

DRAFT VERSION

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**Supporting  
International Inquiry, Holistic Language  
Development and Student Engagement in Real  
Time Learning Environments Online**

**With Teaching Strategies for:**

Building Personalized, Meaningful and Fun Learning Groups Online

Supporting Students' International Curiosity, Inquiry and Understanding

Supporting Students' Holistic Language Development and Interdisciplinary Learning

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“In the classroom student’s eyes are full of light - online they seem hollow.”  
(Describing the experience of switching to online classes in the Spring of 2020.)

-Beijing Normal University Professor

An excerpt from an essay, written by a 10<sup>th</sup> grade SFS Chinese Student who attends the top high school in his province in response to the type of classes administered online by the school in the Winter/Spring 2020.

*Essay Title: Online Class is Garbage.*

*“Because of the coronavirus, school had been put off. Now many schools started their own online classes to make up for time. But do students really need this? I think the answer is no, because schools compare themselves and develop programs in ineffective ways, and time in online lecture is often not optimal for efficiency. It’s my opinion that online class is an unnecessary formalism, wasteful as garbage.*

*Online class began with the slogan "Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning" which was put out by Chinese Education Bureau. You might think it's great right? You can learn online, learn by yourself, so many different learning styles may thrive. But when the school think they should respond positively to the call, funny things happen. If school ask us to learn by ourselves and the other school start online classes, the headmaster will have the mentality of ‘Keeping up with the Joneses’ because the online class of other schools seems more complex. The headmaster at my school feels the need to make comparisons, and suddenly the effect of self study seems less important. So, the whole thing can be seemed as a product of formalism.*

*. . . . Also, because of lack of online teaching experience, teachers have a really low efficiency. Maybe the 40-minute lecture actually covers only 20 minutes. Teachers don’t know what students wonder, and they can't maintain a good class pace. These are just a few of the disadvantages of online classes.”*

*One ESL students' reflection about what makes online learning as described in this book unique:*

"I am not always a big fan of the formal education system, teachers in formal schools are just teachers, a cut above the students. They teach you, they feed you the knowledges, and that's what most formal school teachers do in your whole learning stage, they are both official and respectful and unreachable because they are just your teachers —but in my opinion, they are not really somebody that you can actually make friends or connect with.

In fact, I enjoy the happiness of figuring things out myself, and then share my ideas with different kinds of people who're happy to hear these (sometimes) stupid ideas. When you're chatting with them, you won't get that strange 'talkin'-to-a-teacher' feeling . . the teachers provides you with experiences by being a student, asking questions, exploring with you, hearing your opinions. They could always turn boring subjects (like essay writing) into humorous dramas. . . . Attending the SFS classes, not only my reading, analyzing and writing skills were improved, I also learned how to find appropriate ways to reach my destinations. And of course, I made a lot of friends."

-6th Grade Student

## Chapter 1

# Exploring the Context of Online Learning for ESL Students: Why Small Group Interactive Learning Models? Why International Inquiries?

Written by Devon Wilson

### **The Context of Online Learning Amid Covid-19:**

Within the span of a few months in 2020, online teaching went from something that a relatively small percentage of educators had taken part in, to a form of education that suddenly a majority of teachers and schools across the planet had to consider and implement. In talking with educators and students from around the world in early 2020, it quickly became apparent that teachers struggled to adapt to leading meaningful learning experiences through real-time online platforms, and students struggled in many instances where schools tried to force fit their standard lecture format into an online space. After-school programs came into 2020 with a longer history of designing online learning programs, yet engagement remains a challenge with a majority of students and teachers preferring in-person learning experiences.

### **Introducing the Students for Students (SFS) Program**

Since 2018, a group of eight students and graduates from the Harvard Graduate School of Education from four different countries have worked together in leading online learning groups for middle and high school English as a Second Language (ESL) students internationally. Collectively over the last two and a half years, we've led approximately 1500 hours of online classes. A central focus of this program has been to try out different pedagogies to make the online learning experience as meaningful, impactful, personable and engaging as possible for students. Consistently in our learning design, we have sought to cultivate student's global competence, designing learning experiences that offer students opportunities to develop an understanding of different places and people around the world, and a sense that one's thoughts and actions can have an impact on topics of international importance. Alongside our pedagogy-centered goals, we are a not-for-profit that seeks to promote educational and social equality.

On average, after nine classes, among many language and learning benefits, we saw students' self-reported confidence in exploring and discussing international topics in English improve by 35%, and students' enjoyment of English study improve by 22%. Increasingly inspired by the progress we've seen with students as we have consistently sought to improve online learning experiences for students, our group decided to take action, sharing in this book the lessons, takeaways and designs that have helped us facilitate impactful online learning experiences. Much of the discoveries and content of this book come from consistent inquiry, application, and collaboration over the last two years, with 1500+ hours of online teaching time working with students.

## Who Is This Book Beneficial For?

Although our program primarily serves ESL learners, our teaching philosophy centers around an interdisciplinary approach, involving a cross exploration of disciplines sourcing from the literature we read as a group. This model seeks to flip the classroom, having students read, inquire, and explore individually, and then go deeper with such learning in small group-based classes. Rather than teaching English for English sake or in a vacuum, we model our learning around students' lives and real world explorations.

We believe that since Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC's) are free and readily available, lecture remains the most common form of instruction for public school classes online, and purely 1-on-1 based out of school tutoring-models limit the potential for development of intra and interpersonal abilities, the students-centered, small group learning model (as is described in this book) has potential in supporting online learners from any subject at any age. That being said, within this book, we focus primarily on our experience, designing programs for English classrooms for high elementary, middle school and secondary school students (approximately ages 10-18) with a base level of fluency in English (able to read at least low-level elementary chapter books). Although, we recommend small group engagement (whether that stands as the primary form of instruction or as a supplementary facilitation model while other students in a class are working independently), teachers in our program have found the culture-building and facilitation strategies described in this text to be useful for classrooms with larger numbers of students as well (on and offline).

- In Chapter 2 of this book, we share the design elements we consider central in creating **"International Inquiry Units"** for students (the learning experiences that are central to our program design).
- Chapter 3 introduces and illustrates **thinking routines used by our team to cultivate students inquiry-based thinking skills and to build student-centered learning environments.**
- Chapter 4 examines our findings that support **culture building in real-time online classrooms**, as well as students' interpersonal skills in the process.
- Chapters 5-8 share **specific cases** of successful learning experiences we've designed and the potential they have for developing students' thinking skills, collaborative abilities, creativity, civic agency, research skills and intrinsic motivation to learn about new contexts and cultures. In the appendices at the end of this book, we provide the unit plans described in Chapters 5-8 and invite educators to try them out with students and to create their own international inquiry units.

Because our team has a lot of experience working within the ESL context in China, and many of the students we work with are based in China, the Chinese context frequently emerges as a theme in narratives and examples. However, outside of China, our team of teachers also has experience teaching ESL in the US, Thailand, Ethiopia, India, New Zealand and Ecuador, and we consider our learning recommendations to be of use across ESL and language learning contexts.

In the remaining portion of this chapter, I hope to introduce some of the foundational observations, experiences and questions that lead to the creation of our online learning program. Questions and considerations integral to the design of learning experiences that we feel are important to consider and continue to explore in the quest to make online learning as meaningful, impactful and personal for students. I will share these observations, experiences and questions through a few short stories that inspired them.

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### **Experience 1: Relationships and Motivation in Online Settings.**

From 2013-2015 I served as a Teach for China fellow and taught at an international school in Shanghai during the summers. To be honest, the 2-year completion rate of Teach for China foreign fellows was not very high from my cohort – I estimate this number to be about 30-40% of fellows who initially showed up to Summer Institute in the summer of 2013. Those who signed up primarily because they thought it would look good on their resume for grad school or it would be a neat existential experience were all gone in the first semester. Those who really struggled with discomforts relating to the cultural-gap and administrative challenges on the behalf of the non-profit or school were typically gone within a year. Those dozen plus teachers who remained in my region had a rare combination of traits, a few primary ones being: **they formed meaningful relationships with their students and loved teaching them, they loved/were interested in learning about the local culture/viewed the overall experience as being a form of learning and growth for themselves as well as students, and they believed in the importance of the social mission of helping those with less opportunity.**

I stayed in close contact with one teacher who graduated from the fellowship alongside me. As a fellow in the program, he was always innovating and improving the classroom experience for students. He decided to return to the US after completing the fellowship, take some time off to write, and to work half-time with one of the biggest Chinese online tutoring companies with a name similar to “Extremely Important Child”. This organization had boomed in just a few short years from a few teachers to a few thousand teachers. It is a model built on efficiency, where a customer could instantly schedule an appointment with a foreign English teacher, similar to the way that you can summon an Uber/Didi driver to one’s house. Over the past 20 years, having a foreign teacher teach one’s child in China went from a luxury afforded primarily the children of the elite, to being much more accessible to the middle and upper economic classes, aided by a blend of technology and rising per capita income/wealth. Yet over the couple years of finishing up our fellowship, it became clear that something was wrong when talking to my friend. To sum it all up, when I asked him what his motivation level was like to teach for this organization, he responded saying, “I have absolutely no motivation.”

Although the 1 on 1 model with a revolving door of foreign teachers, centered around “scripted” fixed track practice English fundamentals, may be beneficial for bolstering students foundational skills (and 1 on 1’s are by far the extracurricular method for English study preferred by most Chinese parents), overtime relying on this system comes with some often unforeseen negative consequences. First, it takes the “relationship” out of language learning, leaving with children the impression that English is a good you pay for. In other words, pay \$20, have a 25-minute class, and you may never see that teacher again. English learned, transaction



complete. Without those relationships, for a foreign teacher the student on the other side of the internet connection remains distant and unrelatable (and vice-versa) and it's almost inevitable that teachers will come to do it for the money. From my perspective as a Chinese language learner, it was the friends I made and the intrinsic motivation surrounding a deepening understanding of Chinese culture that pushed me to go further with my language study. This motivation was a large factor in helping me go from not being able to speak a word of Chinese, to being able to take 5<sup>th</sup> year Chinese during my master's and to achieve a perfect score on the "Oral Proficiency Interview" administered to students of US State Department funded programs within 5 years. It is unthinkable that I could've gone that far as a learner without authentic connections with others – it was the connections that made the learning so rich, authentic and enjoyable.

As I spoke with parents whose students had participated in the aforementioned corporate models, I realized that many shared my sentiment,

“这个commercial 的路线会让孩子交流一段时间后，课程结束了，你不再交钱，跟这个老师一点点connection 或 friendship 都没有。这个时候其实孩子也比较伤心，这种网络的教育情况，不是我想要的。。。我比较想要一个配的过程。”

“I've found in this sort of commercial route, it will let students and teachers interact, but after the curriculum is over and you're no longer giving them money, you won't be able to have the slightest connection or friendship with the teacher. It really hurts students to go through that process. I don't want that kind of class experience for my children . . . I'm hoping for more of a shared experience . . . ”

In addition, research shows that when teachers integrate topics that they are passionate about into learning experiences, there are positive effects on student learning. Autonomy is one of the greatest motivating factors for teachers and students, and with the revolving door 1 on 1 structure, it is difficult to offer much autonomy, because it's easiest to coordinate and stay on the same page between the number of teachers and students by adhering closely to a fixed track of learning.

In 2020 as public schools around the world quickly transitioned online, similarly to the out of school learning experiences described above, many students and teachers struggle to maintain motivation. One parent, educator and former-classmate of mine shared online, “I'm losing my battle with this online learning as a parent. I was trying to get (my child) to cooperate, and he gave me this to watch: (Video: “Don't Stay in School” by Boyinaband - the opening lines of the song go: “I wasn't taught how to get a job, but I can remember dissecting a frog. I wasn't taught how to pay tax, but I know loads about Shakespeare's classics. I was never taught how to vote, they devoted that time to defining isotopes. I wasn't taught how to look after my health, but mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell. I never spent a lesson on current events, instead I studied the old American west.”) The lyrics of the song and elementary students relation to them, speaks of an increased dissatisfaction and demotivating-nature of learning that is not relevant to students' lives' and the increasingly interconnected world in which we are all living. In addition, the higher the student:teacher ratio becomes for a class, the more difficult it is to make each student feel recognized and valued, especially when the teacher is never able to see the student outside of a video chat box. Needed are more methods and learning opportunities

that support students as thought partners as they inquire about the world, supporting them as individuals over time.

Key Questions Raised:

**How can we bring teachers and students meaningful relationship building opportunities in online settings, that promote long term motivation in language study?**

**How can teachers and students be given the right level of autonomy, so they are able to use their creativity, while also creating highly impactful learning experiences?**

**How can students be supported as learners, as they inquire about important local and global topics, and their role across contexts?**

### **Experience 2 : “Look at that student, he doesn’t dare to speak in this classroom.”**

It is not uncommon in Master’s classes at the Harvard Graduate School of Education that the teacher is talking less than students in the class. To teachers who lead classes in such a manner, there is nothing better than when students consider a text or topic deeply, make connections to different contexts and either expand on the topic or challenge it. Students from different educational backgrounds adapt and acclimate to these environments in a variety of different ways. Looking specifically at the experience of many Chinese students new to the US, one quote from a Chinese classmate stands out in my mind “Look at that student, they’re a graduate from Beijing University (arguably the most renowned university in China), yet they don’t dare speak to the professor during class.” Whenever I mentioned this to Chinese classmates, many of them would nod their head and say they could relate to these challenges to acclimation as well. For many students accustomed to learning environments with a high student to teacher ratio and the norm of the teacher being the primary supplier of knowledge and information, adjusting to discussion-centered environments, exploring subjective topics without an easy to define answer can prove challenging.

Harvard Learning Expert Tony Wagner conducted interviews with hundreds of business leaders across industries and companies from Apple to Unilever, asking what skills their companies look for in new hires. Surprisingly, many leaders felt that technological skills were less urgent and could be developed overtime, but one of the key essential skills was collaboration. Mike Summers, vice president for Global Talent Management at Dell, said, “Kids just out of school have an amazing lack of preparedness in general leadership skills and collaborative skills.” Another CEO interviewed shared, “All of our work is done in teams. You have to know how to work well with others. But you also have to know how to engage customers— to find out what their needs are. If you can’t engage others, then you won’t learn what you need to know.”

The issue of relying primarily on two types of instruction: lecture-based classrooms with a high student to teacher ratio, and 1 on 1 out of school classes, is that students most often have little opportunity to partake in forms of discussion and collaboration central to colleges and workplaces: raising a subjective topic, without an easy to define answer, and soliciting participants to reason with evidence, think together, discuss, question and challenge the ideas presented.

In order to prepare a student to truly acclimate to environments that rely on discussion and collaboration for learning and forward progress, it is important that teachers focus on knowledge and language skills, but also the ability to actively participate in the learning experience alongside others and to recognize “the process” as being important to learning and understanding, rather than expecting answers and content to be cleanly delivered from the teacher.

Key Questions Raised:

**How can we create environments online where students can experience and become better prepared for discussion centered, student centered learning environments?**

**How can teachers in the online setting be more of a “Guide at the Side”, rather than a “Sage on the ‘Stage/Screen’?”**

### **Experience 3: Letting Teachers Experiment, Innovate and Try New Things Over Time**

For teachers at public and private institutions, opportunities for growth and professional development is tied to motivation. (Guerriero 2015, Iliya & Ifeoma 2015, Gokce 2010) However, professional development for out of school educational programs is often scarce. I once heard the founder and CEO of one of the largest Chinese tutoring organizations (valued at 27 Billion dollars) give a speech at a conference, where he said, “Our organization has the best teachers, we don’t hire ‘trash teachers’ like some of our competitors”. He actually used the term 垃圾老师 (trash teachers) ! At HGSE I met a master’s student who worked with that organization for a number of years, who shared that “they don’t care at all about teacher growth and development, it would be far more expensive to train and give teachers solid professional development, than to just hire fresh new graduates from a top university with good test results and pay them a lower salary till they move on.”

From all that I’ve learned about teacher professional development from 5 years of studying and working at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, I would summarize the most important aspect to “Longitudinal, small group, inquiry based learning for teachers.” In a nutshell, teachers perform best when they are longitudinally supported in using best practices, where they have opportunities to try things out in the classroom, collaborate with a coach or another experienced teacher, and then are provided spaces to share, reflect and plan. In our initial stage, Students for Students operated with a fairly small team of 4 teachers (including myself), but I am happy to share that in a country with a 50% attrition rate for new teachers within the first 5 years, more than 2 years into the program 100% of teachers continue to teach. A fundamental part of this is that similar to the intimate learning communities we seek to promote for students, we also seek to promote our teachers. After sharing best practices, and raising inquiries and innovations from teachers, they have the freedom to try things out, succeed, fail, and improve overtime. We share our inquiries and findings as a group and seek to grow collectively over time. The content of this book is meant to reflect many of these inquiries.

Key Question Raised:

**How does online learning benefit from taking professional development as seriously as top schools and educational programs?**

**Experience 4: “The Need for Study and Understanding of Different Cultures and Contexts Around the World Will Stay the Same”**

In 2017, I was selected to participate in the US State Department funded Critical Language Scholarship program, which sends a small group of US scholars around the world to study 12 different languages critical to the future economic and diplomatic success in the US (in the form of 2-month intensive immersion based programs). During orientation, a student asked a department head within the US State Department if she expected there to be a need for language study in the future as AI translation technology rapidly improves. She shared that even if the need for multilingual speakers is diminished by AI, “the need for study and understanding of different cultures around the world will stay the same.” From my experience studying and working abroad this rings true – at this stage, the cultural knowledge and understanding is just as important, if not more important than the language study itself. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) - Preparing Our Youth for an Inclusive and Sustainable World report shares: developing students’ international global competence is important in helping students both “thrive in a changing labor market” and “live harmoniously in multicultural communities” citing “since the end of the Cold War, ethno-cultural conflicts have become the most common source of political violence in the world and they show no sign of abating.” (OECD, 2018) Inline with these considerations, the learning design and experiences described in the following chapter seek not to promote English for English sake, but rather to use language study as a platform for promoting international curiosity, inquiry and understanding.

Key Questions Raised:

**How can we help students cultivate international curiosity and understanding alongside language study?**

**How does international inquiry influence students’ motivation and interest in language study?**

In sum, the previously stated questions and ideals have driven the mission and learning design for international inquiry units (explored in chapter 2) and the Students for Students program. In the chapters that follow, we will look at elements that have positively influenced our lesson design, and key learning experiences that we’ve found inspiring in the realm of online learning.

*“The urgency to educate all students to become global citizens calls for innovative curricula that can support new ways of teaching and learning. These curricula must also provide all students with effective opportunities to develop the dispositions, knowledge and capabilities necessary to understand the world in which they live, to make sense of the way in which globalization shapes their lives and to be good stewards of and contributors to the (United Nations) Sustainable Development Goals.”*

-Fernando Reimers  
Director of the International Education Policy program  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

## Chapter 2

### Designing International Inquiry Units

Written by Devon Wilson

In 2005, I read *The Kite Runner* in my sophomore high school history class. I enjoyed the book, was moved by the characters and story, but failed to make the connection between the piece and modern-day Afghanistan. At the end, I still had little to no knowledge of the broader context and came away with no routes for feeling empowered to explore it further. Conversely, the same year I had the opportunity to take an interdisciplinary class where we studied English and History together. Being able to view the historical contexts in relation to the books we were reading made both the history and literature come alive. I still remember reading *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and many connections remain vivid in my mind – the relation to the youth experience around World War I, how similar the experience must’ve been for German and British soldiers alike, and the ultimate tragedy and waste that resulted from “the Great War”.

In both school-based and out of school educational experiences, students have too few opportunities to go in-depth with exploring other countries and cultures around the world. In cases where they do have opportunities to read about other contexts, students often fail to have educational opportunities and support to connect that knowledge to larger trends, topics, questions, and budding curiosities.

#### ***Introducing the Overall Design and Aim of International Inquiry Units:***

A small group of four students and their teacher enter one by one into the online chat room. Rather than jumping immediately into the lesson for the day, the group of students, each at least 1000 miles from each other, check-in about how life has been in their respective contexts: things happening at school, in their local communities, news stories that have caught the groups’ attention with room for pictures, short videos or unexpected topics. The teacher knows each student in the group well, and after hours of deep discussion and thinking together, it seems strange that no one in this group has ever met in person. In one particular semester, a group met once a week for 90 minutes, investigating a unit titled, “Exploring Indian Culture and History.” This unit was designed using *Swami and Friends* as a core text, written by R. K.

Narayan about a fictional village that was meant to be representative of life in many parts of India in the 1920's and 1930's.

In one lesson, Murali (a curriculum designer in our program) wanted students to make connections between the way the fictional village in the story was protesting British occupation by burning British factory produced clothing and the larger historical context in India at the time. In the chapter students read:

The evening's program closed with a bonfire of foreign cloth. It was already dark. Suddenly the darkness was lit up by a red glare. A fire was lighted. A couple of boys wearing Gandhi caps went around begging people to burn their foreign cloth. Coats and caps and upper cloth came whizzing through the air and fell with a thud into the fire, which purred and crackled and rose high thickening the air with smoke and a burnt smell. People moved about like dim shadows in the red glare. Swaminathan was watching the scene with little shivers of joy going down his spine. Somebody asked him: 'Young man, do you want our country to remain in eternal slavery?'

'No, no,' Swaminathan replied.

'But you are wearing a foreign cap.'

