helps students prepare for life's unpredictable challenges and increases their sensitivity to other's struggles.

Students gather research that provides context for the person's experience and use that to expand the profile into a five-page research paper. The articles included in this unit can serve as mentor texts. As they research, students look for answers to these questions:

- Why is this issue a problem or cause for debate?

- Who is affected by it? How and why?
- Who else is working to address this? How?
- What are other views people ignore, forget, or might be unaware of?
- Who or what is preventing the social issue from being resolved?
- What are the benefits of addressing this issue?

These questions can be written at the top of loose leaf paper (I prefer having students write out this info for easier review by me and doing all of this on one screen proves confusing). Each question should go on a different sheet of paper. To decrease the chances of them quoting sources that sensationalize the topic, students use databases (see school's or city library's options) and sources with credibility (such as the search option at the *Atlantic* and National Public Radio). They document the answers to the questions in 4 columns under each question: answer to the question, who provided that answer, the titles of the publication and article, the date of publication. They should not write on the back of the sheet.

When they have quite a few answers from a variety of sources, they cut each piece of information into strips (why they should not write on the back). Then they tape the information to the section of the profile where it fits to create an outline or sorts.

Then students merge the person's experience with the research. Sometimes the information complements each other, sometimes not. The student's responsibility is to create links for the reader between the profile and the research by adding commentary that explains the significance of the experience or the research when these two are juxtaposed. Or organizing the person's experience with the research in a way that helps the article flow also proves valuable. While their commentary might express a bias, they cannot indoctrinate or lecture the audience or sensationalize the situation. They must let the information reveal truths to the reader.

One way to test for inappropriate bias is to have peer reviews where other students look for writing that is dictating what to do, overusing adjectives and adverbs, or language that is focusing more on the writer's instead of addressing the situation. Again, the articles included in this unit can serve as mentor texts.

Another way students can assess if their bias is overpowering the reporting is to ask themselves, "Why do I care about this?" This will help them flesh out the "believing is seeing" ideology mentioned in Ioanide's article. Students should submit this reflection with any drafts of the article so the teacher or peers can look to see if the student journalist is simply reporting information that validates their bias.

The most important question I have students ask is one mentioned earlier: What are the implications of the bias? If the bias in the writing encourages a more race- and socially conscious world, that's not a bad thing.

In a 2016 *Code Switch* conversation, Pulitzer-Prize-Winner Wesley Lowery, who covered racial justice and politics for the *Washington Post* discussed the concept of objectivity, along with Pilar Marrero is a political reporter for the Spanish language daily *La Opinión*.³²

"I don't even like the word objectivity," Lowery said. "When we talk about trying to be objective, we begin the conversation with a lie. Like, we begin the conversation with the lie that we don't have biases and that we don't perceive the world certain ways, right?" He explained his efforts "to be fair. And that fairness means that [he has] to interrogate [his] own biases."³³

Marrero challenged media organizations to question themselves when they avoid reporting "issues from the point of view of immigrants . . . by not having Latinos and other minorities in their newsroom, by prioritizing

stories that cater to their particular audience that doesn't look like [her] audience." She argued, and I agree, "it's all relative."³⁴

In a June 1A conversation titled, "When Journalists Say They're Objective — What Does That Even Mean?," PBS Public Editor Ricardo Sandoval-Palos explained that "objectivity really doesn't exist. It's a word that's been overused by our industry in an attempt to portray us playing both sides or trying to reflect all sides of an issue equally. You can't do that," he said. "And the main reason you can't do that is we're human. As humans we have subjective impulses. We make subjective decisions. We make subjective decisions about how we're going to write the story."³⁵

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

This unit will address these common core standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3

Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5

Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.2.B

Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Bibliography

Aleman, Sonya M. "A Critical Race Counterstory: Chicana/o Subjectivities vs. Journalism Objectivity." In *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 16, 2017.

Blassingame, Haili. "When Journalists Say They're Objective - What Does That Even Mean?" 1A. WAMU 88.5 - American University Radio, June 9, 2020.

<https://the1a.org/segments/when-journalists-say-theyre-objective-what-does-that-even-mean/>.

Chaplin, Mae. "Reclaiming Multicultural Education: Course Redesign as a Tool for Transformation." In *Multicultural Perspectives*, 21:3, 151-158, 2019.

de los Rios, C. V., Lopez, J. & Morrell, E. "Critical Ethnic Studies in High School Classrooms: Academic Achievement via Social Action." In *Race and Social Problems*, 7(11), 84-96. 2015.

Demby, Gene. "Reporting While Brown In The Summer Of Trump: Episode 11." NPR. NPR, August 3, 2016. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/08/03/488423946/reporting-while-brown-in-the-summer-of-trump>.

