



TITLE

HUMAN MIGRATION: WHY WORDS MATTER



GRADE LEVEL: UPPER ELEMENTARY TO HIGH SCHOOL

SUBJECT: Social Studies, English

THEME: Activism, Bias and Stereotype, Civil Rights, Colonization, Identity and Culture

STANDARDS: Educating for American Democracy: Theme 1: Civic Participation: What are the responsibilities and opportunities of citizenship and civic agency in America's constitutional democracy?

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- Recognize and understand the power of language: that words can be used to hurt and that they have a responsibility to choose words that support and promote human dignity.
- Students will be able to employ respectful vocabulary to discuss circumstances surrounding immigration, displacement, and human migration, and do so with empathy, compassion, and which avoids stereotyping.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- How do we help students to talk about difficult and sensitive topics in class without being rude or disrespectful of individuals or groups?

MATERIALS:

7 index cards per individual
Sharpie/marker for each learner to write on index cards
Additional materials may be needed for the "Reflect & Create" section below

KEY POINTS:

Begin by identifying and defining vocabulary (see below) - because words matter and we explore why they matter.

Discuss what words we will use and what words we will not use and why

We identify and explore the history of these words.

We will use people-first language to not further perpetuate harm. (See the opening activity below for an expansion on how we will introduce what people-first language is and how we practice it.)



**CREDIT AUTHOR
AND CONTACT:** SANDY TING

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CONTEXT:

One of the most important things we can do as teachers is to promote honest discussion around difficult issues while ensuring students are respectful both in their behaviors and in their use of language. This lesson intends to prepare students to discuss tough topics, like human migration, in an informed and sensitive manner that respects the back story, the history, and the culture of every individual. Its focus isn't necessarily on any one group or nationality; rather it seeks to lay a foundation upon which meaningful and responsible discussion can take place. Teachers should feel free to use both historical and contemporary examples that they are comfortable with and that can be used to illustrate the principles in the lesson.

VOCABULARY:

Lead students in brief discussions using historical or current events (examples such as above or in parentheses below) to provide specific meaning to the words.

Undocumented - people who by birth or by life circumstances do not have the same paperwork as someone born in the same country. Some people are born undocumented and others become undocumented when they leave one country in search of safety and/or better opportunities in another country. (Asians who came during the era of Chinese and Asian exclusion; People on the U.S. border from Central America; DACA status for many in U.S. already from many countries.)

Migrant - a person who moves to find work or better living conditions

Immigrant - a person who moves to a new country to live

Heritage/native country/land - a place that someone identifies as their roots, whether they were born there or not. (For example, a Puerto Rican person may identify as Puerto Rican but not have been born or been to Puerto Rico. In recent history, the attempt to ban Muslims entry into the U.S. fits into this category.)

Refugee - a person forced to leave their country because of war, disaster, or a combination of safety circumstances outside of their country. (see above for Ukraine; in the past following wars in Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East, for example, many seeking entry to the U.S. have reason to claim refugee status.)

Asylum - protection granted by a country to a person who has left their heritage/native land for reasons outside of their control

Illegal(s) - an insensitive term that people sometimes use to describe people who are undocumented. It causes harm because it demeans and eliminates a person's existence to that of a violation of laws, rather than seeing them as a human with needs, dreams, feelings, wishes, and rights. **We will not be using this word when referring to people because we uphold the standard truth that all humans are equal and deserving of respect, dignity, love, understanding, and rights.**

Alien(s) - another insensitive term for people who are undocumented. It causes harm because it dehumanizes a person down to a word synonymous with a non-human lifeform. **We will not be using this word unless we are talking about lifeforms from outer space** because we uphold the standard truth that all humans are equal and deserving of respect, dignity, love, understanding, and rights..



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ACTIVITIES:

Prepare students to use people-first language: to understand what that means and why it's important, we are going to practice it. People-first language recognizes that words carry power and impact and we use it to describe people using identifiers that humanizes them rather than reduces them.

Educators will provide the following example to learners: “Crutches girl needs a chair” versus “Could we offer Susie, the one in the soccer jersey, a chair if she wants one?”

Turn and discuss with a partner the differences between the two statements. Share out as a class.

Practice using people-first language by describing individuals in these images:



Images retrieved from free stock photo site www.pexels.com

Note about using current events to make global connections: The situation in Ukraine offers an immediate example in which teachers and students can engage with this topic. Use the information below as useful resources as you consider materials for you and your students to study.