Swaminathan quailed with shame. 'Oh, I didn't notice' he said and removing his cap flung it into the fire with a feeling that he was saving the country.  
(Narayan, 1935)

Humorously in the story, Swaminathan's mother later at home asks him where his cap is, revealing that it was actually domestic homespun Khaddar, rather than the Lancashire cloth that the group was protesting. Before class, students were asked to read this chapter and then research further the reasons in which the characters in the story chose to protest the wearing of Lancashire and Manchester cloth and the role that this cloth played in international trade and the British occupation. During class, while reviewing the pieces that students had found, teachers introduced additional pieces of writing on the Salt March and played a short documentary on Gandhi's role during this period. In examining and discussing these different pieces, students were asked to consider connections between the book *Swami and Friends* and other historical contexts, how the new resources introduced extended their thinking, and what questions emerged from examining these new resources?

Murali chose to center a unit around this book because, despite its age (first published in 1935), there are many aspects that he views have been reflective of his youth and life in rural India today. The book itself offers a whole range of experiences and topics in India, both those that are topical and bring nuance to historical reviews of pre-independence India and caste-based beliefs. Additional topics include Swami's everyday life and experience – such as his joy and respect for Indian Cricket and the unique dynamics within Swami's joint-family structure. Murali shares,

“[This unit], is not just aiming at providing reading skills, but also reading skills as a means to expose students to different cultures and different worlds. . . . As a teacher the first and foremost thing will be to provide a safe space for the children to actually nurture their curiosity – I see a teacher as someone not who can provide all the answers, but someone who can travel along with the students in their journey of curiosity – at the end of a day it becomes a collective learning experience where each one is learning.”

### ***Student Impact from Taking Part in International Inquiry Units***

Teachers in the Students for Students program observe students who participate in International Inquiry Units becoming more active learners within our world. Through interviews, one-on-one meetings, and strong ties to students and parents, we have observed a myriad of student benefits, including:

- Continuing to read additional texts at the end of a unit
- Learning new languages that relate to contexts explored
- Reading the news more proactively
- Showing increased interest in international topics
- Following up with different people to hear a variety of views on topics
- Expressing their ideas more proactively with increasing confidence and creativity (both in terms of uniqueness of ideas and use of language)
- Developing their voice and abilities (and grades) as writers
- Developing an understanding and confidence of who they are in relation to local and global themes being explored

### **Key Elements of International Inquiries Units Defined**

At the core of the International Inquiry Unit is an attempt to break the cycle of viewing a book as an isolated event. Too often do classes engage with a text to discuss its plot points and characters without embracing the culture, history, power dynamics, and various other elements that surround the book. Instead of treating a book as a single story with one viewpoint, these units utilize various other resources and interdisciplinary topics to dig deeper into a narrative, thus supporting a deeper understanding of a single culture or context.

Through these units, students discuss and explore meaningful and often subjective themes, consider connections between different contexts around the world and throughout history and better understand various perspectives in the process.

**International Inquiry Units: sustained explorations of a single culture or context designed to support students' authentic intercultural understanding and thinking skills, to aid them in becoming lifelong proactive international inquirers.**

### **Key Elements of International Inquiry Units**

#### **Proactive Inquiry, Contextualization and Thinking**

International Inquiry Units are designed to help teachers and students shift from being passive recipients of international content to taking part in **proactive inquiry** (proactively thinking about, investigating and connecting with the context being explored). This method often utilizes a “flipped classroom” approach where students are expected to read, research, consider and write before the classroom meeting. Then, during our meeting, students share and discuss their findings and thoughts that emerge, and the teacher introduces additional provocations during strategic moments, challenging students to think deeper about the contexts that they are studying.

The introduction of additional provocations from the teacher and student aligns with an effort to **contextualize the text** (consistently weave in a variety of resources that add depth, meaning, and increased nuance to the text and context being studied). International Inquiry Units typically select one book as a central resource that is read and discussed over time by students, with additional resources weaved in throughout the learning experience.

Throughout the learning experiences, teachers and students utilize thinking routines and other methods to cultivate **inquiry-focused thinking skills**. Specifically, we consistently seek to give students the opportunity to take perspectives, raise questions, make connections and reason with evidence.

#### **Deep, Varied and Interdisciplinary learning**

International Inquiry Units target “**deeper learning**”, involving sustained explorations of a single country or culture (in some cases exploring 1-2 countries or cultures if they are intertwined in some way). Students are expected to go deeper in following their curiosities with one project sourcing from the book or context being explored, which typically takes the form of a piece of art or research essay. As understanding another culture does not come from a single lecture, book, or memorization of a set of facts and figures, but rather develops as a network of understandings, experiences and information; such an approach supports **multiple paths to learning** and understanding around topics. International Inquiry Units create room for different ideas and interpretations rather than lecturing from cleanly procured PowerPoint and expecting the students to instantly think and understand as the teacher does about the topic. Along these paths, students are consistently encouraged to use evidence to support their takeaways and point of view. Units typically develop in an **interdisciplinary manner**, involving learning opportunities in more than one subject over time.

#### **Personal, Socratic and Fun**



Learning experiences in International Inquiry Units utilize **small-scale personalized learning environments** (3-5 students per group) to increase individual speaking time for language learners, and support student's holistic language development. We seek to both give students time to think about the topics of inquiry and the thoughts of others in the group, but to also share thinking actively with others in the group. Within our learning groups, we hope each student will feel valued, recognized, and known. Through the course, we hope that teachers can also open up about themselves, share personal experiences and thoughts in key moments, and take part in the enjoyment and challenges that can come from learning about a new context.

### **Just the Beginning:**

International Inquiry Units emphasize that like traveling to another country, we will not understand everything about the context from our initial exploration. With each visit (learning experience related to that context), our continuous **lifelong inquiry**, we are developing a deeper understanding over time. At the end of every unit, students are invited to consider how their understandings have shifted from our recent inquiry and what they are curious to explore next.

How these elements can be realized over the course of an international inquiry unit will be explored through the cases and culture building chapters in this book and will be touched upon in the design process below.

In planning for international inquiry units, ideally, the educator can invite people who are “locals” of a context to collaborate and provide key input as to what topics and themes present authentic explorations and learning opportunities or even to lead the design of the unit when possible. The units should seek to incorporate elements that give students opportunities to explore the different views of others around this context (beyond any one person offering input or perspective on the context).

### **A Note on Online Learning Environments and Language Learning Classes**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Students for Students program and International Inquiry Units were designed with a central goal of seeking to create more engaging and motivating learning experiences for online learners and teachers alike. In our studies in Technology, Innovation, and Education classes at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), it became clear that more money and tech did not necessarily equate to better learning experiences. The elements of learning we emphasize (described above) would be the same whether we were leading International Inquiry Units in person rather than online. In fact, in envisioning our learning groups, an early goal became for them to feel as personal and effective as a high-quality in person learning experience. Thus, an unofficial motto for our program became, “Low Tech, Big Heart”, placing emphasis on teacher-student relations and student-to-student engagement in class. On the technology side, these classes require a stable internet connection, shared access to a group video chat program (such as Zoom or Google Hangouts) and a device (computer, phone or tablet) to conduct research on after class; the

primary non-technological requirement is to have a caring educator with an inquisitive mindset facilitating the group.

In designing the program to aid language learners, the team was inspired by our collective teaching experiences across the world and the many learners we encountered. We all noticed that, in general, many students had high levels of comprehension but little confidence, motivation, and oral proficiency. We realized that many of our students had numerous hours a week of more traditional language classes (centered around expanding vocabulary, learning grammar patterns, etc) and relatively few opportunities to authentically use English through reading engaging texts, discussion, and critical writing.

In line with research that suggests that integrating ESL learners into normal track classes is ultimately far better for their learning and growth than staying purely in a language learning track (*Uccelli*), we place emphasis on the application of the language in internationally focused high quality English Language Arts, interdisciplinary learning experiences (with opportunities to infuse discussion, reading and writing practice).

### **Designing International Inquiry Units:**

The design of International Inquiry Units takes inspiration from Project Zero (a research organization at the Harvard Graduate School of Education) ideas related to Global Competence (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011), *Teaching for Understanding* (Wiske et. al, 1998) and *Making Thinking Visible* (Ritchhart 2011).<sup>1</sup> The methodologies and theories in each of these projects were developed through rigorous action-based research, seeking to consistently support and adapt recommendations through class-based experiences and close examinations of students' growth, and have proved helpful in supporting our efforts to promote student understanding, thinking skills, and global competency. In the following sections of our design, certain elements and theories of these programs are woven in and examined.

Below, we will introduce a few principles that will help shed light on our design process:

1. Selecting Meaningful Topics, Goals, and Key Text
2. Considering the Types of Thinking That Should Be Central Within the Exploration
3. Designing the Lessons Based Upon the Goals, Themes, and Outline

### **1. Selecting Meaningful Topics, Goals, and Key Texts**

In *Teaching Educating for Global Competence*, Boix-Mansilla & Jackson (2011) reinterpret Project Zero's Teaching for Understanding Framework (Wiske et. al, 1998) in the context of Global Learning. They write, "Educators committed to delivering quality instruction that prepares students effectively to understand and act on issues of global significance tend to think carefully about how to ensure that their instruction yields deep understanding."

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<sup>1</sup> Aside from my (Devon Wilson's) role as a teacher and founder of the Students for Students program described here in this book, over the last 4 years, I have worked as a researcher and project coordinator on the Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Project at Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

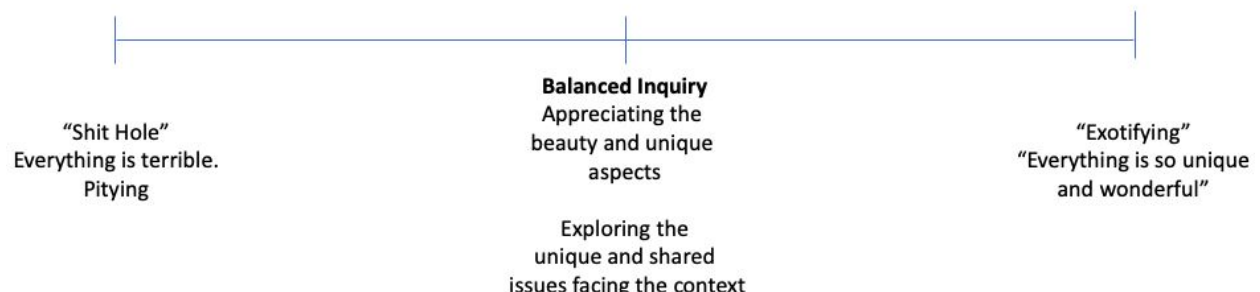


First, they prompt educators to consider “What topics matter most to teach?” While deciding what to teach may be the most important and controversial decision in education, Boix-Mansilla and Jackson offer three factors to guide teachers in developing topics which we have found helpful in designing topics for exploration:

- a. Invite deep engagement
- b. Embody local and global connections
- c. Invite disciplinary and interdisciplinary grounding.

#### **a. Invite Deep Engagement and Associated Learning Goals:**

It is typically not hard to recall the excitement that one feels during the first opportunity to visit a new region or country: that desire to explore a place where the lifestyle, thoughts and ideologies feel so intriguing and unique, yet so similar at times. It seems that as humans, there is a natural excitement and increased engagement that comes with learning about other places. Yet in this age, it’s often hard to walk a fine line, so as educators we’re not perpetuating a “shit hole” narrative (Trump’s infamous term for referring to certain countries i.e, everything is an issue and terrible in these locations), while not exotifying these locations (i.e., viewing everything as so neat and foreign, and failing to see the commonalities or modernity of certain aspects). If those two terms were placed as polar-opposites, our approach to international inquiry could perhaps be seen as trying to find a balance in the middle - inquiring with the intention to highlight the positives and fascinating aspects of a culture and context, while also exploring the regional specific and shared issues facing a region, inviting students to research these areas, and develop nuanced opinions with supporting evidence.



In the case of collaborating with an educator who is from a culture or context that we will explore through the course of the unit, we often begin our analysis by considering the following questions:

- “What do I hope they might take away, both in terms of important current and historical events, as well as the joys, beauties, and wisdom within that culture?” (This question can help in selecting the book and corresponding resources that relate to ideas raised in authentic ways.)
- “How do foreigners often view my culture and context – how can we explore and avoid misconceptions?”
- “What is a key resource or text that can help students in developing those takeaways? (See footnote #1 for notes on selecting texts that match an appropriate reading level)

In the case that someone who is not a “local” to a context is designing an international inquiry unit, it is highly recommended to speak to any contact from that culture and discuss these questions. In our experience, this was highly beneficial to our design and exploration of themes, and in many cases helped us select a different book that was often richer than what we initially found online (e.g. *Swami and Friends*). The response of people “local” or highly familiar with the context, will hopefully positively influence a research deep dive into a diverse set of resources that can contribute to developing the topics associated goals within the unit. These resources could include highly rated books (Goodreads & libraries), documentaries and news from credible sources. For classroom educators, the resource gathering and planning processes described in this chapter may be helpful in selecting a book and designing a unit if such flexibility is provided in your classroom, otherwise may be used to deepen students’ international inquiry around a required text/unit.

All too often teachers shy away from international explorations worrying that their lack of international experience makes them unqualified to explore international topics with students. We would encourage these teachers that if they adopt a mindset of respectful curiosity, consistently seek out diverse authentic resources related to contexts/topics being explored, avoid simplification of the context and emphasize the importance of continuous inquiry, they too can develop authentic international units that invite deep engagement from students.

While conducting preliminary research about a coming international inquiry, it can be useful to draft goals for what we hope students will take away from the international inquiry unit.

**Picture of Practice:**

In designing a unit, crafted to guide students in “Exploring Indian Culture and History”, Murali Mallikarjunan picked out the following five learning goals for his unit. He hoped that students would have learning opportunities to:

-Gain exposure to the pre-Independence rural India, which is similar in many ways to the current rural settings.

- Get a feeling of the schooling system that existed almost a century back and the evolutions herewith.
- Get a sneak peak into India's freedom struggle and relate to their own freedom movements.
- Get a taste of cricket and all the excitement around it
- Empathize and reflect on the various emotions of anger, fear, comradeship, challenge, courage.

In line with these developing goals, Murali selected to use the book *Swami and Friends* as a central text and resource to examine in the unit.

Since our classes are very discussion centered, we seek to balance depth with freshness of topics; therefore, within a book, we look for central themes every few chapters that connect to meaningful explorations in relation to the country and culture from an interdisciplinary sense, and switch the theme of focus every one to two classes. Clarifying and developing these themes can also help in planning opportunities for inquiry, for students to go out and conduct research and seek additional perspectives in relation to the key themes in the book, further contextualizing the text in the process.

In looking for balance between his goals and flow of the book, Murali separated the book into the following 9 topics.

Unit	Objectives	Chapter #	Chapters from the book
1	School and Making Friends	1	Monday Morning
		2	Rajam and Mani
		3	Swami's Grandmother
		4	What is a Tail?
2	Family	5	Father's Room
		6	A Friend in need
		7	A New Arrival
3	Examination	8	Before the Examinations
		9	School Breaks Up
4	Summer Holidays & Native games	10	The Coachman's Son
5	Freedom Struggle	11	In Father's Presence
6	Cricket	12	Broken Panes
		13	The M.C.C
7	Coping with Pressure	14	Granny Shows Her Ignorance
		15	Before the Match
8	History	16	Swami Disappears
		17	The Day of the Match
9	Exploring Modern India	18	The Return
		19	Parting Present

Students are invited to consider which area/sub-topic of the culture or context piqued their interests and curiosities, and later in the unit, are asked to take part in a “capstone project”

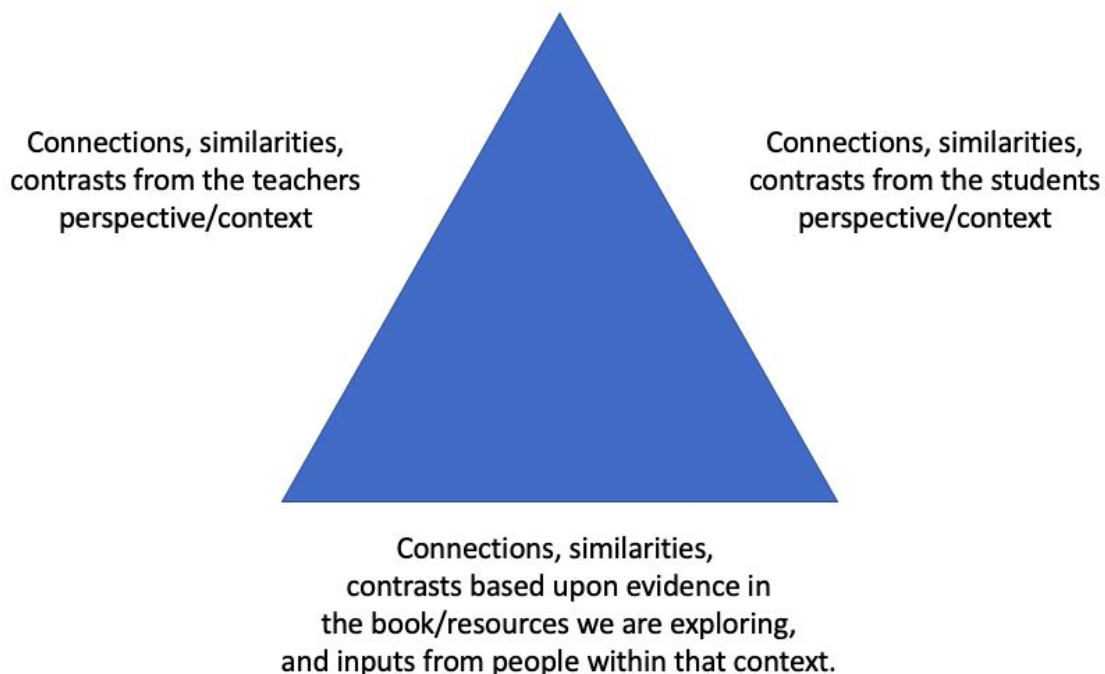
where they go further in engaging, conducting research and/or creating art related to that topic.

### **b. Embody Local and Global Connections**

A central piece to many research projects related to fostering Global Competence and Global Citizenship mention the importance of students viewing one's own context as connected to the larger world – begin to see the “systems” and “interrelated” nature of the world we live in. (Reimers, Boix Mansilla, OOEL)

In International Inquiry Units, opportunities to make connections to the context of focus keep students from viewing that context and inquiry as being about “something happening over there with very little relevance to my life”, to “seeing the stories and explorations as being a part of an interconnected world, part of a bigger story”.

In our initial two years of exploration, many of our teachers were from the US with experience living and working in other countries or different contexts, many of our students were from China (some of them living in other countries such as New Zealand, Australia or the US), and the books and topics that we sought to explore in depth were based in locations outside of the US & China. As our teacher Max Smith shared, in our initial year, we adopted a triangular approach. In exploring themes and topics within our units, we consider the perspective and experience of those raised in the book and related resources, we consider connections, similarities and contrasts to student's contexts and home cultures, and teachers share about connections with contexts in the US or other contexts they are familiar with.



Such comparisons and connection making can support students in recognizing their own perspectives. In the way that the teacher guides this exploration, we seek to do so in a way that

is not othering, but rather often drawing upon moments that highlight similarities, tricky subjective offerings, etc. It is our hope as well to show that in certain instances, experiences and perspectives in a context are complex and varied.

### **Picture of Practice**

In discussing the family structure of Swami's family and the joint family structure common in India, Murali's unit invites students to consider and discuss:

Q: How is this similar or different to the family system in China (or in a culture you are familiar with)?

Q: For you personally, what do you hope your family structure will be like in the future?

Q: Who benefits most from a joint family system?

Q: Do we see any elements of this in Swami's family?

Q: Any advice for what makes a joint/collective family work?

In discussing a folktale raised in the story about the hellish treatment in the past life for those who harbored enmity, students were asked to consider:

Q: Are there any stories like that in Chinese culture about people who are bad/have unfavorable habits?

In discussing a situation where characters in the book take an exam that decides whether they would be held back or allowed to move forward, students reviewed the modern day Indian No Detention Policy (no holding back grades) vs the Singaporean Middle School Entrance Examination that decides the advancement opportunities provided for students, before considering:

Which system do you think is the best for Mani?

Which system do you think is best for the students in general?

Throughout the learning experience, students were given opportunities to raise and discuss connections to their own lives and culture, and teachers often engaged as participants sharing perspectives and thoughts in relation to contexts they were familiar with.

### **c. Invite Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Grounding**

"We discuss different topics and it's really helpful when you can hear others' thoughts, you can also improve your different subjects, for example, English, Biology, History . . ."

-10<sup>th</sup> grade student's description of participating in International Inquiry Units

As referenced in the start of this chapter, strong interdisciplinary connections (relating to more than one subject/discipline) aid in making lasting connections and develop a deeper and more flexible understanding of topics (as I found from my positive experience reading *All Quiet on the Western Front* in high school).

In each of our International Inquiry Units, we universally look for opportunities to explore the **history** around topics or phenomena that are raised. For example, in Trevor Noah's *Born A Crime* (adapted for young readers version), Noah describes his mom's experience living illegally in segregated areas of Johannesburg in the 1970's and 1980's. Such a narrative provides a great

opportunity for students to share what they notice, think, and wonder about the context, and to research such inquiries further in relation to South African history and the context of Apartheid in Johannesburg during that time period.