Garcia-Navarro, Lulu. "Virginia Poultry Workers See Victory In New COVID-19 Protection Rules." NPR. NPR, July 19, 2020.

<https://www.npr.org/2020/07/19/892757768/virginia-workers-see-victory-in-covid-19-protection-rules>.

Garcia-Navarro, Lulu. Twitter Post. July 19, 2020. 8:33 a.m.

<https://twitter.com/lourdesgnavarro/status/1284843881092218881>

Harrison, Vee L. "A West Side House Party Exposes the Disconnect between Young Black Residents, Chicago Officials and the News during COVID-19 Pandemic • The TRiiBE." *The TRiiBE*, May 4, 2020.

<https://thetriibe.com/2020/04/a-west-side-house-party-exposes-the-disconnect-between-young-black-residents-chicago-officials-and-the-news-during-covid-19-pandemic/>.

Harvard University. Project Implicit. Accessed August 15, 2020. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>.

laonide, Paula. "Negotiating Privileged Students' Affective Resistances: Why a Pedagogy of Emotional Engagement Is Necessary." In *Seeing Race Again*, edited by Kimberlee Williams Crenshaw, 327-351. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019.

Karp, Sarah. "Racial Issues Flare at Chicago's Elite Payton College Prep." NPR. NPR, October 2, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/local/309/2019/10/02/766379053/racial-issues-flare-at-chicago-s-elite-payton-college-prep>

Lipsitz, George. "The Sounds of Silence: How Race Neutrality Preserves White Supremacy." Essay. In *Seeing Race Again*, edited by Kimberlee Williams Crenshaw, 23-51. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019.

Payton College Prep. PAW PRINT, Chicago Public Schools, November, 2019. <https://paytonpawprint.com/>.

Reeves, Richard. *Is America Dreaming?: Understanding Social Mobility*. Brookings Institution, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2XFh_tD2RA.

"Six Principles of News Literacy." SchoolJournalism.org. Accessed August 16, 2020. <https://www.schooljournalism.org/news-literacy-overview/>.

Staff, TMZ. "1,000 People Attend Chicago House Party During Coronavirus Pandemic." TMZ. TMZ, April 26, 2020. <https://www.tMZ.com/2020/04/26/1-000-people-attend-crowded-house-party-in-chicago/>.

Sullivan, Margaret. "Perspective | What's a Journalist Supposed to Be Now - an Activist? A Stenographer? You're Asking the Wrong Question." The Washington Post. WP Company, June 7, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/whats-a-journalist-supposed-to-be-now--an-activist-a-stenographer-youre-asking-the-wrong-question/2020/06/06/60fd86-a73b-11ea-b619-3f9133bbb482_story.html.

"The Universal News Drivers." The Universal News Drivers | Stony Brook Center for News Literacy. Accessed August 16, 2020. <https://digitalresource.center/content/universal-news-drivers>.

Williams Crenshaw, Kimberlé, Luke Charles Harries, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and George Lipsitz. "Introduction." Introduction. In *Seeing Race Again*, 1-20. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019.

Notes

¹ SchoolJournalism.org, "Six Principles"

² Chaplin, Mae, "Reclaiming Multicultural Education," 155

³ Sullivan, "What's a Journalist"

⁴ Aleman, "Critical Race Counterstory," 86

⁵ Karp, "Racial Issues Flare,"

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Payton College Prep, "Pawprint," November 2019

⁸ Lipsitz, "Sounds of Silence," 40

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Sullivan, "What's a Journalist"

¹¹ De Los Rios et al., "Critical Ethnic Studies," 187

¹² Iaconide, "Negotiating Students'," 342

¹³ Harvard University, "Project Implicit,"

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Lipsitz, "Sounds of Silence," 47

¹⁶ Iaconide, "Negotiating Privileged Students'," 339

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ TMZ, "1,000 people,"

¹⁹ Harrison, "A westside house party,"

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ de los Ríos, "Critical Ethnic Studies," 182

²² Ibid.

²³ Williams Crenshaw et al., "Introduction," 3

²⁴ Iaconide, "Negotiating Privileged Students'," 346

²⁵ Aleman, "Critical Race Counterstory," 83

²⁶ Garcia-Navarro, Tweet, July 19, 2020

²⁷ Garcia-Navarro, "Virginia Poultry Workers"

²⁸ Iaconide, "Negotiating Privileged Students'," 347

²⁹ Digital Resource Center, Universal News Drivers

³⁰ de los Rios, "Critical Ethnic Studies," 182

³¹ Ibid.

³² Demby, “Reporting While Brown”

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Blassingame, “When Journalists Say”

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use