Words have meaning but the context in which they are used is just as important. The evidence for this is readily apparent in the unfolding events in Ukraine. Educators should take careful thought as to what content will be most appropriate and impactful for their learners. NewsELA, <https://newsela.com/>, has a text set comprised of 13 articles on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Facing History and Ourselves, <https://www.facinghistory.org/>, provides the following text that can also be used in lieu of a specific article:

On February 24, 2022, the Russian military invaded Ukraine. The escalating conflict is causing a widespread humanitarian crisis, as civilians are injured, killed, or forced from their homes. This Teaching Idea is designed to help students explore one facet of this devastating war: the mounting refugee crisis. The UNHCR projects that more than 4 million Ukrainian people—10% of the population—will leave the country because of the Russian invasion, and as of March 8, 2022, half of the 2 million Ukrainian refugees who fled to other European countries are children,



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ACTIVITIES:

European governments and private citizens have mobilized to help Ukrainian refugees. For example, the European Union plans to allow Ukrainian people to live and work in EU countries for up to three years, the Polish government is providing Ukrainians with healthcare and social assistance, and individual volunteers have assembled to provide free rides, food, and supplies. We can and should be inspired by these stories, and they also raise ethical questions about the different treatment migrants and refugees from other parts of the world, including Middle Eastern and African countries, have faced recently in Europe.

This Teaching Idea introduces students to the experiences of Ukrainian people forced to flee the war and highlights the inspiring ways governments and individual volunteers have stepped up to help Ukrainians. It also raises ethical questions about the treatment of refugees and migrants from non-European countries and asks students to consider how we can take care of ourselves and each other during this crisis.

<https://www.facinghistory.org/educator-resources/current-events/teaching-about-ukrainian-refugee-crisis>

Further Activities

1. List the routine of a typical day in your life and a quick note about why these are important to you. (For example, putting in my contacts because my vision is significantly impaired without it or going for my morning run with my dogs, because it helps wake me up and spending time with my dogs always makes me happy.)
2. List 7 things each on a separate sticky note/index card that you cannot live without.
3. You have 10 (timed) seconds to select two that you must give up. This is required.
4. Turn your remaining cards over and mix them up.
5. Instructor will take 4 of them.
6. Turn over the card that you have left.
7. Look at your list of your routine, what you have lost, and what remains. How is your day to day affected?
8. Turn and talk with a partner and/or in small groups. Share aloud as a class.

Assessment: Reflect & Create

Using a journal, reflect on your thoughts, reactions, and how your routine, day to day life is affected if interrupted or plans have to change. Consider the options of journaling, creating a collage, drawing, and/or poetry. Consider offering blackout poetry as a powerful work of art and expression and show examples of these.

Blackout Poetry Instruction:

1. Find a newspaper article, poem, article, or any text-based publication that you can mark up.
2. Skim the text and look for words that stand out to you. Box those words with a Sharpie.
3. Black out the rest of the poem and watch the boxed words pop!
4. Bonus: Turn the blackout part of the poem into a drawing!

Using the following prompts, engage as a class, with partners, or in small groups. Use a NearPod if you would like to use anonymous sticky note/bulletin board features and moderate a whole-class discussion.

Assessment: Ask students to reflect on one or more of these prompts and write down their thoughts:

We say we can't live without certain people, medications, and personal items - yet over 50 million people today have to. How does this shift your thinking about migrants, refugees, immigrants, people who are seeking asylum, and people who are displaced?

Some say that many people coming to the United States (with or without documentation) are criminals. What makes this false narrative dangerous? How can we challenge this stereotype?

How do we express and demonstrate empathy rather than pity?

What is one step you can take to support your local refugee community?

On March 24, 2022, President Biden said the U.S. would welcome 100,000 Ukrainian refugees and said that providing support was an "international responsibility."

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/24/us/ukrainian-refugees-biden.html>) What do you think are some of the most important ways people can support Ukrainian people who are displaced from their homes?



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SOURCES:

PBS Learning Media. This resource deals with the controversy surrounding the removal of Confederate monuments in Richmond, Va., and the teacher's guide pays specific attention as to how to deal with racist language to ensure students are sensitive to each other's feelings.

<https://vpm.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/how-monuments-came-down-resources/curriculum-guide-activities-media-gallery-how-monuments-came-down/>

Lucy Koh, Washington Post, Aug. 10, 2021. Recent example of insensitivity from an American politician.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/10/08/grassley-lucy-koh-model-minority/>

Liz Kleinrock interview, Smithsonian APAC. "How to Teach About Taboo Topics."

<https://smithsonianapa.org/learn/learn-archives/2020-04/>

EdWeek. What do Teachers Think About Discussing Racism. June 2021.

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-do-teachers-think-about-discussing-racism-in-class-we-asked-them/2021/06>



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