Otherwise, the interdisciplinary nature of units often may source from the nature of the book. *What the Moon Saw* involves the narrative of a traditional healer in Mexico, and in parallel to the medical narrative, we had the opportunity to explore the presence and our understanding of various **medical practices** and healthy customs/habits across cultures. *My Life with Chimpanzees*, a youth friendly autobiography written by Jane Goodall, provides many opportunities to explore **biological systems**, and different natural elements through the guidance of the famed “ethnologist.” Students were invited to conduct their own ethnological observation, trying to better learn the language of a plant or animal. The **music** referenced throughout the book *Dunger*, based in New Zealand, gave an opportunity to explore the music of different time periods referenced, and discuss our interpretations and feelings in relation to the music. Our exploration of Fairy Tales and Story writing provided opportunities to incorporate “**drama**” and play-based representations of our stories, acting out stories and developing creative expansions of fairy-tales (improv based elements of certain units are described in further detail in Chapter 8. Teachers in our program observed that these interdisciplinary entry points provided both opportunities for authentic learning – and often moments of the highest engagement amongst students.

## **2. Considering the Types of Thinking That Should Be Central to the Exploration**

International Inquiry Units are designed to help teachers and students shift from being passive recipients of international content, to engaging in **proactive inquiry - proactively thinking about, investigating, and connecting with the context being explored**. In seeking to promote student-centered, thinking-centered classrooms, it is important to consider at a broader level what types of thinking should be emphasized in the unit. Specifically, our program consistently seeks to cultivate thinking skills relating to perspective taking, questioning, connection-making, and reasoning with evidence, among others. Thinking Routines (Ritchhart, 2011) and Global Thinking Routines (Boix-Mansilla, 2016) provide useful “models for students of what it means to engage with ideas, to think, and to learn. In doing so, we dispel the myth that learning is just a matter of committing the information in the textbook to one’s memory. School no longer is about the “quick right answer” but about the ongoing mental work of understanding new ideas and information.”(Ritchhart, 2011) Such routines can be especially useful in promoting thinking and discussion for students who may be more used to classroom environments around providing definitive answers rather than collectively exploring and discussing content. In the following chapter, we highlight five thinking routines that we often use in order to support thinking-centered online learning environments and cultivate students' thinking skills relating to perspective-taking, questioning, connection-making, and reasoning with evidence.

## **3. Designing the Lessons Based Upon the Goals, Themes, and Outline**

Once an educator has conducted a deep dive into resources available in exploring the context, identified the central and sub-topics and goals, interdisciplinary opportunities, and types of



thinking that one hopes to explore in the unit, one is ready to formalize the content-based goals and thinking goals – what students will take away from the unit. With these goals in mind, we can begin to develop lesson outlines, envisioning what students will do to learn. We hope that rather than a rigid curriculum where students are led step by step about how they should come to view the context, the curriculum should be fairly flexible in nature. A unit structure that is open for students to share their thinking and interpretations, with many opportunities for students to explore inquiries and develop deeper understanding and connections. In designing each of our lessons, we provide general ranges for how long we may expect micro-explorations, presentations or discussions to take place, but with the understanding that one learning experience within a lesson may prove to be rich in generating students' thinking and engagement and can be explored further as the group desires. In chapters 5-7 of this book, we describe the design and experience of leading three different international inquiry units that we hope will be useful in showing how the meaningful topics and goals identified for units align with what we ask students to inquire about in individual lessons.

*A few general considerations in planning individual lessons for International Inquiry Units:*

*1. Allocating Culture Building and Reflection Time Within a Unit*

This will be explored further within chapter 4, "Developing a Collaborative Culture for ESL Learners," but generally within a 90-minute lessons, we will allocate 15-20 minutes at the start of the lesson to check in with students, build personal connections with each other in the group, and support other daily routines and practices. This time can provide good opportunities for practicing different types of feedback, thinking moves (explored further in Chapter 3) and forms of dialogue that can support the shared learning within the group. As discussed in Chapter 1, this time for relationship building is essential for motivating both teachers and students involved in distance learning and language learning in general.

*2. What Content and Provocations Should Be Viewed Before-Class vs In-Class to Stimulate Discussion and Thinking*

To promote a flipped, student-centered mode of learning, we recommend having students complete the reading of the primary text chapters prior to class. Since many of our students host very busy schedules, we generally try to time things so pre-class preparation takes a 1:1 class time to prep ratio or less (i.e. for a 90 minute class, 90 minutes or less of homework preparation), with an hour of prep being ideal. On some heavier reading days, students may spend the entire pre-class prep time reading through chapters of the book. On other days, we may only expect 20 minutes of this time reading, and 30-60 minutes of this time researching or writing up their thoughts on a topic that we will be exploring further in the following class. In relation to our mission to connect the central book to a diverse set of authentic resources related to the topic, we often find it useful to introduce additional media resources (e.g. short news articles, clips from documentaries or films, an opinion piece) in class (which can typically be viewed in 5 minutes or less), before giving students opportunities to compare, connect, and think about extensions of their understanding and questions that emerge.

*3. Balancing Discussion About Book Content with Inquiry About the Larger Context*

As described above, based upon the goals and content of the book, educators are encouraged to identify a theme for every lesson or every couple lessons. Often, we will begin by discussing the content in the chapters - sometimes some of the most fruitful conversations arise from asking students to prepare a question they have about the chapter that does not have a clear answer and to identify 1-2 themes or symbols from the chapter. After discussing impressions and questions arising from the text, we will often incorporate some questions that raise discussion and thinking about the specific subtopic of the lesson – using the example from the beginning of the chapter about the Freedom Struggle and associated burning of foreign cloth, we may ask students to discuss ‘What stood out to you about the nature of the rally that occurred?’ and ‘What are your thoughts about this form of protest?’ From here we will weave in resources external to the book students found (if they were asked to research relevant topics before class), or the teacher may introduce a few additional resources to stimulate discussion and promote interdisciplinary understanding between the text and the larger topics or themes being explored.

In designing lessons, we generally seek for balance—neither focusing solely on the book content nor focusing solely on the topic outside of the book, but rather merging the two to create a synergy between the book and larger field of content.

#### **A Final Note - Student Learning and Growth through the International Inquiry Process:**

We as educators all too often focus on the deficit of ESL students’ language ability, rather than best practices in language learning that encourage viewing students as thinking partners with the ability to participate in multiple forms of expression (some English language focused and some not). HGSE Professor of Education and Linguistics, Paola Uccelli shares,

Through talk, we not only learn to talk, we learn to read, to comprehend, to reason with others, to understand others’ perspectives – these opportunities present a simulation of the social world. But at schools, voices are not equally distributed, researchers went to 20 urban schools in CA, FL, TX, NY, WI and measured how much discussion was happening in the classrooms and found that lower-track ESL classes only presented 7 minutes of discussion time on an hourly basis for students (approximately 1/5th of the time of other tracks). (Uccelli, 2018)

Measures of success in student learning emphasized in the Students for Students program include students developing an increased curiosity in the world and specific contexts, an increased motivation to study languages (seeing them as means for exploring the world), and a greater confidence in one’s abilities to proactively and effectively research and discuss issues of international importance. From participating in international inquiry units, on average after nine classes, we saw students’ self-reported confidence in exploring and discussing international topics in English improve by 35%, and students’ enjoyment of English study improve by 22%. In our experience as language learners, developing confidence and motivation to study a new language are like engines that can propel students forward to developing higher levels of fluency and nuance with the language. Throughout the learning process, we seek to emphasize the importance of humility and the value of sustained inquiry when learning about new places. We hope to see students more proactively utilize thinking skills practiced within our courses and to proactively adopt beneficial communication and collaborative study habits.

Perhaps most importantly, we also try to introduce some aspects of the culture and topic that are beautiful, fun, and interesting; we hope to help students nurture a greater appreciation of the context we are exploring.

In reflecting about his experience participating in our international inquiry units from 8th to 10th grade, one student in our program, Bob, wrote

Devon introduced us to the book “A Thousand Splendid Suns” and thus the amazing author Khaled Hosseini. To be completely honest, I only knew the country Afghanistan by its name at the start. However, diving further into the book with the specific tasks/discussions that we are going to do during class in mind, I began building up interest in this unfamiliar and bruised yet resilient country. And after exploring the very distinct characters in the book: Mariam, Laila, Rasheed, etc, I started to observe the vivid language used to illustrate those individuals and grew curious about the author. This curiosity eventually led to me reading all of his well-known novels, *The Kite Runner*, *And Then the Mountain Echoed*, and *Sea Prayer*. From which I acquired an immense amount of knowledge of modern Afghanistan history, multiple heart-touching stories and various writing techniques/methods that I still will be utilizing for my own literary work.

It brings me great joy to see that Bob’s international inquiry into the Afghan context did not end on our last day of class, and ultimately his reading of *The Kite Runner* contributed to a more nuanced and complex international understanding than it had for me in 10th grade; his response conveys an awareness, sensitivity, and respect for this new context that we hope to see from all learners who participate in international inquiry units.

Although we primarily offer these programs for intermediate to advanced language learning students (10-18 years old in age), we expect that International Inquiry Units will be of interest and benefit for learners who are not already familiar with the contexts being explored.

To help educators in creating their own International Inquiry Units, in **Appendix A** we have provided an International Inquiry Unit Planning Sheet. We hope that the following chapters describing our culture building processes, and the experience and design around multiple online units we have led, will be useful in supporting student learning, enjoyment, and shared inquiries about international settings online.



Footnote 1:

**Note on Selecting Appropriate Texts and Assessing the Reading Level of a Group:**

Our organization takes on a simplified approach to assess and place students in groups and select appropriate readings that we have found fairly effective. Pulling a couple sample pages from the books we'll be reading, we rank them in order of their Scholastic guided reading level (visit Scholastic Education for more specific information on their leveling system). For example: a few pages of a J-K book (approximately early Grade 3), a few pages of a S book (approximately early Grade 5) and a few pages of a Z level book (approximately early Grade 6 and up). In relation to these pages of text, we ask a few multiple choice and a few free-response questions to test students' understanding. For example, after reading a couple pages of a S level book, we asked students:

Where does this story take place?

Abuelo Marco is Flor's \_\_\_\_\_?

What do you think *baclao a la vizcaina* is?

What did Abuelo Marco ask "Flor" to do?

Many standardized reading tests are designed, students are encouraged to go as far as they are able to within the test. Such a basic assessment has proven useful for getting a general sense of the reading level of the group, and which book is within the range for the group. Scholastic Rankings most often use grades in relation to "native speaker" proficiencies (e.g. a Grade 6 book is meant Grade 6 for a student studying in the US context, not a Grade 6 ESL student in another country with one year of English experience.)

For these units, we hope that students will enter with an approximate proficiency level of at least an early Stages 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Level (Level J and Above), as many books about international topics lower than a J stay at a very surface level. For students who are older in age, but have a lower level reading proficiency, "high-low books" can serve as the "holy grail", books that tend to generate a high level of engagement and interest in students (and aren't obviously tailored to much younger learners), but provide a lower threshold for reading comprehension. *My Life With Chimpanzees* (by Jane Goodall) is a great example of this type of books, ranked a W (Grades 3-5), on the Scholastic Guided Reading chart, but she writes with a passion and authenticity that we've found to be engaging and thought provoking for middle school and high school readers as well.

*What if our classrooms become places “where a group’s collective as well as individual thinking is valued, visible, and actively promoted as part of the regular, day-to-day experience of all group members?”*

Ron Ritchhart  
Senior Research Associate, Project Zero  
Author of Making Thinking Visible

## Chapter 3: Utilizing Thinking Routines to Deepen Thinking and Understanding in Real-Time Learning Groups Online

“You get to learn different things and talk with other students. . . . this program is good because you actually learn it yourself, it’s not just others putting stuff in your head.”

-9<sup>th</sup> Grade Student

Thinking Routines are a core methodology the Students for Students program relies on in creating student centered, inquiry-based learning groups online. “*Thinking Routines* loosely guide learners’ thought processes. They are short, easy-to-learn mini-strategies that extend and deepen students’ *thinking*,” (Project Zero Thinking Routines Website <https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>). At a recent talk, Ron Ritchhart, author of the foundational text on Thinking Routines, *Making Thinking Visible* (2011), was asked ‘Which routines are best for supporting online learning in real-time learning groups?’ Ritchhart responded that his research has suggested that the most successful routines are those that become “well established” in learning communities, supporting students’ long-term thinking dispositions. In the Students for Students program, we consistently seek to design learning opportunities where students can use and cultivate inquiry-based thinking skills related to **questioning**, **connection-making**, **reasoning with evidence** and **perspective taking**. By practicing and honing these thinking skills, rather than focusing purely on delivering facts and specific content, overtime students are better equipped to develop authentic understanding about international contexts on their own.

In this chapter, we will explore the thinking routines we consistently use to support student inquiry, deeper understanding and to go beyond the surface of many of the topics and themes we explore. These routines have become well-established in our online learning communities and in the way that approaches the meaningful international topics within our units.

Thinking Routines Explored in This Chapter:

- **Think Puzzle Explore**
- **Sentence, Phrase, Word**
- **Think Pair Share**
- **Connect Extend Challenge**
- **What Makes You Say That**

## 1. Think Puzzle Explore

*A routine that sets the stage for deeper inquiry.*

1. What do you **think** you know about this topic?
2. What questions or **puzzles** do you have?
3. What does the topic make you want to **explore**?

**Purpose:** *What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?*

This routine activates prior knowledge, generates ideas and curiosity, and sets the stage for deeper inquiry.

(Visible Thinking Project/Project Zero Thinking Routines Website, 2020)

Think Puzzle Explore is a great routine for activating student's prior knowledge on a topic and generating puzzles which students may explore further. Consistently using Think Puzzle Explore has potential to help students recognize their current understanding or perspective on a topic and cultivate student's ability to question and proactively research topics. In online settings, this routine can be especially useful for connecting two separate class periods. Here is an example.

### **Picture of Practice:**

In a recent 6<sup>th</sup> grade lesson, students and I were exploring fairy tales and folktales around the world and I hoped that after reading *The Little Mermaid*, students could learn about Hans Christian Anderson and how his personal background influenced the raw emotional nature of his stories. In addition, I wanted students to learn about the context surrounding the authors home, Copenhagen. In this case, I used the Think and Puzzle steps of the routine on two topics simultaneously so that, in the end, students could explore the topic and puzzle that they were most interested in. In our discussion, I recorded students' responses to the Think step on the left side of the Zoom whiteboard, and their responses to the Puzzle step on the right. Then, students each picked the question that they were most interested (names added next to the puzzles on the right). At the start of the next class, rather than me lecturing about the Hans Christian Anderson's life, students presented their findings and I had a few additional excerpts prepared in case there were some areas that I could share to deepen the exploration (if they weren't shared within students findings).

Think:

\*Hans Christian Anderson

—> Story writer

Denmark:

\*Many bikes

\*It's in Europe

\*Hamlet? -Prince of Denmark

Puzzles:

Was HCA famous at that time? Were his stories welcomed?

His life story? What was it like? (Jean) (Iris)

Time period where he lived? How it inspired his writing?

Why did he start writing?

Did he come up with the idea of mermaids? Did he meet a mermaid? Where did mermaids come from?

What happens next in the Little Mermaid? (Frank)

How is the Little Mermaid remembered?

Denmark:

Where is it exactly? (Iris - General Denmark)

Why do people in Boston say it's too cold to bike? But Denmark is colder - and lots of people bike? How did the biking culture develop?

## 2. Making Sense of Text

A thinking routine to study and inquire through close reading of texts

Select one passage, one sentence, and one word that you feel are important in connection to the question or topic under study.

**Read** one passage you have selected aloud to the group.

**Explain** what you think about the selected passage (interpretation, connections, etc.)

**Invite** group to respond to the selection adding ideas and new connections

(Project Zero Educating Global Citizens through a US and China Lens Project, 2020)

I particularly enjoy using this routine with students in our classes because I enjoy using this routine as a learner. In college and university settings, after going through mass amounts of readings prior to class, around the start of class teachers often ask students to meet briefly in small groups and discuss general impressions of the readings. This type of conversation tends to either remain very surface level or is sometimes hard to follow if one group member goes on an in-depth tangent that may be very different than other group members interpretations or focus.

Rather, starting with the “Making Sense of Text” routine, gives a student the opportunity to begin by selecting and reading aloud a sentence that they feel “captures a core idea of the text” or a phrase “that moved, engaged or provoked them”, before explaining why they selected the passage. This process is generally easier to follow and engage with for all students participating



in the discussion. This applies especially to English as a Second Language students or visual learners who may benefit from seeing the quote (or hearing a quote repeated) that will be discussed. As students share, they are learning to **“reason with evidence”** and base their opinions in relation to quotes.

**Picture of Practice:**

In reading *A Long Walk to Water*, a book written by Linda Sue Parker that explores life in South Sudan across two time periods, Codi Caton wanted students to develop a disposition to “reason with evidence” when exploring this topic, so he would often give them opportunities to select a sentence to contribute to discussions. Codi asked students:

“What about Salva’s uncle? Do you like him? Find a sentence that supports why or why you don’t like him.”

“Why does the group decide to cross the river? Find sentences that give us a clue.”

“Look through Chapter 10 and write down examples of how the men and women act differently or seem to be assigned different roles in the desert. Share these sentences on the white board.” (Codi’s International Inquiry Unit using this *A Long Walk to Water* is explored further in Chapter 6).

**Additional Picture of Practice:**

In another portion of the Fairy Tale unit described in the example above, students split up reading sections of a biography on the Brothers Grimm, detailing how the pair of aspiring German Lawyers became engrossed in fairy tales and cultural preservation. As students gave summaries of the sections they were assigned, they were asked first to share a **“sentence”** that they thought to be representative of this time period in the brothers’ lives.

In our online learning groups, we’ll sometimes use the “read one passage” step either as a class (eliciting 2-4 quotes) or in small groups, allowing a student to read their quote and explain their interpretation for approximately 1 minute, before allowing 1-2 minutes for response and discussion from other student in the group/class (taking approximately 3 minutes in total). After an initial round of sharing discussion has happened, another student will read the passage they selected, share their interpretation before discussing as a group. (A group of 3 students would ideally take 9 minutes in total to finish this process).

**Technology Tips:**

When sharing the sentence as a whole group, it can be helpful for certain learners if teachers have an electronic version of the text. Teachers can ask students to cite the page or do a screen share to show the actual text as they begin to read their selected passages.

Teachers can also set up break out rooms on Zoom for students to discuss in groups of 2-4 students.

### 3. Think Pair Share

*A routine for active reasoning and explanation.*

Think ,Pair, Share involves posing a question to students, asking them to take a few minutes of thinking time and then turning to a nearby student to share their thoughts.

**Purpose: What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?**

This routine encourages students to think about something, such as a problem, question or topic, and then articulate their thoughts. The *Think, Pair, Share* routine promotes understanding through active reasoning and explanation. Because students are listening to and sharing ideas, *Think, Pair, Share* encourages students to understand multiple perspectives.

(Project Zero Thinking Routines Website, 2020)

Think Pair Share is a useful three-step strategy that helps students first think individually, then think together in small groups or pairs, and finally think together as a whole group. The individual and pair think time can provide an opportunity to slow the pace of real-time online environments, so students can think more deeply about the topic at hand. Here is an example:

**Picture of Practice:**

In reading *I Am Malala*, a book written by Malala Yousafzai about her experience fighting for girls' education in Afghanistan, Sarah Koehler wanted students to better understand Malala's intentions for social action. She pushed students to consider issues their local communities face as well as issues facing us all on a global scale.

Sarah asked students first to consider the question, "What does it mean to be a dreamer? What are the most pressing/urgent issues in your community? In the world?" After taking some individual time to consider this question, students were sorted into pairs via the breakout rooms and after 3-4 minutes of discussion, students returned to share some of the thinking that was generated with the whole class.

(Sarah's International Inquiry Unit using this *I Am Malala* is explored further in Chapter 5).

In online settings, students can **think** individually in the shared online learning room as the teacher sets up pairs or small groups using the breakout function. Students can **pair** and discuss for a few minutes in individual breakout rooms (the teacher has the option to join break out rooms and listen in on the discussions), and after the breakout rooms are closed, a few students can **share** some of the thinking from their group with the whole class. Many of these observations may be useful to come back to over time, so it is often advantageous to activate the whiteboard feature and document students thinking on the topic, taking a screen shot, or saving the whiteboard at the end for future use.

Note: Think Pair Share is adapted from Frank Lyman: Lyman, F. T. (1981). The responsive classroom discussion: The inclusion of all students. In A. Anderson (Ed.), *Mainstreaming Digest* (pp. 109-113). College Park: University of Maryland Press. For more information on this specific routine,

visit: [http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking\\_html\\_files/03\\_ThinkingRoutines/03d\\_UnderstandingRoutines/ThinkPairShare/ThinkPairShare\\_Routine.html](http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03d_UnderstandingRoutines/ThinkPairShare/ThinkPairShare_Routine.html)

## 4. Connect Extend Challenge

*A routine for drawing connections between new ideas and prior knowledge.*

How is the artwork or object **connected** to something you know about?

What new ideas or impressions do you have that **extended** your thinking in new directions?

What is **challenging** or confusing? What do you wonder about?

**Purpose: What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?**

The routine helps students make connections between new ideas and prior knowledge. It also encourages them to take stock of ongoing questions, puzzles and difficulties as they reflect on what they are learning.

(Visible Thinking Project/Project Zero Thinking Routines Website, 2020)

In exploring a central theme for several lessons or weeks, we hope that students will **make connections** between the central book we are reading, news articles, their own lives, local or global phenomena, weaving these resources to create a more nuanced understanding of the context being explored.

