

LESSON PLAN

Cultivating Identity Literacy

Essential Question: What makes me, me? What story do I want to tell about who I am and what matters to me?

Guiding Questions:

- How can we talk with each other across our differences?
- What would need to happen at your school for students to feel like they could share personal stories about who they are and what they believe with their friends, peers, and adults?

Overview

Over the course of the “Identity and Storytelling” text set, students have explored the complexity of identity and considered how sharing aspects of ourselves with others can be both validating and challenging. In this final lesson, students start to envision what sharing their stories—authentic stories about who they are and what matters to them—can look like, sound like, and feel like.

Students will watch a TED Talk in which Priya Vulchi and Winona Gao, university students, authors, and co-founders of the nonprofit [CHOOSE](#), reflect on the year they spent engaging in conversations with people across the country about identity, race, and culture. They explain the importance of prioritizing what they call “soul stories” over “ego stories” and consider how engaging in meaningful conversations about race and culture can help all of us challenge assumptions and deepen our understanding of one another. After watching the video, students apply these lessons to their own lives in order to generate concrete steps they might take to share their stories, make space for the stories of others, and start to develop their own “identity literacy.”

Texts and Materials

- Video: [Lessons of Cultural Intimacy](#) (07:23)
- Handout: **The Challenge of Sharing Soul Stories Discussion**

Teaching Strategies

- [Exit Card](#)

Pacing

These activities are designed for one class period.

Activities

1. Reflect on Identity and Assumptions

Prepare to watch this lesson's video by having students reflect in their journals on assumptions that someone, even a close friend, might make about them. Let them know that they won't have to share what they write. The following questions can prompt their thinking: *Based on your identity, what assumptions do you think individuals, even close friends, might make about you? What questions could they ask in order to better understand you—your identity, values, experiences, and perspective?*

If you feel comfortable, share ideas from your journal response with the class and then see if any volunteers want to share as well.

2. Learn about Racial and Cultural Intimacy

Show the video [Lessons of Cultural Intimacy](#) (07:23). To help students process the video, pause twice and use the following questions for quick pair-share discussions:

- (02:45) What is the difference between “ego stories” and “soul stories”? Think about your own experience as a student. What are some examples of ego stories that you tell or hear others tell about themselves?
- (05:20) By sharing their soul stories with one another, what experiences did Priya and Winona learn that they shared? What assumptions did they realize they were making about each other? How did sharing soul stories, and not just ego stories, help to strengthen their friendship?

Time allowing, show the video a second time straight through. Then have students choose *one* of the following questions from Project Zero's “Take Note” thinking routine¹ to reflect on in their journals and discuss with their small groups as part of the next activity: *What is the most important point? What are you finding challenging, puzzling, or difficult to understand? What question would you most like to discuss? What is something you found interesting?*

3. Discuss the Challenge of Sharing Soul Stories

Divide students into small groups and give them time to explore their ideas from their “Take Note” reflections. Then let them know that they will be discussing Winona Gao and Priya Vulchi's argument that we can develop racial and cultural intimacy by “investing ourselves into digging deeper into our soul stories and how they have shaped our lives.”

¹ [“Take Note” Thinking Routine](#) from Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Divide the class into small groups and distribute the handout **The Challenge of Sharing Soul Stories Discussion**. Encourage students to support their ideas with evidence from the personal narratives, text set readings, journals, handouts, and their own experiences.

4. Reflect on Personal Action

On an [exit card](#) that you create, have each student write a concrete step they can take in the upcoming weeks to help foster a space that invites storytelling. They can also explain the impact it would have on their learning, the classroom environment, and others in the class community if they follow through with this step, as well as how you can support them.