To help facilitate these opportunities for connection-making, during class we will often send students an additional article, video (via screen share) or provocation that relates to the themes in the book/topics being discussed during class. Ideally these provocations will take approximately 4-8 minutes to explore (otherwise we will typically have students view the resource before class.) After exploring a new resource, we invite students to discuss: the **connections** they see to the central book being read and other resources in our larger exploration and international inquiries, how this resource may have **extended** their thinking on the topic, and any **challenges** or questions that were raised in exploring the topic.

**Picture of Practice:**

In designing a unit around *Swami and Friends*, a book written R. K. Narayan about a fictional village in India that is meant to be representative of life in many parts of India in the 1920's and 1930's, Murali Mallikarjunan wanted students to make connections between the way the fictional village in the story was protesting British occupation by burning British factory produced clothing, and the larger historical context in India at the time (referenced in Chapter 2). During class, students were asked to read an additional piece or writing on the Salt March and were shown a short documentary on Gandhi's role during this period. In examining and discussing these new pieces, students were asked to consider "What **connections** do you see

with the book *Swami and Friends?*”, “How do these new resources **extend** your thinking about this topic”, as well as sharing “What questions or **challenges** emerged in examining these new resources?”

Abbreviating this routine to just “connections” and “extensions” can also be a useful protocol for students to use when responding to presentations or sharing from other students in the course of the learning experience.

## 5. What Makes You Say That?

“What Makes You Say That?” (WMYST) or “Say More About That” are considered to be magic sentences by many professors and scholars at the Harvard Education school. It is the perfect balance of respectful curiosity without communicating any sort of prior judgement (good or bad), about the student’s thinking. When used effectively, WMYST challenges students to **reason with evidence** behind their thinking, supporting deeper reflection and understanding of topics being explored. Ritchhart explains: “It sends a message to students that simply giving the correct answer or guessing what’s in the teacher’s head is not the game we are playing. When teachers’ press students for thinking, students feel more engaged, challenged, and motivated. They also develop a greater sense of initiative and feel like their teachers expect more out of them.” (Ritchhart, 2016)

### Picture of Practice:

In designing a unit around *Dunger*, a book written Joy Cowley about an unexpected intergenerational summer vacation based on the South Island of New Zealand, Debbie Kwan wanted students to develop a norm referencing text and resources to support their thinking and opinions on pertinent topics. When the book referenced the 1960’s folk and Vietnam War era protest music the main character’s grandparents enjoyed, students were asked to look closely at one of the songs and state what the song revealed about the era in which the grandparents were teenagers. To support their interpretations and reasoning, at certain moments the teacher asked students “What makes you say that?”, encouraging them to share more about their thinking or link the conversation back to the key resources being discussed.

### A Tip for Thinking Together in Online Settings with ESL Learners

For most routines in the first step, similar to the “Think” stage of “Think-Pair-Share”, it can be beneficial to start by sharing with students “I’m going to give you a moment to consider (the question or step of a thinking routine to be discussed). . . .” The term “moment” is advantageous to “30 seconds” or “a minute” because it doesn’t put a specific time pressure on our thinking and reflection time. For some students who are not used to this idle time or may be tempted by other distractions on their computer or elsewhere, I’ll sometimes add, “If you have a piece of paper, jot down a few ideas that come to mind before we discuss together.” Giving this time not only contributes to the depth of thinking and discussion around a topic, it can help ESL learners formulate in their mind a response within the less familiar language. For students with higher English proficiency or a faster “shot clock” (time students tend to want to

answer after a question is posed), who may want to share immediately, I'll sometimes share, "That's great - hold onto that for just a moment and we'll discuss together."

Additionally, when an educator is not in the same room with the student, sometimes it's hard to judge whether or not the student is ready to move on and discuss or needs some additional thinking time. Another move I have found helpful is to have students demonstrate with our fingers where we are at in our process. "If you're all set - give me a thumbs up, if you need one more minute, show me a one, if you need two more minutes show me a two." After using this move with students for a period of time, they'll seamlessly keep working or thinking while also giving a hand signal with how much more time they'd like. I'll share a general response based upon how they answered, sometimes sharing "Great - I'll give you all a couple more minutes" or "Excellent, just wrap up what you're doing and we'll share in a just a bit".

#### **A Final Word:**

In reflecting about the experience of participating in our online learning group, one 7<sup>th</sup> grade student shared, "This is the first time I feel a teacher has cared about my ideas, and not just the answer."

Students generally echo this sentiment about the benefits of being a part of a learning community where participants thinking is central and valued. The use of routines shared above has been central to decreasing our teacher talk time and increasing students' individual and collaborative thinking in online settings. Thinking Routines have long been a powerful tool for deepening students' thinking and understanding in physical classrooms; with a few adaptations using digital tools, we've have found them to be just as effective in real-time online settings.

**For More Information on Thinking Routines:** Check out the book *Making Thinking Visible*, *The Power of Visible Thinking*, or visit the Project Zero Website's [Thinking Routines Toolbox](#).

## Chapter 4

### Developing A Collaborative Culture for ESL Learners

Written by Max Smith

Teaching high school students full-time for several years, I see the direct relationship between a strong classroom culture and student outcomes on a daily basis. When I joined S4S, one thing I wondered was how my classroom culture building routines would translate to a virtual setting and to students who are learning English as a second language. I have found that creating consistent routines that build and reinforce a welcoming, supportive, hard-working, and risk-taking classroom enhance students' interactions with each other, develop their in-class presentations, and strengthen their mindsets about themselves as English language speakers and learners. Supporting our efforts to build collaborative and personal online learning communities, all teachers in the S4S program are encouraged to develop the personalized classroom cultures that match their teaching styles and goals with their students'. In this chapter, I share what this looks like for the International Inquiry Units I facilitate. They are organized based on when I typically employ them using the sequence below:

- Opening unit routines
- Daily routines & practices
- Closing unit routines

#### Opening Unit Routines

##### Initial Correspondence

The teacher's opportunity to make or break a classroom culture through their initial classroom actions cannot be understated. For S4S, this starts with our introduction, a written correspondence to our class where we prepare them for our first meeting. Our founder, Devon Wilson, provides the first connection by creating a WeChat group where the students in our inquiry group are connected to the instructor. Then it is up to me to set the tone for the course. In my initial correspondence, there are a couple of culture building moves I make right off the bat.

The first is referring to my class as a "team." I do this to de-center power and redefine my role as a "more experienced learner" rather than the keeper of knowledge. I reinforce this with "collaborative and we"based language by using words like "alongside" and "together" to build an expectation that students will be as integral to the progress and direction of the course as I am.

The second is prepping students for a show-and-tell where they find an artifact that gives us a window into who they are. Grounded in Ryan and Deci's theory of relatedness, I ask students to come prepared with an artifact (picture, memento, etc.) that does one of the following:

- Represents a time where they felt they belonged
- Illustrates a moment in the past where they felt most like themselves
- Shows us a place or experience of which they loved being a part

As I will share in the next section, priming students with this artifact opens up the conversation for deeper connections than a cursory "what is your name and where are you from?" introduction to class.

While the initial correspondence may seem like such a minute part of class, for me it truly sets the tone for the type of relationship I plan to build with my students and the ways we will engage with each other in our learning. It confers a sharing of power and a co-construction of knowledge. Particularly within an online learning setting, this provides the opportunity for me to set the tone for our class similarly to how I do this in person over the course of the first few moments in the classroom. Below is an example of a typical introduction I provide with a new class:

"Hello team! My name is Max Smith, and I'm thrilled to be learning alongside each of you as we read Goodall's *My Life with Chimpanzees*. In this course, we will explore what it means to be an *ethologist* as we practice "slow looking" with nature and animals. For our first class together, please come prepared by reading Chapter 1 (attached). Lastly, take some time to find an artifact (this could be a picture, drawing, personal memento, or something else) that shows us about a time where you felt you were truly coming alive. We will share our artifacts with each other and have time to ask each other questions about them in our first class. If you have any questions before we meet in person, please reach out to me via WeChat. I look forward to kicking off our learning together this Sunday. Until then!"

### First Day Introductions

The first day of class is always a little nerve-wracking. No one knows anyone, and we're all wondering what this experience will be like. My focus during this time is to greet each student as they log in and set them at ease by letting them know when we will officially begin. When we do officially begin, we start with introductions. The typical protocol is as follows:

- What is your name?
- Where do you live?
- What artifact did you bring and why?

I go first to model speaking with genuineness. For the first question, I introduce myself as “Mr. Max.” The use of the “Mr.” connotes my responsibility as the adult in the room who is in charge of my students’ safety and learning; however, I pair this with the choice for students to call me by my first name to reinforce the collaborative orientation of our learning environment. I have found that students quite enjoy using the moniker and it builds an initial bridge for them to start releasing the traditional mindset they’ve been conditioned to assume about what their role is as students.

For the second question, I bust out google maps to pinpoint the city where I live, Atlanta, and have students draw a connection between my city and theirs. I do this to signal to my students that I am willing to take whatever time it takes for us to start getting to know each other more deeply. I will then start sharing some of my proudest reasons for living in Atlanta--that it’s Dr. King’s birth home and a center for civil rights activism. In modeling all of this, the message I am sharing to my students is that they can be honest and proud of who they are when they share, too.

Before students use the protocol to introduce themselves, I set the expectation that they will each ask one question to each other. I do the same (if not asking multiple questions) and use google to pull up pictures of what students are referencing in their responses. This often sparks additional questions and comments from the students. When a student has finished introducing themselves, I prompt students to give a round of applause. It’s a simple celebration, and the students love it!

### *Creating First Day Agreements*

At school, working with adults, and in my virtual class with S4S, my priority after introductions is always creating agreements. Over the past decade, I have seen organizations construct and define these in varying ways. “Norms” is a commonly used term. In the past few years, I have seen some organizations shift to the term “Agreements” because the word *norm* can impact what behaviors the group generates by priming us to consider what we believe is “normal” or “societally appropriate” rather than speaking from a place of authenticity around what we actually need from a group in order to feel safe, heard, and that we belong. Even more recently, in my work as an Equity Facilitator Fellow with the Atlanta-based teacher development fellowship CREATE, we use the term “Ethos.”

For S4S, creating “agreements” is our first exercise in collaboration and democratic unanimity. I explain that agreements are the ways we will all agree to show up in this shared space together. Agreements answer the question “what do I need in this space in order to feel safe, heard, that I belong, and to take risks with my learning?” To allay any pressure to create perfection, I tell students that we will revisit them at the beginning of class each week to make



sure the things we landed on are actually creating the classroom culture we want, and we can change them at any time. Agreements work best when there are just a handful so that they can be easily committed to memory.

To create agreements, I post the guiding question in the chat and then pull up the whiteboard feature on Zoom to go through an Open-Narrow-Close protocol. In the “Open” step, I encourage students to be generative, and I capture all of their ideas on the whiteboard. In the “Narrow” step, we discuss how the ideas relate to each other. How can they be organized? Can they be condensed? At this point, I tell students we want to narrow our ideas down to 4-6 agreements. In the “Close” step, I formalize each of the agreements, using students’ language as much as possible in each of them. I remind students that they’re called agreements because they’re things we all can agree to uphold in every class. Students give a final lookover, and we finish by all showing that we agree with our thumbs up.

Below, I’ve included a list of the more commonly used agreements in my virtual classes:

- We try our best
- We respect & support each other
- When we don’t know, we ask
- We listen to understand
- We are talkative
- We have fun together
- We come prepared
- We push ourselves to take risks with our learning

### 1-on-1’s

The final opening unit routine in each of my virtual classes is the 1-on-1. I usually schedule these to take place the second week of class. 1-on-1’s are a 30 minute time where I meet individually with each of my students. I conduct 1-on-1’s to build a stronger relationship with each of my students and to check reality on their experience with class so far. They do not have any pre-work for the meetings. Below is the agenda I use:

- Check-in on student: how are they feeling right now?
- Share the purpose of 1-on-1’s
- Ask student what they want to talk about
- Ask student what are their goals for the course?
- Ask student how class is going so far. What is going well? What can be improved? What knowledge and skills are they building? How is the course different from their initial expectations of what it would be?
- Ask student how the course load is going so far (difficulty with text, time it is taking to do homework)
- Remind students of the ways to communicate with me if they need anything outside of class

While I do come with an agenda for our 1 on 1's , it is designed to be flexible to the student and it is mostly for my use as a tool to facilitate our time together if needed rather than a protocol we must follow. Some of my best 1-on-1's got as far as "ask students what they want to talk about" and the rest of the time was filled with conversation about their favorite tv shows, video games, books, or sports. These are moments when I know the 1-on-1 is serving its purpose: they are building command of their conversational English and exhibiting leadership through the topics they share.

The benefits of 1-on-1's are evident right away. For starters, they provide the time for student-teacher relationship building that is already built into the structure of in-person learning by consequence of sharing space together. After our 1-on-1, students come to class with a different energy because we have gotten to know each other outside of the traditional classroom setting, and I leverage that connection to bring it out within our learning space, to further disrupt the conditioning of a traditional students' role in passive learning.

### **Daily Routines & Practices**

After I have set the initial classroom culture through the opening unit routines (introductions, agreements, and 1-on-1's), I use a series of practices every class period to reinforce and build upon the student-led, collaborative learning environment. I think of these as a skeleton for each lesson. While the content and activities vary, these routines provide a familiar container through which students collaborate in sense-making, expressing ideas, and developing our culture for learning.

#### Opening Activity

Standard pedagogical practice includes some sort of "opening routine." These come in many names and forms such as "Do Nows," "Bell Ringers," "Warm-ups," and "Energizers." The purpose of this time is to activate students' energy and focus it on our purpose for being together. A few of my favorite opening activities are the "Whirl-around," "Connections," and "Mad-libs."

In the "Whirl-around" there is a question of the day, and each student answers the question then sends it to another student to do the same. It's called "whirl-around" because when a student sends the microphone to someone else, they say "I whirl it to..." and do a whirling motion with their hands like it's a wand. This is a great opening activity at the beginning of the year because, in addition to having a fun question of the day, students can re-share their names and become used to talking to each other directly (without waiting for a teacher to prompt them). I usually provide 3 things for students to share in a whirl-around: their names, a quick

fact about themselves (e.g., favorite color, favorite band, dream vacation), and then a question that requires a more in-depth response (e.g., tell the story of how you got a scar, what is the next thing you are saving up for and why?). When students get the hang of this, I push them to provide the quick fact and deeper response questions for us to answer at the beginning of future classes. If no one volunteers, I have everyone write down some ideas for the next minute and then share them aloud. This facilitator move also provides us with future whirl-around questions, and students enjoy getting their question featured in the opening activity or knowing it will be saved to use in an upcoming class.

“Connections” is another great opening activity for the beginning of the course, when we are still getting to know each other. It is very similar to the whirl-around where students will share their name, a quick fact, and something requiring deeper response. The difference is that instead of a student “whirling it” to the next student, the next student to share must find a connection with what the previous student shared. They say “connection” aloud and then explain it before then sharing their answer to the opening activity questions. For example, let’s say Tina shares that her favorite color is blue and then shares a story about her favorite summer memory fishing with her father. After she has finished sharing, Dora says “connection” before explaining she has gone fishing before. Next Dora provides an answer to the daily question. This activity can be fun and challenging for students to come up with a connection to each other, and it can spark interesting discussion as students probe for more information until they can find something with which they can connect --especially when there is only one student left who has to make a connection with the previous speaker. The connection making practiced in this process is also used in effort to support the type of thinking we hope students will engage in during International Inquiry Units--making connections between resources, classmates’ thinking, and different contexts.

“Madlibs” is based on the popular card game. I tell students to write down two examples of a noun, verb, and adjective. I then show them a Madlib (a short story that has different parts of speech left blank for the reader to fill in). They each read the Madlib using their examples to complete the story. This provides lots of laughter as students hear how nonsensical, unexpected, or wry their inadvertent stories are. If I have a class that loves Madlibs, I will take it to the next level by having them write down adverbs and prepositions. This is a great way to build students’ fluency in parts of speech without them even realizing it.

### Revisiting Agreements & Setting Intentions

After our opening activity, we are more energized. I funnel this energy into grounding us in today’s agenda by asking my students to remind us of our agreements. As students share them aloud, I write them on the whiteboard Zoom feature for all to see. I then ask students if the list

still feels relevant and like it is working for the class or if anyone has ideas to add to or change them. Then we put our thumbs up signaling we agree to uphold each of them for class today.

Sometimes, I leave the routine there. However, if I feel we could benefit from further engagement with our agreements - for example, if I'm sensing they have become trite - I will push students to choose one of our agreements and set an intention for how they will live into that agreement in class today. I use the breakout room feature on Zoom to pair students up and have them share their intentions with their partner. This buddy system creates shared accountability, and I tell them at the end of class they will return to their buddy who will report back to them how they saw the student living into the intention they set. I can be strategic in who I partner up based on relationship building I want to see. When students know they will be reporting back to each other, it redirects their daily attention and engagement toward each other's participation and conversation rather than on me (another quick way I decenter power).

### *Talk Moves*

When I first joined Students For Students, one of the biggest challenges I faced in facilitating virtual learning was eliciting student discourse, especially student-to-student discourse. In the physical classroom, I can use proximity to encourage a student to share with someone next to them, or I can use a talking piece that students can pass to one another.

In the virtual space, there are different challenges the facilitator must pick up on: it can be harder to read the energy in the room, because you're not all breathing the same air; it can be more challenging to have a student respond directly to another student because the virtual setting adds a layer of distance or formality. As I tried out different approaches to encourage student discourse, I have found a few talk moves that I now regularly use.

To encourage their use, I am explicit with them about the purpose of these talk moves to build their confidence and collaboration by responding to each other rather than just to me. I will often connect the talk moves back to our agreements as an extra way to emphasize how everything we do culture-wise is connected and self-reinforcing. The major talk moves I use in my Zoom classroom are "sending it back," "wait time," "passing the baton," "thinking routines," "breakout rooms," and "shout outs."

### *Sending it Back*

"Sending it back" is the most direct way I prompt students to replace the habit of turning to the teacher for the funds of knowledge with turning inwards and to each other. I take a question either explicitly or implicitly directed at me and redirect it to the room. This may sound like: "That's a great question! What do folks in the room think about this?" or "Seven just asked

something really interesting. Let's all take a moment to think about this. I want to hear what some of you think."

### *Wait Time*

Opposite to "sending it back" is silently using "wait time." This is one of my favorites, and I have developed a reputation among my classes for holding it with poise at length. In the beginning of the year, I usually use wait time after sending it back so students understand that I am serious when I expect them to think and share aloud. As the weeks progress and they are more comfortable with the expectation, I skip sending it back altogether and simply respond with my facial features, such as encouraging smiles, nods, and obvious looking at other students for a response with my eyes. When working with younger students or students who are developing English fluency, I am often amazed how wait time can lead to the expansion and deepening of their thinking. For example, there was one class where I used wait time after asking a student a question where it took longer than the natural rhythm of conversation to respond. There was a moment where I could see he was ready to give up, expecting the teacher to move on, but then he snapped back to thinking in the same split second, realizing his voice and thoughts matter and deserve to be heard. At the end of my classes, a common piece of feedback is that the first class where I felt my opinions and ideas mattered. It's the little moments like using wait time with that student that I attribute to this positive student feedback class after class.

### *Revoicing and Narrating*

Falling somewhere in between sending it back and wait time are the classic teacher moves "revoicing and narrating." Sometimes simply repeating what the student says (revoicing) will get students to add onto it. Alternatively, I can describe what the student just said/did (narrating) as a way to show I am actively listening and also expecting another student to respond more directly to the ideas being shared. All of these moves take time for students to adjust to--especially because you are restructuring power and communication--but the agency the talk moves build in students is well worth the learning curve (which may include several awkward silences).

### *Passing the Baton*

"Passing the baton" is one of my students' favorite daily activities because I embrace it as a light-hearted, somewhat corny, but highly effective instructional tool. I tell my students to make a wand motion with their hands and that what they are doing is actually creating our class baton. Whenever they have the baton, they get to share their ideas, and they may also choose to simply hold it for a while. Then, they "pass the baton" by waving their hand like a wand and sending it to another student to continue the conversation. A lot of drama and excitement gets built around the split-second moment of suspense when students do not know who their peer will pass it to. This also keeps the momentum high for the activity at hand.

### *Thinking Routines*

Another instructional tool the staff at S4S incorporates is called “Thinking Routines”. These are protocols which push students to activate their attention and thinking in specific ways. There are many benefits to integrating them into our learning experiences: for instance, they are generative, not evaluative, meaning they do not set an expectation of a “right or wrong” answer, but rather open students up to sharing whatever comes to their minds. Secondly, they give students a clear structure, which encourages them to share more than if they were just presented with a question to answer. Lastly, they build in the expectation that all students must participate and share because the nature of the protocols are low-pressure, quick, and fun.

I also consistently use several thinking routines from Project Zero’s “Making Thinking Visible,” including “Circle of Viewpoints,” “Compass Points,” and “See-Think-Wonder.” I encourage you to check out their full list. Along with these, I have also started to experiment with some of my own. To illustrate how I use these routines, I’ll share one that I created called “Wow-Wish-Wonder.” Like most of the thinking routines, I use them in ways to get students to respond to each other’s work. The work can be anything: an oral presentation, artifact for show-and-tell, written work, etc. After one student presents their work, each student will share a “Wow” (something that struck them with awe), a “Wish” (something they would like to see added or included), and a “Wonder” (something they are left being curious about). Usually one student will volunteer to start, and then we’ll “pass the baton” from there until all students have participated. To close the protocol, the student presenter will share their final thoughts and feelings in general after hearing all of the feedback.

An additional feature that can be used during thinking routines is the whiteboard feature on Zoom. Sometimes I will play the role of “scribe” and capture students’ feedback on the white board for everyone to see. Alternatively, I may ask if a student wants to volunteer for this role or ask students to write down their “Wow-Wish-Wonder” on the white board as they’re sharing. Whiteboards can be saved by taking a screenshot and shared with students afterwards for their reference in future work.

Along with the whiteboard feature, Zoom’s breakout rooms are great for promoting student discourse. I use this strategy in both planned and unplanned circumstances. If sending it back to the students is not prompting any dialogue, I may say “all right students, let’s discuss this in small groups!” and then send them to breakout rooms and ask for them to report back on what they shared. In general, breakout rooms are very versatile. Consider using them for gathering students’ ideas at the beginning of a topic or chapter discussion, for assigning different groups to explore different questions or take different perspectives, or for creating different sides for a debate.

### *Shout Outs*

The last talk move I regularly use in my classes is “shout outs.” This lives in two places within the lesson. It can be a nice way to close an activity, round of presentations, or discussion; and it is how we always close our daily classes. When I use it at the end of an activity, I usually tell students to give each other a literal round of applause: we clap our hands in a circle in front of the cameras so everyone can see. Then we may each share something we want to celebrate about another classmate, “pass the baton style” until everyone has given and received one shout out. At the end of class, we do shout outs for everyone. Oftentimes, I will tie the shout outs to ways I observed students practicing deeper learning skills like collaboration, complex problem solving, or deductive reasoning. I will also encourage students to shout each other out for ways they saw each other live into our class agreements. I find that shout outs really boost morale and end the class on a high note. Furthermore, I have seen some of the strongest relationship building occur during shout outs because students are able to explicitly name the connections they have built with each other and celebrate each other’s leadership and cooperation.

### **Closing Unit Rituals**

Closing well is just as important as starting well. In his book, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman explains the “Peak and Tail” principle of memory. That is, when an experience is over, the feelings we associate with the entire experience are mostly defined by how we felt during the “peak” or most climactic event and during the “tail” or whatever happened last. His research references long needles injected in patients for shot administrations, but I have found the principle to generally hold true for classes, as well. I keep this principle in mind when creating the culture for my two closing routines: “capstone project exhibitions” and “closing celebrations.”

#### Capstone Project Exhibitions

In our curriculum, S4S has built in culminating tasks. For example, in the unit on environmental sustainability and ethology, students can share a montage of their 9-week observations and diaries of a living creature. In the unit on fairy tales, students may finish by sharing their final draft of their own fairy tale, fable, or folk tale. These are projects we usually have been working on for 3-5 weeks of the course, so there is a lot of investment in exhibiting the final project.

Often, the nature and associations of projects is felt by students as something colossal, and the psychological tax of this can take away any of the joy or intended outcomes for their learning for which the project was intended. Our curriculum intentionally eliminates this burden through bite-size cycles of design and peer feedback. At the end of the unit, students are already very

familiar with each other's work because they have been sharing their ideas and resources with each other for several weeks. This process of chunking the project also allows me to get a gauge on the progress students have made and frame their expectations around what a solid state of the project will look like by the end of our course.

This all leads to an exhibition day that is about celebrating growth and latest iteration rather than looking for perfection of a final version. We typically go through one last thinking routine protocol with students' presentations - but with one twist. I ask students to share out how their thinking has changed since the beginning of the project and how they will apply this changed mindset to their lives in school and at home. For me, the power is not in the final state of their projects but rather in these candid reflections. Their presentation becomes a medium for their thinking, and their capstone projects are simply another artifact they can use as evidence of their growth.

### *Closing Celebrations*

By far, one of my favorite parts of class is the closing celebrations ritual. This is purely a time of spreading love and gratitude for each other and the growth we have made as a class. From a logistical standpoint, I'll block out 15-20 minutes at the end for this activity, so everyone has the time to share without feeling rushed.

On our final class, after everyone has shared their last presentations, I give a quick narrative "look back" at everything we have done. Then, we go around and each say our closing gratitude to every other student in the class. I usually start to set the tone of meaningful praise and warmth, highlighting different stories of how I have seen students build their confidence, their writing, and their leadership. Then, each student gets the floor to share their gratitude and moments of pride with and for each other. The things students have shared during this ritual are truly heart-warming. I have had students share their plans to visit each other's families, take another class together, and even call each other "life long friends." These are the moments we educators live for.

### **A Final Note - The Impact of Culture on the Classroom for Students and Teachers**

Utilizing the opening unit, daily, and closing unit routines in this chapter has helped in tailoring the experience to the different student groups I've worked with and foster a culture of collaboration. Just as in physical classrooms, the routines and moments we take for culture building move our class from feeling like a sterile group of strangers to a team who feel empowered to learn and can enjoy and appreciate this shared experience together.



As the teacher, being intentional about creating an affirming classroom culture is just as beneficial for me. It moves my role beyond the traditional archetype of knowledge arbiter. It also makes the experiences meaningful. I can be reviewing the same curriculum, but because there are new students and we are creating our own classroom culture together, I get a new experience and takeaways from the content and pedagogy. This is what keeps me returning to the work as an educator with a renewed pride and passion every time.

*“One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world.” – Malala Yousafzai*

## Chapter 5

### Celebrating and Developing Our Vision as Dreamers - Malala Unit

Written by Sarah Koehler

In the American middle school where I taught prior to attending Harvard, our librarian encouraged students to read by asking each teacher to post a picture of their “Hot Read” outside their classroom door. My “Hot Read” was *I Am Malala*—the *Young Reader’s Edition*. The autobiography explores important themes around equity and education through the lens of Pakistani culture—a culture that was largely unfamiliar for my students—while remaining personable and accessible. Malala Yousufzai wrote the book, with the help of Patricia McCormick, when Malala was 16 years old, just a few years older than my seventh and eighth graders. I hoped that the passion that is conveyed when Malala describes her struggles and successes in working to increase women’s access to education, as well as the relatability of Malala’s pre-teen world view, would leave my middle schoolers feeling inspired to recognize their identity as change makers and act on it. Simultaneously, students would have a chance to explore the culture and context of the world’s fifth most populous country, a culture about which my students knew very little.

A semester into my involvement with Students for Students, when I was given the autonomy to design and teach my own curriculum, I immediately thought of *I Am Malala* for similar reasons. Though my students with Students for Students would be from China, not Tennessee, and would encompass a broader age range than my middle schoolers, I felt that the book’s value remained relevant. The text lends itself nicely to the goals of our International Inquiry Units at Students for Students. Namely, the book allows for the exploration of a specific global context, requires readers to engage with issues of international importance, including religious conflict, terrorism, and human rights, and introduces them to the customs and traditions of a largely unfamiliar culture. So I set off to begin writing a nine-class curriculum. What follows here is an overview of the unit, a discussion of the key themes that arose throughout the course, and a summary of our learnings from having taught this curriculum to five groups of students.

#### **Unit Summary:**

*I Am Malala* begins at the time of the Taliban’s rise to power in Malala Yousafzai’s home region of Swat Valley, Pakistan. Over the course of the book, Malala shares an in-depth look into her progression as a dreamer, from an average 11-year-old to a globally recognized advocate for girls’ education. The unit’s curriculum follows her story closely, with a somewhat broader investigation of Pakistani History, Islam and the Pakistani-Indian conflict in the first three classes. The lessons focus first on the context and response that led to the success of a specific dreamer (Malala), then expand by the second half of the unit to have students think more broadly about other dreamers who inspire them. We end by connecting what we’ve

learned to our own contexts and values, reflecting on the problems in our own communities and developing or further concretizing our own dreams for a better future.

## **Unit Overview**

### **Dreams for a Better World:**

#### **Exploring Pakistani Culture, Girls' Education, and The Power of Dreams**

Book: *I Am Malala* (Young Reader's Edition)

(9 Lessons – 90 Minutes each)

Homework for 3-week semester:

- Approx. 2 chapters of reading per night
- Some additional tasks as assigned
- Class 5: Mini dreamer assignment on dreamer of student's choosing
- Class 9: Passport Stamp Project: The Impact of One Person (culminating presentation on dreamer chosen for mini dreamer assignment)

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

1. Compare and contrast similarities and differences between China and Pakistan. Students will identify some of the aspects of Pakistan's culture and history that make it unique through an examination of
  - a. Pakistan's split from India
  - b. the Taliban's rise to power
2. Describe some of the differences in lifestyles for men/women, boys/girls living in Pakistan and identify a few of the barriers to girls' education.
3. Explore in-depth the impetus for dreams and the impact of at least two dreamers—Malala and another dreamer of the students' choosing. Apply these findings to the students' own passions and dreams for the future.

### Broad Learning Goals:

As with all of our units, Students for Students hopes this unit will:

1. Strengthen students' language confidence through an application based approach--improving their speaking, listening, writing, and reading abilities in English.
2. Improve students' critical thinking skills through providing students opportunities to question, draw comparisons, and reason with evidence.

Classes:

1. **Prologue-Chapter 3:** Pakistani Customs, Differences for Men and Women
2. **Chapters 4-7:** Pakistani History, Red Flags of Conflict in the Region

3. **Chapters 8-11:** Islam in Pakistan and the Taliban’s Rise to Power
4. **Chapters 12-15:** Girls’ Education in Pakistan, Dreams for a Better World
5. **Chapters 16-19:** Inspiration and Courage—Mini Dreamer Presentations
6. **Chapters 20-23:** The Attack Against Malala, Opposition to Dreamers
7. **Chapters 24-27:** Connecting the Dots, Setbacks
8. **Chapters 28-31:** The Importance of Allies, Perseverance and Support
9. **Chapters 32-Epilogue:** The Power of Dreams (sub-topic: Differences between Pakistan and England)—Passport Stamp Presentations (The Impact of One Person)

## Key Themes

### Developing our Vision as Dreamers through Local-to-Global Connections

Malala’s story serves as an amazing example of someone who pursued her dream for a better world, despite enormous obstacles. *I Am Malala* details this journey, beginning with events that led her, at age 11, to decide to speak out courageously against repressive policies that prevented girls from obtaining an education. A few years later, in October 2012, she was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman for voicing her beliefs. Following her miraculous survival and recovery, she has continued to fight for all girls’ right to learn. In 2014, she founded Malala Fund to increase educational opportunities for girls around the world and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts. Since 2014, Malala and Malala Fund have worked to build schools, amplify girls’ voices, develop teacher leaders to combat gender discrimination, and advocate for policies that support equal access to education (Malala Fund, Malala’s Story, 2020). Despite the enormity of the problem before her, Malala has remained optimistic, stating that she believes she will see every girl in school within her lifetime (Malala Fund, 2018). Now in her early twenties, she continues to advocate for every girl’s right to learn, while studying at Oxford University. Her boundless determination has been quite contagious, attracting the attention of youth around the world, including, now, several young people in our Students for Students online classes.

One of our main goals with the *I Am Malala* curriculum is for students to understand the potential positive impact of just one person, not only in the Pakistani context but in their local and global contexts as well, and for them to reflect about their passions, values, and personal call to action. The OECD’s PISA framework includes “tak[ing] action for collective well-being and sustainable development” as one of the four core components of global competence (OECD, 2018). But what’s required to take action? And what are the risks? Various activities within the curriculum ask students to reflect on what it means to take action and “dream” for a better context. They’re encouraged to make connections between Malala’s dream and their potential as dreamers in their home communities. In exploring Malala’s success, we discuss her resilience in the face of setbacks and how her dream is still in progress. Malala ends her autobiography with the powerful reminder that “One child, one teacher, one pen, and one book can change the world!” And yet, this can’t happen without dedication, passion, and unyielding persistence.

To make this message more relevant and tangible to our learners, as part of the curriculum, students give two “Dreamer Presentations.” The first requires students to come to class with a list of three dreamers or change-makers who have inspired them. In breakout rooms, students discuss their “whys” for each selection and ask their peers for feedback to help them narrow the list down to one. Each student researches their selected dreamer outside of class and develops a presentation with an accompanying visual element (e.g. PowerPoint, Mind Map, Digital Storyboard, etc.). Their first presentation should answer the following questions:

- i. What is your dreamer’s cause and what is their dream?
- ii. What or who inspired their dream?
- iii. Has your dreamer experienced any setbacks or barriers to achieving their dream?
- iv. Has your dreamer’s dream been realized/achieved, or is it still in progress?

The second “Dreamer Presentation” asks the students to turn inward, reflecting on their own vision for a better world and how they might act (or continue acting) on it. Again, they’re asked to create a visual element to accompany their presentation and answer the following questions:

- i. What is a cause about which you are passionate/What is your dream for the future?
- ii. What or who inspired your dream?
- iii. What setbacks or barriers might you experience to achieving your dream?
- iv. What steps will you take to ensure that your dream is realized?

In my first two rounds of teaching this curriculum, I used my 1-on-1 check-ins with each student at the beginning of the semester to better understand their passions and prompt them to start reflecting on their dreams. I learned that my student, Stella, is passionate about education reform. The non-traditional university she attends, which allows students to drive their own learning more so than most Chinese universities, has opened her eyes to new educational possibilities. For her first “Dreamer Presentation,” Stella chose to present on Yinuo Li, an educational reformist and Director of the China Country Office at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In her second presentation, Stella drew on examples from both Yinuo Li and Malala in sharing her vision for a more student-centered, less test-focused Chinese education system.

### Female Empowerment

Malala’s fight for all girls to go to school naturally lends itself to class discussions around gender equity and female empowerment. I’ve long been a believer that female representation begets female participation, particularly in leadership roles, and believe that young girls benefit from seeing other girls and women taking charge. They learn that if they can see it, they can be it. In a 2018 talk given by Malala’s father at Harvard University, Ziauddin Yousafzai summarized this idea simply but aptly. What is sometimes referred to as ‘breaking the glass ceiling,’ he referred to as “breaking the iron bar in patriarchal societies.” When asked what steps we can take to increase equality for girls, he responded, “We should have more girls in leadership positions. When we see more girls in leadership roles, more girls are inspired.” The way to achieve this,

Ziauddin Yousafzai says, is that “Girls should believe in themselves, but boys should respect equality and freedom of girls. Curriculum is a powerful tool” (Yousafzai, 2018). My secondary aim for the *I Am Malala* curriculum, after inspiring students to take action around their own dreams, was to expose students to a stellar *female* example of someone who had done just that.

The first time I taught this curriculum, my class consisted of three young Chinese women with vastly different educational backgrounds, ranging from seventh grade to sophomore year of college. There was something very special about exploring this curriculum in an all-female virtual classroom. I fed off of their energy, as they became increasingly empowered by Malala’s outspokenness and leadership. Many of our interactions between classes in WeChat ended with “girl power” hashtags or messages like “You all inspire me!”

This was, no doubt, facilitated by their high English proficiency. (All three girls tested into our highest proficiency level at Students for Students.) Less time was needed to check for their understanding of the assigned chapters, and, as a result, we were able to devote more time to investigating supporting resources, such as articles on women’s right to vote in Pakistan, images of women wearing a hijab, and footage from Malala’s Netflix documentary *He Named Me Malala*. Following the final class, one of the students asked for more resources about female resistance, and another student sent everyone several articles about the dreamer she had investigated throughout the semester, one of her female heroes. This level of engagement was powerful to witness and set the bar high for future groups of students.

In my second round of teaching *I Am Malala*, the class makeup was a mix of genders and the average English proficiency much lower than during my first round with the curriculum. Working with these students confirmed my assumption that Malala’s message of gender equity transcends gender and proficiency level. Though we spent more time in the text itself, questioning the meaning of various words and confirming timeline of events, students’ engagement and presentations again demonstrated their ability to make real-world applications to the content that challenge systemic oppression. Multiple students raised examples of the gender dynamics in their own families, comparing and contrasting the roles played by their mothers with the expectations Malala describes for women in her society. The male in the group went so far as to express a desire for more gender parity in his future relationship than what he’d witnessed in his own family. To me, giving students the space to engage in these conversations in a way that they may not typically at school, and with students from various regions and experiences across China, is the value at the core of Students for Students.

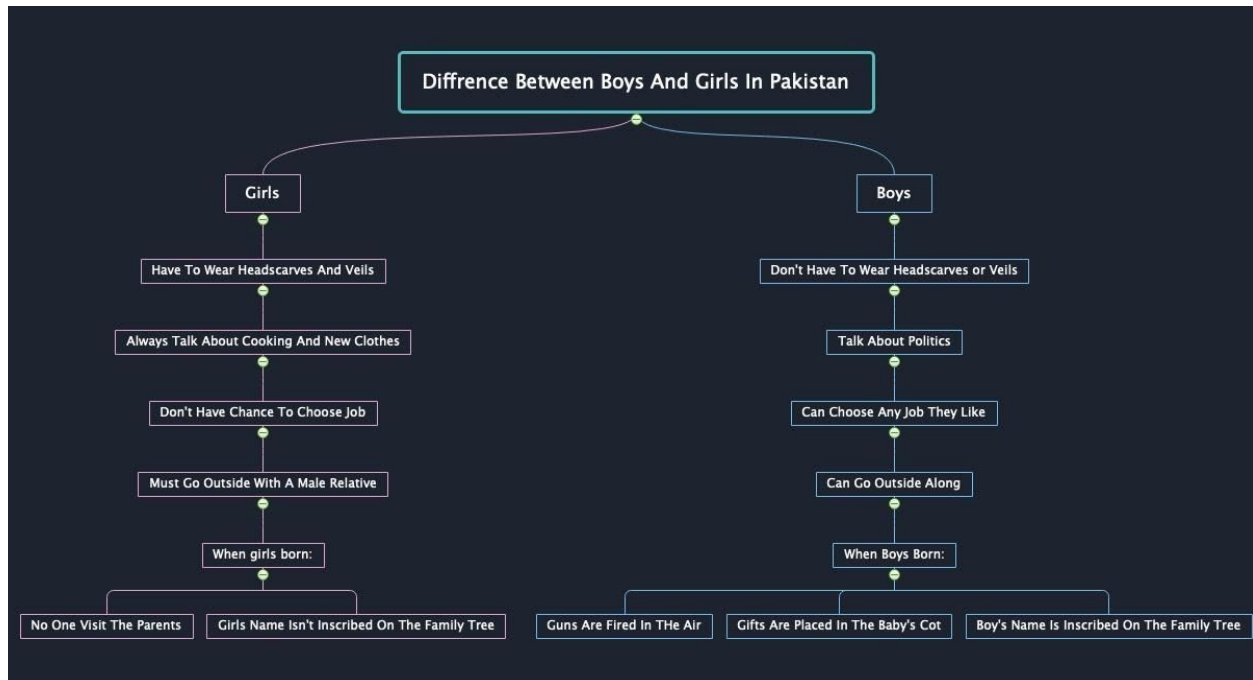
## **Learnings**

### “The Danger of a Single Story”

I initially hesitated to write this curriculum at all, out of concern that my limited understanding and experience with Pakistani culture would lead me to create a unit that misled students or gave them a too-general, broad-stroked view of Pakistan. In one of my favorite TED Talks,

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns of the dangers of a single story. She says, “I’ve always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar” (Adichie, 2009). Without being a local to Pakistan, or having ever been there myself, how could I hope to accurately represent the richness and diversity of all of Pakistan? And in teaching a unit that focuses so intensely on one person and her family, how could I ensure that her story did not become representative of all Pakistanis, in the eyes of my students? In just a nine-class unit, this is a daunting task. Here are the steps I took to mitigate the chances that I might misrepresent Pakistani culture:

1. In designing the unit, I consulted several locals, whose opinions I highlighted throughout each lesson. Interestingly, this exercise actually illuminated the nuance within Malala’s own story. Two of my Pakistani friends, with whom I spoke most often while designing the curriculum, disagree sharply about the value that Malala has brought to Pakistan. One sees Malala as a hero, a champion for women’s rights, and a role model for young people. The other has referred to Malala as a “pawn of the West,” a figure whose story has been capitalized upon by white Westerners for ammunition toward their own foreign policy agendas (a view she confronts as well towards the end of the book). Highlighting these two opinions in class helped students to think critically about the text—to see that there’s always more to a story than what’s on the page—and led to a lively debate.
2. To build on this notion, I often reminded students that Malala’s story does not reflect the experience of all girls in Pakistan. This led to an opportunity to briefly explore the difference between biographies and autobiographies. We discussed examples of girls in Pakistan who have not faced barriers to education and examples of people who disagree with Malala’s methods. Here you can see an example of a mind map one of my students created to summarize her reading assignment. She summarizes all of the gender differences described in the text but in a way that suggests uniformity of experience within gender groups. The wide-sweeping generalizations used, including language like “always,” led to a discussion on the importance of acknowledging nuance and differences within various populations. In subsequent classes, when one of us made a broad-stroked claim or assumption about a group of people, someone in the class stepped in to encourage that person to avoid using generalizations.



3. Finally, in an effort to more fully incorporate the triangular approach of relying on the student perspective, teacher perspective, and other resources, I invited more knowledgeable guests to join one of our lessons. Students prepared questions in advance for our guests, who were born and raised in Pakistan, and the guests prodded them, in turn, to think more deeply about how they could relate Malala’s activism to their own passions and experiences. The students loved this class, in particular—jumping off one another with questions both raised by the text and their own research of Pakistan.

The success we’ve seen, five times now, with regard to students’ engagement with this curriculum, knowledge of the Pakistani context, and enthusiasm to become more involved in their communities, demonstrates, to me, the power of the International Inquiry Unit. The Malala unit described here and provided in full in **Appendix B** is not just about improving English abilities; it’s about shifting mindsets, increasing global competencies, and activating youth to realize their potential. Through presenting myself as a learner, alongside my students, also eager to learn about a new culture and context, and through drawing from a diverse set of resources, I felt comfortable exploring these topics with students. It turns out, you don’t have to be a local or to even have traveled to a country to feel capable teaching about that context. Students are eager to connect to and engage with stories from around the world. We just need to provide them with the structure and opportunity to do so.



## Chapter 6

### A Long Walk to Water International Inquiry Curriculum: Building Global Competencies

Written by Codi Caton

#### **Going Global: My three-year journey to the International Inquiry Curriculum**

As an English teacher in rural Ethiopia, I spent every morning slopping through the mud to reach a tiny classroom with cracked desks and a single, warped chalkboard. Tenth-grade students huddled together, rapidly copying the information on the board and practicing a short speaking exercise with me before grabbing their machetes and jerrycans from under their desks and rushing off to work on the farms. At home, mud was still on my mind, with my mud walls, mud floor, and a muddy compound that stained all the chickens' feathers. While trying to clean the mud off of everything, I'd sit with my neighbors as they roasted coffee for us to sip as the sun went down.

Living in Konda, a banana tree-covered village in the Keffa region of southern Ethiopia, allowed me a kind of deep engagement that would forever change how I approach transcultural teaching and learning. Before arriving, I was well acquainted with Ethiopia's long reign as the world's original producer of coffee and one of its top exporters. But there was no way to fully understand the importance of coffee until I had consumed countless tiny cups under the hum of Amharic gossip. I was awoken every morning to sit around the coals with my host family as my newly assigned sister Misret roasted the beans. We would chew on dried barley and repeat the same conversation topics we had for months: the weather, school, family back home. After lunch I'd duck under a grass roof to drink another tiny cup or two with fellow teachers, each of us competing to pay for each other. Again, after dinner and the day's responsibilities finished, I carried my tired body back into my host family's home for another cup, reviewing the day and rocking baby Tsunikal on my knee.

After a year of these thrice daily coffee ceremonies it started to hit me how important this routine was to the people and culture. For Ethiopia, coffee is culture. It's the time of day to connect with those around you, whether that's your boisterous family teasing each other or a stranger discussing politics. Mothers and daughters treat guests with bread and popcorn while the smoke of burnt coffee beans lifts into your lungs. You take a moment to look out at the sky and remember that life is not contained in those seven hours of work. Beyond all the daily benefits of pausing life to share a cup, coffee is a form of national unity.

Ethiopia is an incredibly diverse nation, with 90 ethnic groups and an estimated 83 languages, ranging across a landscape twice the size of Texas. Over the past two centuries, Ethiopia has

fought off colonization and struggled to unify its many peoples under a single flag. Conflict between ethnically charged political groups has been a staple in the country, constantly challenging the unity of a country often regarded as “a symbol of African independence.”<sup>2</sup> In a country where state borders are defined by ethnic background and the prevailing language can seem to change every thirty kilometers, coffee imitates the sun as it pulls everyone into its orbit. Whether walking by the orange and pink hues of an Oromo mosque or the earthen domes of a Tigray church, there is always a woman under a blue tarp selling tiny porcelain cups of coffee for a few cents.

Throughout my almost three years in Ethiopia as a Peace Corps Volunteer, I learned more about its culture, people, mindset, and livelihood than I could ever try to communicate to loved ones at home. Yet, when I returned home to the United States, I found myself bombarded with simple questions that tried to neatly put a bow on my experience. Some of these questions came from a lack of knowing what else to ask, such as “How was Africa?” Others were fueled by misconceptions from popular media, from “So everyone there was poor?” to “Did you see lions?!”

As an Assistant Teacher in my hometown of Lee’s Summit, Missouri, my students were equally enamored and confused by my experience. They wanted to ask questions but felt that they knew too little about Ethiopia (or Africa) to ask. After strong encouragement from students, I made a slideshow and spent two full classes discussing the cultural differences between America and Ethiopia. It was the most energized I had seen the class, especially some of the lowest-performing students. They asked about food, religion, and, of course, dating. We discussed some of the complexities of race and Ethiopian views on the US. I left the class enthralled with the sheer curiosity my students exhibited, but also dismayed at how little students had been taught about the world and their abilities to talk about other cultures and traditions. These students wanted to be global citizens but hadn’t been given the tools.

I still had these thoughts crumbling around my brain when I met Devon Wilson, the founder and CEO of Students for Students, during my first semester as a master’s student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Students for Students offered an opportunity to work with Chinese students, a group I had previously no experience with, and the challenge of adapting salient lessons to an online environment. I joined the team excited to experiment and hone global citizenship pedagogy that seemed so elusive with my previous students. Working with Chinese students to slowly investigate another culture and promote the kind of deep understanding that I gleaned in Ethiopia felt like the kind of transformative learning opportunity that we educators so often strive to create.

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<sup>2</sup> Ethiopia Country Profile - BBC <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13349398>

After reading through several materials, we decided to focus a class on South Sudan and the novel *A Long Walk to Water*. I have since facilitated several semesters worth of courses with Students for Students and have had the joy of walking through this curriculum three times in the past year.

In this chapter, I share the aims and design of the curriculum, positive growth, and challenges in executing the lessons in this International Inquiry Unit focused on South Sudan.

### ***Unit Summary:***

This nine-week curriculum aims to expand students' understanding of South Sudan using Linda Sue Park's novel *A Long Walk to Water* as a base resource. *A Long Walk to Water*, based on the true story of Salva Dut, follows the life of Salva after he is orphaned in the Second Sudanese Civil War. As rebels ransack and viciously murder most of the town while Salva is in school, he flees alone into the forest. Salva must then follow a group of other Dinka (the local ethnic group) as they escape violence and start a new nomadic life. Throughout the novel, Salva encounters several travesties, yet continues to seek safety while also helping others.

Alongside Salva's struggles, the reader learns about Nya, a young Nuer girl who walks several miles every day to carry water for her family. Through the eyes of Salva and Nya, the author captures the struggles of a country divided and the human spirit's will for survival.

### **Unit Overview**

#### **Walking Through Conflict:**

#### **Exploring South Sudanese Culture, Refugee Crisis', and Literature Analysis**

Book: *A Long Walk to Water*

(9 Lessons – 90 Minutes each)

Homework for 3-week semester:

- Approx. 2 chapters of reading per night (45 minutes)
- Some additional tasks as assigned
- Class 2: Presentation on different indigenous groups in South Sudan
- Class 3: The Theme of Your Life drawing and writing activity
- Class 4: Writing about Character Motivation and Empathy Exercise
- Class 9: Color, Symbol, Image thinking routine and final reflections

By the end of this unit:

- a. Students will investigate different ethnic and cultural groups of South Sudan, with an aim to understand and empathize with different groups from the 1980s to today
- b. Students will embrace the complexity of different race/ethnic/religious relations and conflict in Sudan, while considering how this relates to other parts of the world
- c. Students will explore the themes of hope and what it means to give
- d. Students will make claims as to why characters make decisions, using text from the book to support their ideas
- e. Students will consider the different gender roles in South Sudan
- f. Students will look at symbols throughout *A Long Walk to Water* and interpret meanings based off the text, logical reasoning, and intuition

#### Broad Learning Goals:

As with all of our units, Students for Students hopes this unit will:

1. Strengthen students' language confidence through an application based approach--improving their speaking, listening, writing, and reading abilities in English.
2. Improve students' critical thinking skills through providing students opportunities to question, draw comparisons, and reason with evidence.

Classes:

1. **Chapter 1-2:** What is Culture?
2. **Chapters 3-4:** What does it mean to explore a story?
3. **Chapters 5-6:** What is a theme?
4. **Chapters 7-8:** Evaluating Characters Decisions and South Sudan History
5. **Chapters 9-10:** Gender in South Sudan
6. **Chapters 11-12:** Theme Assessment and the Life of Refugees
7. **Chapters 13-14:** Symbols
8. **Chapters 15-16:** What does it mean to give?
9. **Chapters 17-18:** Wrapping up our Learning

## **Part 1: Designing the International Inquiry Unit**

*A Long Walk to Water* follows a young boy during the Sudanese civil war as he travels across South Sudan to reach Ethiopia and later Kenya, looking for his lost family and finding a home in refugee settlements. Considering South Sudan and Ethiopia neighbor each other and share

some of the ethnic groups represented in the novel, I thought this would allow me to share insights with students on living in the region without becoming the teacher with all the answers. Instead, my intent was for the teacher and students to take on the role of mutual learners as we plunged into the intricacies of South Sudan.

## Unit Design

**The unit was specifically designed to be conducted in online Zoom meetings with Chinese high school ESL students, though the format and activities are easily transferable for various audiences and in-person learning.**

While drafting the unit, I again thought back to those students in my hometown who had shown intrigue in global topics yet an absence of skills in discussing global topics and little access to other world views. Why were students only able to see the surface level of another culture and not able to engage meaningfully with global topics? I didn't realize it then, but I was dealing with the same questions and objectives outlined in Teaching for Global Competence, as referenced in Chapter 2.



I wanted students to dig deeper than reporting on a country's population and geographical location. In this class, students should have learning moments on par with my Ethiopian experience: the experience of immersing oneself within a culture. I wanted students to leave class with critical thinking skills along with authentic takeaways similar to seeing coffee as not just an export but a cultural glue bridging identities. Teaching for Global Competence provided

a framework on how to achieve this deeper learning as I drafted the objectives for the curriculum.

<p>Curriculum Goals</p> <p>Students will investigate different ethnic and cultural groups of South Sudan, with an aim to understand and empathize with different groups from the 1980s to today (<i>Invite deep engagements</i>)</p> <p>Students will embrace the complexity of different race/ethnic/religious relations and conflict in Sudan, while considering how this relates to other parts of the world (<i>Embody local and global connections</i>)</p> <p>Students will make claims as to why characters make decisions, using text from the book to support their ideas (Invite disciplinary and interdisciplinary grounding)</p>
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With these Global Competency goals in mind, the rest of the curriculum design was influenced by the dichotomy of what I hoped students would think *with* and think *about*. The philosophy and routines explained further below derive from *Making Thinking Visible* (Ritchhart, 2011)..

Thinking about	Thinking with
<p>The content students are expected to interact with and remember.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Dates and key players in The American Revolutionary War</p> <p>Main characters and settings in <i>The Great Gatsby</i></p>	<p>The lenses and critical thinking routines students use to analyze and interact with content.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Identifying how key players affected each other in the American Revolutionary War; asking questions about the war's effect on the global community</p> <p>The various lenses used to analyze <i>The Great Gatsby</i>; ability to use evidence to support interpretations of the novel</p>

Too many of our education structures prioritize the sending and receiving of information: we teach students about the Revolutionary War so that they can fill in the correct bubble answering the year that it started on a standardized test. As Ritchhart explains, educators should be focused on both what students think *about* and what they think *with*; in other words, what lenses are students using to analyze different topics, or “what kinds of thinking do you value and want to promote in your classroom?” (*Making Thinking Visible*, 5) While students are encouraged to learn as much as possible about South Sudan, they are more so encouraged to see perspectives considering gender, race, and economic conditions, while also practicing critical academic and real-world skills. For example, in the second class, students are asked to do research on a specific ethnic group in South Sudan and prepare a short presentation. These presentations focus on the ethnic group’s beliefs and traditions, common culinary practices, art, etc. Students complete this project using the Think-Puzzle-Explore thinking routine (Ritchhart, 2011). This routine promotes scaffolded critical thinking: students must first reflect on their background knowledge (what they think they know about the topic), then ask themselves what puzzles or curiosities they have - or where there might be holes in their understanding, and finally they generate ideas on how they can learn more. On top of flexing these *thinking with* muscles (questioning, uncovering the complexity of topics), they are honing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (Reimers, 2016), such as speaking and giving feedback as they present and interact with peers. Students are also deeply engaged with the content and *thinking about* South Sudan as they learn concrete information about various cultures including the traditions, values, and religion of the Dinka, Nuer, and Zande.

As students progress through the book, we venture to perceive South Sudanese culture, historical events, and the novel through different lenses. Much of this is driven by discussion, but students also complete research, presentations, and other work outside of class that help to synthesize learning and develop interdisciplinary skills. In the fifth week we focus primarily on how gender is portrayed, analyzing what we notice from the book, what we find from other sources, and how this compares to our own culture’s gender identities and norms. Later in the unit, we discuss Salva’s experience as a refugee and similarities with the current refugee crisis. We take this opportunity to examine videos that show perspectives from refugees as they ask for assistance throughout Europe and from governments who are steadfast in their position to prioritize their citizens over refugees. These topics are not always easy to discuss, especially for second language learners, but through carefully scaffolded thinking routines and deep engagement, growth in language and critical thinking skills has been evident in each class.

## Part 2: Implementing the Unit and Analyzing Student Experiences

### Positive Growth

Tray (all students' names have been changed) is a Chinese middle schooler who doesn't know how to not smile and answers every "How are you?" with "I'm happy today because...". He is the ideal example of a student who can exhibit incredible growth in an International Inquiry course because, like many students, Tray hasn't had much exposure to other cultures and histories. When I asked him on the first day of class to describe what he knows about South Sudan or Africa, he responded that the people "are all poor because they don't know how to grow rice." I include this not to mock or belittle Tray, but to highlight the lack of global understanding with which many students enter class.

Throughout the course, Tray expanded upon his knowledge of South Sudan while also practicing critical thinking skills such as conducting research, uncovering complexity, and considering different viewpoints. When Tray presented on the Nuer tribe in South Sudan, he noted a long history of the importance of cattle, which was even used as currency. On his own volition, Tray then explained that this reliance on cattle was due to an often harsh and dry environment and that when people went hungry it was mostly due to droughts.

During a discussion on gender, he claimed that boys and girls in South Sudan have vastly different lives, but that gender differences in China were negligible. Another student respectfully challenged this idea, noting the remnants of practices such as foot-binding, parents' obsession with birthing boys, and the gender income gap. Tray wasn't convinced. He gleamed a warm-hearted smile and claimed that boys and girls are the same.

At this crucial learning moment, I realized that it was imperative that I resist the constant tug as an educator to put an answer in the student's ear. It would have been easy to tell Tray that, well, males and females clearly do not live within the same cultural structure. But inquiry-based learning and visible thinking routines are not designed to give answers and dictate correct opinions; they are created to challenge everyone to think critically.

I took this opportunity to push the conversation further. We spent the next 20 minutes mapping out what we think a South Sudanese boy does each hour of the day based on our knowledge from the book and previous research, and then did the same for a South Sudanese girl and a Chinese boy and girl. What time does a young South Sudanese girl wake up, and what does she do after breakfast? What does the average Chinese boy do once he gets home from school? This conversation challenged all of us to put ourselves in another person's shoes, resulting in everyone stretching their empathy muscles and Tray changing his course of thought. He later reflected that he assumed girls and boys had similar experiences because he



had been taught to treat everyone equally and genuinely wanted everyone to be equal, but that it was more complicated than that: him wanting it to be true didn't mean it was true. Tray had started to move from seeing everything through solely the lens of a young Chinese boy, to a more empathetic and critical thinking global citizen - a monumental learning moment.

Tray was not the only student to experience major learning moments. Jenny also started to build a more complex understanding of how gender is portrayed in China and across the world, thus sparking a deep desire to be a part of the conversation. She now mentions how she wants her future work to help break social stigmas against Chinese girls. Zhong discovered that he often looked at conflicts with a natural inclination to find someone to blame. As an example, he mentioned how easy it is to blame Nazi Germany for World War II, but that the conflict in the book is much more complex with many intertwining factors. Following this reflection, I pushed Zhong to consider how we might be missing some complexity in the story of how World War II started, such as Germany's recovery from World War I, offering us a chance to further explore the topic. These reflections are not uncommon for 12 to 15-year-old students in our explorations, though they have the ring of university-level learning. The International Inquiry Unit gives students the much-needed time, differing viewpoints, and scaffolded routines to drastically mature in their thinking.

## Challenges

While student growth is visible in every class, there are always challenges in practicing such wide-ranged and nuanced skills. In the exploration of *A Long Walk to Water*, most of the challenges result from a limited understanding of conflict and a lack of academic materials on South Sudan.

First, the book is incredibly heart-wrenching. Salva is orphaned as a young boy, forced to walk miles each day to escape violence, and is subjected to devastating loss. Based on the true story of Salva Dut, the novel shows the real-life consequences of war, which can be emotionally exhausting for anyone, especially younger students. Asking young students to read and learn about a disastrous civil war should be taken extremely seriously, and educators should design stop gaps to ensure that all students are emotionally supported during and after class. In my classes, I've attempted to account for these challenges by spending some extra time during our one-on-one meetings to inspect how the content is affecting students and their mood. On days that are extra-sad and difficult, we end class with some South Sudanese music and giggle as we all try to sing along.

Additionally, we strive to point out to students the immense beauty and value in the culture that thrived during and after conflict. While atrocities are common in the book, we can also look at the shared meals and communal living emphasized in the novel. Soldiers kill and pillage,

but there is immense hope in Salva's dedication in leading hundreds of refugee boys to safety and providing safe drinking water to villages.

Second, discussing conflict with younger students can be challenging not only because of its emotional toll, but also due to its immense complexity. While the novel highlights the centuries-old feud between the Dinka and Nuer tribes, the thrust of the story focuses on the brutal Second Sudanese Civil War, a conflict that lasted from 1983-2005, often believed to be a continuation of the First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972), and escalated (at least partly) due to religious differences and the government's quest for oil. Like all civil wars, there is not one clean and easy answer for its cause, the differing sides' prerogatives, or its result.

Obviously, it was much more complex and nuanced than can be described in a few sentences. Students in middle or high school may struggle to embrace this complexity while they are trying to learn about the country and conflict, but also may inaccurately lay blame to certain parties. In one class, a student strongly believed that the Dinka and Nuer feuds made up the prime conflict in the Second Sudanese Civil War. To challenge these misconceptions, I assigned students a research project to further analyze the conflict. Students were instructed to come back to class with quotes or direct evidence to discuss the causes and parties of the Second Sudanese Civil War. As students shared their findings, we used a Connect-Extend-Challenge thinking routine (useful for activating pre-existing knowledge and considering new take-aways). I invited them to consider how our learning "connected" with our exploration from the book and in what ways it "extended" or "challenged" our understanding of the book. This allowed me to push students beyond these misconceptions without handing them any answers. In the end, we want students to come to their own conclusions, but to do so using solid reasoning and evidence.

Finally, exploring South Sudan's culture and context outside of the book can be challenging due to the lack of free resources. South Sudan is a young country, having gained independence in 2011, and most resources available concern the antiquated Sudan nation state. The fledgling nation has a relatively small presence in global consciousness and media. While this exemplifies the dire need of curriculum on South Sudan, it can be challenging to find resources in different modes (visual, auditory, etc) for students to broaden their learning.

### **The End of Class and the Beginning of Wonder**

Despite the numerous challenges, the process of reading Salva's story and weaving through the intricacies of South Sudan is always a rich and meaningful experience. At the end of the unit, we practice a simple routine where students and teacher reflect on how our thinking has changed since the beginning of the exploration. Using the prompt "I used to think \_\_\_\_\_. Now I think \_\_\_\_\_." We share the major breakthroughs in our learning. Every semester I am amazed at the deep level of reflection shown in the concluding class. Students

note their markedly more nuanced view of South Sudanese, comment on their shifting and complicated views of war, or express a rejuvenated interest in reading.

Throughout the various reflections, students are consistently looking closer to the core of their thinking and learning journey. Students don't leave class with just the ability to report to parents the size, population, and major exports of South Sudan. Rather, students finish the course with a transformed position on how conflict starts, why poverty exists in many contexts, the responsibility of countries to host refugees, new reflections on their gender identity within their own country, and countless other complex positions.

I've had to come to terms with the fact that no nine-week course will create the change in thought and values the way that Ethiopia left its fingerprints all over my consciousness. Instead, the International Inquiry Units push students to shed their skin of simplified and locally bound thinking and start to see the colors of the world through critical lenses. Students should leave with a fresh sense of wonder and consciousness for the planet and all its people, pulling them closer to lifelong learning.

Those endless coffee rituals in Ethiopia were not valuable simply because I left with observations. Sitting for hours with my host family, watching the sunset over acacias while learning jokes in Amharic lifted me to a plane of constant fascination. Surrounded by darkness and the deep shadows of trees, only flimsy solar lamps lit our smiles as we drank yet another tiny porcelain cup of coffee. In the darkness it was easier to realize how far removed this world was from my last, yet how comfortable I had grown with my new family. Baby Tsinukal pawed at me to lift her into the air. Misret grinned with every mispronounced word I attempted. The tiny village of Konda was a world unto itself, and I couldn't conceive of how many pockets of culture, family, and pure life just like this one are glowing across the planet. I plan on soaking up these gleaming moments, and I hope students do too.

## Chapter 7

### Exploring Poetry from Around the World

Written by Tanya Kant

#### Why choose poetry?

Poetry as an artform has always earned notoriety for its exclusivity. Historically, it was the form that found patronage in the noble courts while prose was relegated to be most suitable for the gentlefolk. Although such hierarchies have dissolved over the centuries, and the poetic tradition has undergone numerous revisions in terms of style and access, it still stands out in the modern literary world as a form that feels more elusive than its prosaic counterpart. Readers are a lot less likely to pick up an anthology of Maya Angelou's greatest works over Agatha Christie's many thrillers in a time of leisure. The situation is also quite worrisome when we look at the rigid ways in which poetry often finds itself represented in school curriculums, and the limited opportunities that learners get to meaningfully engage with the form.

Evidence suggests that poetry can be a great medium to study the linguistic and conceptual components of a language. It has also been linked with improving fluency and comprehension for elementary students<sup>3</sup>. Accounts from high-school educators have listed poetry to be an effective tool to build speaking and listening comprehension skills<sup>4</sup>, which can be especially useful in ESL classrooms. Studying the composition can also help readers get a grasp on precise diction and various literary devices. More importantly, poetry can be a rewarding medium to delve into self-expression. Given these priors, exploring the poetic form to make it accessible for the learners in an online setting seemed to be a venture worth exploring.

We were also motivated to explore a learning unit based on poetry using the SFS model as it brings together a flipped classroom space, extended lesson time and incorporates learning routines in the process, thereby keeping the learning space student-centric. Making room for student-led discussion, interpretation and exchange of ideas all can enrich the study of poetry.

#### Unit Vision

The vision behind the poetry unit is to take the students on a transcultural journey around the world through the medium of poetry. Each week, the students are introduced to a new theme—a certain emotion, a state of being, an angle of story-telling and responses to common phenomenon—which is then explored through the lens of three poets writing from different parts of the world. The idea is to create a space for the students to engage with the same topic from multiple perspectives, thereby allowing them to develop a more complex understanding of the content.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1046&context=gerjournal>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/04/why-teaching-poetry-is-so-important/360346/>

Another goal of the unit is to be mindful of making the portfolio of poets as diverse as possible. This is a key consideration to give the students a chance to engage with a variety of voices and contexts—from modernism to postcolonialism, from Maya Angelou to Agha Shahid Ali—without having to enroll in a literature class at a university. The focus is to capture the complexities of our world through the selection of poets. There is also the hope that through giving students opportunities to write and create alongside the exposure to such a variety of voices, the students will develop their own voice as writers and thinkers.

Branching from that strain, the final goal is to lean the unit heavily towards exploring different mediums of self-expression. The unit contains creations that fall under the broader umbrella of poetic expression but approach the process through different forms. This means making traditional compositions share the space with confessional writing, free verse, spoken word and even song lyrics. The hope is for the students to have a chance to explore their personal narratives in the final performance task in a voice with which they most identify. By sharing thoughts, ideas, interpretations and feedback over the weeks with a tight-knit community of peers, there is also an expectation to build trust and a sense of community within the class space, which should help the students to express themselves with greater freedom and vulnerability.

### **Unit Design and Challenges**

The unit is designed while keeping access and relevance for the students as the central concerns. Seven themes were chosen for in-depth exploration:

- Identity and heritage
- Hope and healing
- Bilingualism
- Bittersweetness
- Discrimination, displacement and belonging
- Self-belief
- Humor

The chosen themes can be connected overarchingly to the reality of an adolescent ESL learner. While themes around identity, self-belief, bittersweetness and hope are more commonly associated with the experiences of a middle- and high-school student, other themes like displacement and migration are included to expand engagement with global concerns.

A key challenge here was to balance introduction to new forms and themes to push learners' thinking while retaining the element of relatability. Reflecting on my time working with first-generation ESL learners, one of the biggest struggles that often tormented my class of forty-five was to be driven to pick up a story with unfamiliar themes in the first place! The motivation would easily wear out if even after toiling through the tiresome business of deciphering sentence structures and grammar, they still could not fully grasp the narrative since it was twice removed from their reality. This unit hopes to address this by being mindful of the

poetic voices included, and through introspective questions that encourage the students to think closely about the relevance of the theme in their own contexts.

Going deeper into the design component, the unit follows the trademark flipped classroom approach, where the lessons are designed such that students read the assigned poems with guiding questions, along with brief author descriptions and any additional readings, or precursory learning opportunities before the lesson. The approach encourages students to build confidence in their own interpretation of the work. The main lesson is then designed with the objective to supplement the students' understanding by introducing additional complex, provocative or local-to-global centered questions for discussion, as well as additional resources, adding opportunities for students to further their thinking and better understand the stories intertwined with the pieces of poetry we are examining. The idea behind this component is to layer the students' understanding by drawing intrapersonal and interpersonal connections.

A core component of the design is the final performance task. The students, along with the instructor, develop a personal piece of writing over the course, slowly incorporating new information around poetic forms, literary devices and voice to explore a theme they feel closest to. The motivation behind creating this task was simple: to have the teachers actively take part in what they expected the students to accomplish. For the students, seeing their teacher go on the journey with them could be a great motivator for taking greater risks and expressing with greater authenticity and vulnerability in their original composition.

### **Lesson Excerpt**

Theme: Identity and heritage

Objective: Students will be able to articulate the role of memory and shared traditions in shaping identity

#### Readings

Poet	Poem
Joy Harjo	<a href="#">Remember</a>
Adrienne Su	<a href="#">Peaches</a>
Li-Young Lee	<a href="#">I Ask My Mother to Sing</a>

### Guiding Questions

<b>Remember</b>	<b>Peaches</b>	<b>I Ask My Mother to Sing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who do you think the poet is speaking to?</li><li>• What according to you is the central message the poet wants the person to know?</li><li>• Why do you think remembrance is so important to the poet?</li><li>• What values is the poet associating with the idea of remembering?</li><li>• After reading the poem, how would you interpret the African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child”?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• List two traditions that the poet’s family followed that interlaced their Chinese heritage with their suburban American life.</li><li>• How do you think the poet feels about having these different traditions in her house? Support with at least one piece of evidence.</li><li>• What can you say about the poet’s parents from the poem? What does this tell you about the experience of immigration?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What role does memory play for the poet’s family?</li><li>• Why do you think the poet’s mother and grandmother continue to sing at the end?</li><li>• Why do you think the poet likes to hear the song even when it makes his mother and grandmother cry?</li><li>• Why do you think the image of the waterlilies is important/relevant for the poem?</li></ul>

### Lesson

#### Pre-Class

- Read the excerpt about the poet’s background then read the poem with the help of the guiding questions. Note your responses to the guiding questions as you read. (Note: For some classes we will withhold the identity of the poets, exploring students’ initial interpretations and impressions before examining background information about the poets - in certain instances, such a process helps prevent bias that may come with seeing the backgrounds beforehand.)

#### During Class

#### *Poem Discussion*

- Common reading of the poems. Which one stood out to the students? Why?
- What is common in the three poems? How do they differ?
- What stands out visually when you look at each of the three poems? Discuss how you can know the type of poem (sonnet, haiku) by looking at the length and structure itself.
- Review the role of memory in all three poems. How do the poets link memory and traditions with identity?
- Discuss the background of the three poets. Discuss why remembrance and heritage is an important theme for a Native American poet, a Chinese American poet and a Chinese-Indonesian poet.
- What is the role of memory for people who migrate from one country to another or from villages to the city?

### *Performance Task Discussion*

- This is the first class when the students get introduced to the final performance task--creating their own pieces of poetry. The students, as well as the teacher, will ideate and flesh out a piece of poetry over the course run, culminating with a final presentation in the last week.
- Initiate a discussion on the themes that the students would like to write about and encourage introspection on the reasons why the theme is close to them.

### *Independent Work (homework)*

- Think of a story that has been passed down in your family or a tradition that your family follows. What do you like about it? Who are the people involved in it? Write a small paragraph to describe it. You can add pictures or inputs from any family members if you'd like.

### **A Final Note- Defining Success**

Success for this unit, included in **Appendix D**, should not be defined as absolute mastery over the poetic form. Instead, it should fall more into the realm of deeper critical engagement and an improved level of comfort and enjoyment with both poetry and the English language. Like any educational investment, it would be unwise to expect quick results or sudden paradigm shifts from a single unit. However, if at the end of the course, the students are able to take a step back and reason through a challenge from multiple perspectives, ask questions that signal deeper meditation on the theme, expand their avenues for self-expression, or if they are able to absorb the newer vocabulary or stylism into their own work, that should be a cause for jubilation.

But the best sign of success? Watching the learner reach for the dusty copy of Keats' odes or another book of beloved poetry the next time they find themselves with time to spare!



*"I was in China in 2007, at the first party-approved science fiction and fantasy convention in Chinese history. And at one point I took a top official aside and asked him Why? SF had been disapproved of for a long time. What had changed?"*

*It's simple, he told me. The Chinese were brilliant at making things if other people brought them the plans. But they did not innovate and they did not invent. They did not imagine. So they sent a delegation to the US, to Apple, to Microsoft, to Google, and they asked the people there who were inventing the future about themselves. And they found that all of them had read science fiction when they were boys or girls."<sup>5</sup>*

*-Neil Gaiman, Writer*

*The case in the following chapter is a bit different from the previous International Inquiry Units, focusing on a play-based, improv-based writing unit that involves an epic battle. . . .*

## **Chapter 8**

### **Dungeons, Dragons, Superheroes and the TOEFL - Imagination Based Role Play and English Teaching**

Written by Devon Wilson

I had heard previously of an especially engaging Harvard French class that had students role-play a character over the course of the semester. A student would assume the role of a baker, or a banker, or one of many positions and write a backstory for their character in the language. Then, as students learned new grammar and sentence structures, they would apply them in different scenarios where different characters in the community crossed paths. Although I never had a chance to see these groups in person, the idea of such groups planted a seed about how playful improv might be beneficial to language learning.

In my second year with the Students for Students program, I started playing once every other week with a Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) group. In D&D, each gathering is prepared by a Dungeon Master, someone who envisions what sorts of things and landscapes players (often a group of 2-5 people) may come across in the quest for that night. How players react to the creatures encountered - some friend, some foe, some unknown - is totally up to them. I'm the newest member of the group, and in playing with this group of four other characters, I've been astonished by how similar the nature of the game is to an "improv troop" who will create the performance as they go, acting off of each other and occasional suggestions from the audience. Each player gets extremely into their character, sticking closely to the way they would act in different situations. For example, Wakzaam, the half dwarf who is all about honor will sometimes get into fights with others about his own pride, the pride of the group, or the pride of certain causes he supports. My character's name is Daigoth the Barbarian, an orphaned child raised by an arms dealer who now travels with the group. He's fairly self absorbed, and a bit of

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<sup>5</sup> **Neil Gaiman: Why our future depends on libraries, reading and daydreaming**

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/oct/15/neil-gaiman-future-libraries-reading-daydreaming>

an undercover adrenaline junkie, but ultimately an increasingly loyal member of the group (often implicitly).

By the winter of 2020, for a good period of time I'd thought about how these types imagination-based/play-based experiences could be used to support intermediate and advanced groups of language learners, hoping that they could lead to a very engaging and fun unit for students. Certain types of Sci-fi and fantasy have become increasingly popular in China over the last few years, but western-style fantasy (wizards and swords) and Dungeons and Dragons are both pretty much unknown and unexplored in the Chinese context. I figured it would be hard to engage them using wizards and barbarians, which initially kept me from attempting to design such a learning experience.

When the coronavirus hit and students first went into home-based lockdown in China, I found myself having to develop curriculum at a much faster pace than we previously had (previously creating 1 or 2 units every 3 months). Our 2 weeks of winter classes expanded into 12+ weeks because we had students who had been quarantined for the full 12. One night I sat, thinking hard about how we could bring this type of experience to the classroom for a group of students I had already worked with for a month plus. Suddenly it came to me, "Superheroes!" Coming off of the triple smash hits of the Avenger series in China and celebration of basically everything Marvel over the past decade, superheroes are still pretty much in that unique spot where they are loved by nearly all, regardless of age, gender, or anything else. Over the last month I had worked with three types of writing, and I wanted to somehow integrate each of them into the unit, mixed with some playful banter and battle:

- i. Storytelling Based Writing (narrative writing)
- ii. Individual TOEFL Essay Writing (i.e., In 5 paragraphs, explain why you agree or disagree with a given stance, such as "Students benefit from taking a year off between high school and college.")
- iii. Integrated TOEFL Essay Writing (i.e., Consider two opposing views (one written, one spoken) – where three points are made about a topic – write an essay summarizing the two points of view and where they contrast.)

The first type of essay writing matched up easily. As Harvard Professor and Speech Coach to Obama, Marshall Ganz<sup>6</sup> once shared, "There is a reason why the origin story issue of superhero comics are always the most popular." We naturally love to hear the Story of Self. So this is where things started. At the end of our last class before the superhero unit, I asked students, "Have you ever considered what superpower you would have if you could pick one?" Students' faces lit up, "Yeah!" a couple of them said. I was instantly excited to hear their input, but I held off and shared the following, "For the next few classes – we're going to try to use our imagination to role play and interact with each other based on characters we create. Here is the background and what you need to prepare:"

The unit began with the following:

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<sup>6</sup> Marshall Ganz, Via Personal Communication September 2016

“You are a young teenage superhero growing up in the town where you live today (there’s also a chance that you may be from another planet, another dimension, etc. – you decide). You have never revealed your superpowers to anyone publicly. When you arrive home one day, a hologram briefly appears, and it says to you, “We are recruiting persons with spectacular abilities and a calling for Justice. You’ve been summoned to the “Excelsior League of Justice.” When you arrive, **“we will tell you our story, but first you must tell us yours! Meet tomorrow at 18 Appian Way.”** You’ve heard rumors of such an amazing league, and you are amazed that they have sought you out. You think to yourself, “I really need to represent my story well so they will accept me, and you set out to write immediately.”

Task: Write a 1-2 page story about your superhero origin story. In one or more paragraphs, explain where you are from and your earliest childhood memories. In two or more paragraphs, describe the exact moment when you received your superpowers, take us there with a “Ba-Da-Bing”<sup>7</sup> – what were you doing, what did you see, what did you think? Then, in two or more paragraphs, take us to a moment where you learned more about your powers or were challenged to use them.”

When students came to the next class, I wasn’t quite sure where things would go with this. I read the following to set the scene:

“You walk down Appian way – a street on the outskirts of town you had only walked down once or twice before. You arrive at an old mansion that appears to be abandoned and think to yourself, “Why have I never noticed this place before? It’s beautiful although clearly abandoned.” You knock on the door - no response. You walk through the tall grass around the building, just making sure you’re not missing anything. As you approach the house, the woman you saw from the hologram appears suddenly – “Key’s under the mat” – then she flashes away. You reach under the mat, put the key into the back door, and as you enter into the small room at the entrance of the house, suddenly a light scans your face, the room around you turns blue, and you’re shot down an elevator, going deep underground. When the elevator doors open, you find yourself in a massive underground chamber, with white marble pillars, the front of a huge door. As you enter into the front door, you see a few figures sitting at a table in the center of the room, and you hear a few others coming in behind you. A few figures come in with you from different elevators, and a deep voice says, “Welcome to the Hall of Justice” – state your story!!!!”

Students were shy and a bit playful at first, “I didn’t want to come here”, “that’s alright, I don’t want to join, I don’t need to share.” And I playfully jested back, “Nonsense – you have long heard of the Excelsior League of Justice, and you realize what a wonderful opportunity this is!” Before long I was so happy we had chosen this topic. In previous classes, I’d asked students to write about a moment of their life around the Coronavirus, about the story of the family, but by far, this was the most engaged and most detailed I had seen them write.

One student, Accelerator, shared about how he learned he could control different vectors and matters when a student in class once shot a rubber band at him, and he was able to reflect it in

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<sup>7</sup> Trailofbreadcrumbs.net Video: Ba-Da-Bings--Or Getting Your Reader to See Things the Way You Do

a moment of fear without actually touching it. Accelerator, although not physically strong, had a natural interest in physics, which guided the use of his powers. Later, his friend was confronted by a gunman in the supermarket, and, when Accelerator hit the gunman's hand, he unintentionally changed the blood flow and broke the robber's hand.

One student, Musicueller, wrote about how she is able to telepathically transmit music into the minds of others when she has an instrument. She also has an intuition into the deeds of others and described a minute when she was playing piano at her house and learned that a visiting guest was actually secretly a serial killer.

The other three students' abilities and stories were detailed as well, concerning their abilities to talk to animals (Sahara), use Naruto-like chakra abilities (Sake), and control ice and snow (Elstella). Describing the specifics of their backgrounds and features challenged each student's vocabulary and storytelling abilities.

I too, Captain Insano (trying to pick a goofy name and somehow found myself thinking of the film, *The Waterboy*, for the first time in 15 years), had the following story of my own background to tell:

*"I don't remember much from my childhood. My first memories were of being alone. I raised myself alone on the streets of New York. I would sleep in a warm sewer duct I had come across, where steam from the subway systems would ventilate. At nights I would be immersed with steam and I couldn't see more than a few inches in front of me most nights. From a young age I learned that I was agile. I could sneak away food from a cart and the owner would never notice. And, if they did, I could easily get away in seconds.*

*One day, I was bored and was running around a field on the outskirts of town. I looked up and saw a person watching me closely from the side of the field. He called to me but I thought to myself, "I better lose this creep" and ran away. He came back to the field several times but I would stay out of range and far away from him, playing on my own. One day, when I returned to the spot, a new soccer ball, jersey and letter was left where I often went to play – "Consider coming to play for the Brooklyn Jets. Meet me at the Jets' Stadium office if you're interested." After much back and forth, I went and, before long, began to play on the team where I adapted to the game of soccer very quickly despite never having played. That's when I discovered I had a powerful dash. I could charge forward with a momentary burst of steam and knock over any player, even some of the adults we played with.*

*Before long, I was noticed again, not by a better team but by the government. I was trained to run supplies, materials and top secret messages in dangerous areas. Eventually, I became jaded by the realities of war and decided to break away from things, starting a justice league – the Excelsior League of Justice!"*

After sharing their stories, consistent with practice of Dungeons and Dragons, I gave them a few minutes of unstructured time to chat and improvise with one another while Captain Insano left the room to deliberate whether their stories and powers were adequate to be considered for the League.

I was again surprised by how enthusiastic students were. Students wanted to know specific details about each other's characters, things like where each of them was from and their favorite foods. One student was particularly interested in the vector control abilities of Accelerator:

"I can't change the whole world's physical rules. I can just choose one thing and change it."

"You can change directions on the force's direction? Because if you change the gravity, you can fly on the ceiling."

"Yes."

"So do it!"

"Yeah, I'm flying!"

"You mean your whole house is flying?"

"Yeah, the house is now flying in the sky."

And with that, the estate of the Excelsior League of Justice took air and became a hovering fortress.

Before long, Captain Insano returned, and said "I was just talking with the group, and . . . unfortunately . . . I think none of you will be accepted to join the Excelsior League of Justice. But I will give you a chance . . . to write an essay where you can agree or disagree with this position. . . And then we can either let you off, or you can stay in the flying fortress."

Students were challenged with the following prompt:

*"As was stated at the end of class – "You have not been accepted to the League of Justice. This is a good idea. Do you agree or disagree?" In an individual essay format, respond to whether you agree or disagree. Some tips for writing your intro, main paragraphs and conclusion are included in the image below. At the start of our next session, you will share with us your writing, and I will make a final decision about whether or not you have been accepted to the League of Justice based upon your input."*

**Video Clip:**

A clip of the story telling of one student, the exchange between students in the free discussion, and the lead into the argumentative essay:

<https://youtu.be/WD73Y6sUvac>

I figured it would be seen as a bit cheesy that students were being asked to write an essay again in this imagination-based game, but there was still an air of fun and silliness that made them engaged to partake in this task as well. Before leaving, we took the opportunity to discuss structuring a 5-paragraph argumentative essay and best practices for individual sections.

On the return to class, humorously, 3 students agreed with my decision that it would probably be best if they were not accepted into the league so that they may return to school for now. One student, Sahara wrote,

*“Doctor Insano told me that I’ve not been accepted by the League of Justice. It’s a very wise choice, I definitely agree with it. I’ll explain the reason from two points.*

*First, your information’s are not being transparent. I know nothing about your “League of Justice”, What if you are a terrorist organization? What if you wanna kidnap me? I didn’t even know who you are and what you are. But I came, with great courage I came to your underground base, and I was totally shocked. Your main base is underground, which means you are 80 percent illegal. Have you seen any underground legal army organizations except researching and development centers? And the other 19.99 percent possibility is that your organization’s mission is so dangerous that you didn’t even want people to know. So that led us to the safety problem. If I joined your organization, and remember I’m a 12-year-old, and I’m killed by the enemies, who’ll pay the allowance? ...Your non-transparency informations made me scared and make you very informal.*

*Second, I’m not powerful enough to defend the enemies. What I’m good at is actually learning and reading, and I don’t know how these “superpowers” could help me defend the enemies, which are always muscle men, muscle men and muscle women. I admit that I did have the superpower to talk to animals, but what could that help? I haven’t even practiced it.*

*I always stand on the right and justice side, but until now, I don’t know who you are or what you are, if you let me know and give me a formal training program, then maybe I’ll think about it.”*

One student fought the decision saying she was ready:

*“Hi, I’m Musicueller. After being rejected, I feel confused about this decision. I don’t agree with the idea that I can’t be accepted by the league of justice. . . .*

*Thirdly, my strength is that my power is nearly invisible. A stranger can’t recognize whether I’m using my power or not. They can’t tell if I’m singing or pretending. And when the song loop in their head, they still don’t know where it comes from. Isn’t it terrific?!*

*All in all, I really think that you need to reconsider accepting me, i have the ideal ability of identifying the bad guys, having great potentials and can invisibly using power. What do you think so?"*

Again, I had a 100% participation and 100% completion for both essays so far. All essays served as great starts for a 5-paragraph argumentative essay, but also left some room for deeper discussion, such as how they could strengthen their conclusion or make clear their argument for certain points.

I prepared for the fact that some students may argue for why they shouldn't be accepted by telling those students that they showed the most important virtue of all-- "humility"--and they were accepted! Students humorously played back, "no!!!", questioning me about who I had been talking to, saying that no one was actually there when I consulted with my advisors. I jested back that only those with extraordinary abilities could see them.

Before long, we switched to having some fun, engaging with our first battle.

#### **Battle Rules:**

I came up with fairly simplified rules for this fighting style, inspired by the battle rules for Dungeons and Dragons (which are actually fairly complicated involving 15+ different stats, 6 different dice, etc.) We simplified things down to 3 stats:

- i. Athletics/Strength: 3/6
- ii. Intelligence/Wisdom: 3/6
- iii. Charisma: 3/6

Students had two extra points they could add to any one stat. For example, Accelerator was not physically strong or Charismatic so added his two points to Intelligence:

Athletics/Strength: 3/6  
Intelligence: 5/6  
Charisma: 3/6

In this case, there are generally three types of scenarios for what Accelerator can do during his turn.

1. If he attacks, tries to jump up to a high ledge, or do anything physical like this, he needs to "**do an athletics/strength/attack check**" where a 6-sided dice (normal dice) would be rolled. Since he has a 3/6 athletic/strength stat, a 1, 2 or 3 would be successful, and a 4/5/6 would fail. If he were attacking and rolled a 3, he would do 3 damage to another player; 2 would do 2 damage; and 1 would do 1 damage.

(Note: Each character has 10 health points (hp). Each time a player is attacked in battle, if the attack is successful, the damage is subtracted from their health points. For example, Accelerator attacked a character and rolled a 3, 3 points would be subtracted from the health points of that player. In the event Accelerator was hit by 2 damage from another player, his

health points would decrease from 10, down to 8. If a player's health points go to zero or below zero, the player passes out during the battle is no longer active in combat. At the end of a battle, all characters on the winning team are revived to full hit points).

2. If Accelerator wanted to check if he understood the weakness of a creature or the way something was made for instance, he would roll an **Intelligence check**. Since he is strong in this area (5/6), rolling a 1-5 would succeed, but a 6 would fail. A lower roll (e.g., 1 or 2) would mean he knows a little bit, a higher role (e.g., 4 or 5) would mean he's an expert.

3. If Accelerator wanted to convince somebody, he would do a **Charisma Check**. Since he has 3/6 charisma, rolling a 1-3 would succeed, but a 4-6 would fail. A lower role (e.g. 1 or 2) would mean he barely convinced someone or the person may be up for talking to him, a 3 would mean he was fairly persuasive/charismatic.)

And for perhaps the most important rule – have fun and roll with things! The rules provided here are more meant to be guidelines to support play, shared improvisation and creativity, rather than being a strict pattern that dictates player action.

**A Character Tracking and Battle Tracking Sheet has been provided in Appendix E to assist with the documentation of character features and the tracking of battles.**

*Note: In the description of the final battle towards the end of this essay, there is a video clip of a portion of that battle. In it, you can see students doing multiple athletics/strength/attack checks and even an intelligence check (regarding summoning a snake).*

This first battle was meant to be a warm-up round with little instruction, just wanting to see how students would improvise in battle. *“As you enter into the chamber, two flying jet powered drone-like robots fly around the room. The door slams shut behind you, and one of them fires a laser at each of you. You each take 1 damage.”*

I shared my screen using the whiteboard feature to show the stats for each student with 10 health points(hp) and the 12 health points for each robot. (The screen could also be shared to a Battle Tracking sheet found in Appendix E). The first robot attacked with a widespread laser attack successfully rolling a 1. One health point was subtracted to each student, and suddenly they were down to 9 health points.

Team A:	
1. Name: Accelerator	HP 10 – 1
2. Name: Muscular	HP 10 – 1
3. Name: Sahara	HP 10 – 1
4. Name: Sake	HP 10 – 1
Team B	
1. Name: Robot 1	HP 12 –
2. Name: Robot 2	HP 12 –



Students then went in the order that their names were written. On a student's turn, they could attack, do a movement, try to convince the robots, learn about them, etc. Honestly, I wasn't sure what they'd do, since they'd never been exposed to this type of game play. Students hesitated at first, but before long Musicular and Accelerator both decided to attack, but their rolls (with a virtual dice) were unsuccessful. Sake, however, rolled a 3, hitting one of the robots successfully with a burst of mental flame doing 3 damage. Sahara tried to summon a dinosaur with her animal powers, but, since those powers were previously unstated in her background story, no dinosaur appeared in the room.

Team A:	
1. Name: Accelerator	HP 10 – 1
2. Name: Musicular	HP 10 – 1
3. Name: Sahara	HP 10 – 1
4. Name: Sake	HP 10 – 1
Team B	
1. Name: Robot 1	HP 12 – 3
2. Name: Robot 2	HP 12 –

The robots attacked again with their laser attacks, doing a few more points of damage to Musicular and Sake. Accelerator decided to summon a force field over the group and he was successful, which I assigned +3 extra health points of defense to. Musicular wanted to get out of the way and ran over to the corner of the room. Sake missed, and, this time, Sahara, sensing there was human (a type of animal) DNA in one of the drones, tried to convince it not to fight them. (In D&D, the players are not able to decide the realities of the game (that's up to the Dungeon Master/the organizer), which is why I rejected the Dinosaur, but I thought the DNA response was pretty creative and reasonable, so I let her roll a Charisma check.) She passed and was able to convince the robot not to attack her fellow teammates. The robot then turned and began to attack the other robot who had not listened. The remaining aggressive robot effectively took down the force field but was destroyed soon after. Following that, Sahara actually accused the robot of being a spy for Captain Insano even though it peacefully joined them, so battle ensued once again and that robot was destroyed.

Students entered the next room, where they encountered the third and final essay towards the end of class. For this challenge, I wanted students to both practice the TOEFL Integrated Essay style (which is not about giving one's opinion, but rather unbiasedly being able to communicate the distinctions of two different opinions regarding a topic), then make an ethical call related to superheroes and justice in the prison system. When they entered the next room, they encountered two superheroes from the League of Justice, Hawkwings and Professor Manray, arguing about whether a recently-discovered weapon should be utilized. Students were given a prompt that stated, "You have three minutes to read the following essay, including the three main points, and take notes on the topic:

### Written Essay

Hawkwings has provided the following written argument for using the bracelet weapon:

“This bracelet has the power to drain a human of their energy – miraculously sucking their energy into the bracelet and giving more power to the person wearing it. There are those who think that it should never be used, but, hopefully, readers of this essay will clearly understand the multiple benefits of using such a tool with incarcerated populations.

Firstly, people in prison do not need to use their energy for anything useful. The bracelet could take that untapped potential and put it to use for something positive.

Secondly, people are not scared of the relaxed rules of conventional prisons and the courts today. The knowledge that the bracelet exists, would strike fear into those who commit crimes and would prevent them from doing them in the first place.

Third, the bracelet is an antique of the superhero age. By using it, we would be respecting those who came before us, honoring their memory and efforts.”

Next, I shared the following spoken opinion from Professor Manray, reading it once aloud (as is done for the TOEFL essay).

### **Spoken Prompt**

“Hawkings has provided a formal response to the question, ‘should the Bracelet of Power actively be used to drain the life-force of those who have already committed crimes in the prison system?’ In this essay I hope to state why this is not a beneficial idea.

First, although it may appear that many people in prison don’t use their energy for something useful, many use that time to plan for what they wish to do post-release. Many prisoners put their energies towards useful things such as studies and fitness. In addition, it is not uncommon that prisoners are wrongfully accused, and sometimes their sentences will be reversed. Therefore, it would be unethical to use the bracelet on someone whose crimes are not certain, or who may have changed since committing the crime.

Second, scare tactics have proven to be ineffective for reducing crime. Rather than using the Bracelet of Power as a tool to scare potential victims, our energies would better be spent by reaching out to communities and populations most vulnerable to organized crime, due to poverty and poor living conditions.

Finally, it is actually unknown how old the amulet is and how long it has been used. It was unearthed from that ancient Mayan ruin by Captain Insano a few months ago, and although we suspect that it may have ancient super-human origins, we cannot say precisely what its specific origin is, or why it was created.”

Students went home and worked on their integrated essays. We started the following class, picking up with the argument. Students responses included the following:

*“The bracelet of power has the power to drain a human of their energy, but should it actively be use to drain the life-force of those who have already committed*

*crimes in the prison system? Hawkings and professor Manray got very different opinions. This essay will provide three points of the two people's argument to let you get a better understanding on their opinions.*

*Firstly, Hawkings thought that people in prison do not need their energy to do anything useful, the bracelet can make them serviceable. However, the professor didn't agree. He said that these people might not use their energies while they are in prison, but they might be using them to do things they want —such as study— when they get out.*

*Secondly, Hawkings point out that people now are not scared of the relaxing rules of the prison and court, the existence of the bracelet would give them a shot and stop them from even doing these illegal things. But the professor says to him that it had been proved that scare tactics will have not effects on reducing crime.*

*Finally, Hawkings said that the bracelet is an antique of the age of superheroes, using it means showing your respects to the heroes who came before us. But professor Manray argues that we actually know nothing about when or why this bracelet was created."*

One student gave an opinion in the essay, or tried to synthesize the points creatively, which gave us opportunities to review the outline of TOEFL's integrated essay. This opened up a teachable moment to reinforce how what's most important is guiding the reader to know the conflicting opinions and where they differ, not to provide one's own perspective on this topic.

After this discussion, I shared with students that it was actually my (Captain Insano's) intention to use the bracelet of power, not just on prisoners, but on all non-superhero citizens. In our floating fortress, we could use the bracelet to slowly drain their power and rule overall. My plan was that any students who agreed would be on my side for a final battle, while anyone who disagreed would be against me. In a scenario where they all agreed, I would say I was tricking them and now I would need to subdue them and take them to the police.

I was proud that they all agreed not to use the bracelet. Professor Manray joined my side alongside one final drone robot. It was a fierce battle. Captain Insano took down two of the superhero fighters with steam bursting forth as he punched the ground, however Insano was ultimately impaled by an icicle in the final moments. At some point in the fight, Sahara had tried to control Professor Manray and she failed to persuade him. However, after witnessing the defeat of his leader, Manray pulled out a bit of curing potion he had from Atlantis to bring the two fallen superheroes back to life (because the only member with healing powers, Sake, was down).

Video Clip:

Watch a portion of this epic battle here: <https://youtu.be/aMKl4hjE314>

(Note – in the video, you can see I have a Word doc opened where I have the names of the characters and their health points written. Each time someone attacks, if it hits (a 1-3 dice roll for most characters, 1-4 if their strength is a 4), I minus the attack roll from the health points. In

*the end, Captain Insano only has 1 hit point, so, when Elstella rolls a 2, it's enough to defeat him.)*

Superheroes had a chance to make a statement about what they would like to do next, in this moment or in life. Having been on quarantine for close to 7 weeks now, most chose to return back to school to study.

### **Final Notes and Addressing Secondary Disease:**

For me, this unit served as one of the highlights of the classes I've led. The play-based superhero scenario gave us a chance to practice a few key skills in a way that was silly, fun, and ultimately made me feel like I was physically in the classroom with my students from Hainan, Gansu, Shanghai, Ji Lin, and Chongqing (each at least several hundred if not thousands of kilometers from the other). I saw a boost both in students' authentic participation around the writing of these essays and in the way they engaged with me and others around the scenarios. In the session that followed this unit, even though we remained focused and on-task, I could feel that bonds between students were closer than they had been before.

A surprise for me came in the second class when one 10<sup>th</sup> grade student shared that he related our role-play based learning structure to "Secondary Disease". When I asked him to elaborate on that statement, he shared that as a middle school student, he was always in his head, imagining different scenarios and imaginative situations, but, in his schooling, he was told that sort of imagination is a waste of time. (Side note: this student attends the top public school in his province, which gives students much more freedom than other provinces, and he excels in math and the sciences.)

I wanted to respond to him right away, highlighting what a positive scene I'd observed in our classroom over these last couple classes and the benefits of creatively imagining the way things can be in this design-centered world, but, instead, I asked him, "What sorts of benefits do you think may be able to come from having an active imagination?" We had a good conversation as a class about how some positive things may still come from imagination and how jobs, such as engineers, designers, teachers, and creators all rely on these skills in different ways. We discussed how, for many adults it's harder and harder to think creatively as they grow older. So a la *Little Prince* – I encouraged them to keep and cultivate our imaginative skills, rather than be ashamed of them and perhaps activating student imagination is the cure, not the disease. The battle raged on in the final class (as portrayed above), and I could tell the students were a bit sad to see it come to an end.

Since completing this first exploration, I found similarly positive results in essay writing and engagement when working with a second and third group of students. Similarly, with a new unit I designed around fairytales, I used the last few lessons to introduce a role play where I was an old King. The King decided to send his sons and daughters to adjacent kingdoms with no possessions with the challenge that whichever of his children succeeded "in the truest sense", would be the heir to his throne (as students wrote tales about their adventures in these kingdoms, I would intervene from a far for better or for worse, sending magical characters and items to their respective kingdoms).

### Implications and Perspective Taking:

One of the key thinking skills emphasized towards helping students develop flexible, deep understanding of topics and Global Competence is the ability to take perspective. A basic routine for short learning opportunities comes through the Circle of Viewpoints (Ritchhart, 2011):

#### Circle of View Points

1. Brainstorm a list of different perspectives.

2. Choose one perspective to explore, using these sentence-starters:

- I am thinking of ... the topic ... from the viewpoint of ... the viewpoint you've chosen
- I think ... describe the topic from your viewpoint. Be an actor—take on the character of your viewpoint
- A question I have from this viewpoint is ... ask a question from this viewpoint

I think whether students are portraying figures in a book, from history, or from our own imaginations, the imagination based model explored in this chapter has vast potential in the realm of recognizing perspectives and language learning. In order for it to be effective, we need to support students in key moments, recognizing the limits of their understanding and backing views up with evidence (particularly for historical portrayals or when portraying characters from literature).

I've included the three lessons that made up this unit in **Appendix F** and invite teachers to consider these as a fun way to practice writing together. I also encourage teachers to consider other moments where dramatic role play may be beneficial for learning. I suspect that, as I discovered, students and teachers alike will be pleasantly surprised by fun, fresh experiences and worlds that can be created together.

## Appendix A

### International Inquiry Unit Planning Sheet

#### 1. Selecting Meaningful Topics, Goals and Key Text:

##### **A. Questions to Consider and Discuss with Someone Local or Familiar to the Context**

(or to consider on one's own after conducting an extensive search for resources relating to the context):

(Brainstorm)

What do I hope that they might take away, both in terms of important current and historical events/issues, as well as the joys, beauties, and wisdom within that culture? (Preliminary Goals)

How do foreigners/people often view this culture and context – how to explore or avoid any misconceptions?

What is/might be a key book or resource that can help students in developing those takeaways?

*Once the Book or Key Text is Selected:*

#### **2. Completing the Unit Outline: Considering the Topics by Session, Local-to-Global Opportunities and Chance for Interdisciplinary Learning**

What is the central generative theme for the International Inquiry unit? How might it be summarized to a single line?

Seek to balance depth and freshness of topics while contextualizing the text. Within the book, what are the central themes that emerge by section/chapters? (note – some themes can cross over multiple lessons. Chapters generally should be read prior to the class).

Lesson 1 - Chapter X –X : A Theme

Lesson 2 - Chapter X –X: B Theme

Lesson 3 - Chapter X –X : C Theme

Lesson 4 - Chapter X –X: D Theme

Lesson 5 - Chapter X –X : E Theme

Lesson 6 - Chapter X –X: F Theme

Within the different themes, where are opportunities for local-to-global connections and consideration?

Where are the opportunities for interdisciplinary blending?

What are additional resources (news articles, documentary clips, etc.) by theme that can further support student understanding, adding nuance and depth to their inquiry?

What types of thinking are important that you would like to emphasize in your inquiry unit?

Considering those different questions above - What are the goals that are central to this unit (both in terms of interdisciplinary understanding and thinking skills)? (Finalized Goals)

### 3. Designing the Lessons Based Upon the Goals, Themes, and Outlines

a. Going theme by theme (lesson by lesson) – consider where it would be more beneficial to have students read and explore topics before class, and what resources you’ve gathered that might best be introduced to promote conversation and thinking on the topic.

b. What are the key questions for discussion that are raised for the chapter or theme? How can those questions be raised in a way that is not seeking a specific answer, but is seeking a variety of opinions and authentic thinking on the matter?

c. What opportunities/routines are there to support types of thinking central to your unit?

d. What elements/routines of culture building do you want to incorporate in your lesson (often focused in the beginning or ending for 15-20 minutes).

e. With these considerations in mind – begin to create an estimated timeline throughout a lesson. How many minutes will be assigned towards culture building? Towards discussing chapter content and the development of the story? Towards student sharing of research? Towards exploration of additional resources often supported with the use of thinking routines? Towards discussion of questions related to the book or topic? (A sample of one such outline is provided below)

**Sample Unit Outline:**

Generative Theme: Exploring and Comparing “BRICS” – Modern Day South Africa – Context, Stories and History

(Book: *Born A Crime* – Young Readers Edition)

**Goals:**

- Students will be able to explore and develop an understanding of 20<sup>th</sup> century South African history and will understand Apartheids resonance in modern society.
- Students will be able to explore, research, and engage in some pertinent economic explorations: unemployment, land distribution.
- Students will be able to recognize perspectives in the course of history and how different parties may view certain issues in modern day South Africa.
- Students will have the chance to explore music, dance and pop culture in South Africa branching off of the types of music and dance described in the book.
- Students will have opportunities to holistically develop oral, listening, reading, and writing.

**Unit Arch:**

**Lesson 1** - Xhosa, Zulu, Afrikaners, the British – Constructing a timeline with resources from the book, beginning to paint a map of South Africa and Johannesburg.

Begin to set frame of what we know about apartheid. (Chapter 1-2)

**Lesson 2** - Life in Soweto, Apartheid History (Chapter 3)

**Lesson 3** - Nelson Mandela, Language, and the role of Speaking as a Leader (Chapter 4-5)

**Lesson 4** - Bullying, In Groups Out Groups (Chapter 8-9)

**Lesson 5** - Romance and Education & Music (Chapter 10-11)

**Lesson 6** - Modern Politics, Education (Continued), Mining & History (Chapter 14)

\*Planning Final Projects

**Lesson 7** - Alexandra, Unemployment & Underground. Black Markets (Chapter 15)

**Lesson 8** - Corruption, BRICS Analysis (Chapter 16 – First 10 or so pages of Chapter 17)

**Lesson 9** - Sexism, Domestic Violence - Sharing of Final Projects (Finish Chapter 17)



## Sample Lesson Outline

### **Lesson 1 - Xhosa, Zulu, Afrikaners, the British – Constructing a timeline with resources from the book, beginning to paint a map of South Africa and Johannesburg. (90 minutes)**

#### Pre Class Message:

Hello Team,

I am looking forward to getting into our exploration through the book *Born A Crime*, written by the most famous comedian from Africa. Before our first class, please complete the following:

1. Read pages Chapters 1 & 2 pages provides (24 pages)
2. In the first two chapters, the author references many groups within South Africa. I am going to assign you each one group – please note references to your group as you read, especially in regards to historical dates, and look online for a bit more additional information regarding your group.

Tom – Zulu

Jiawei -Xhosa

Al - Afrikaans, British

3. Within the first couple chapters, the author mentions a few cities/territories in South Africa, as well as a few neighborhoods within the city of Johannesburg. Whenever these places are noted – please make note of the page number, and general context of the place.

Example: When my mom started working, she still lived with my grandmother in Soweto\*, the township where the government had relocated my family decades before.” (P.23)

Thanks,

Devon

#### **0. Check-in and Logging In (5 minutes)**

#### **1. Introductions – Pick a Picture or Object to Aid in Introducing Something About Yourself (10-15 minutes)**

#### **2. Create Community Norms (10+- minutes)**

#### **3. Share about groups – creating arch of timeline – and Trevor’s description of the groups along with any independent resources) (25-30 minutes)**

(Important sections 3-4 Zulu vs Xhosa, pages 19-20 Dutch East India Company – Cape Town, British 1800’s, Afrikaners coming to claim South Africa, Apartheid no specific dates in section)

\*Hear students reporting – go back to these groups as necessary.

#### **4. Create map of SA – listing areas he mentions (30 Minutes)**

(Cape Town, Johannesburg, Homelands (if they had come up),

Flip Paper and begin listing neighborhoods mentioned

“Eden Park” sat not far from the sparkling townships in the East Rand, Thokoza and Katlehong. (12)

“We were standing at the corner of Jellicoe Avenue and Oxford Road, right in the heart of Johannesburg’s wealthy, white suburbia, and there were no minibuses. The streets were empty.”

“When my mom started working, she still lived with my grandmother in Soweto, the township where the government had relocated my family decades before.” (23)

“My mom’s secret flat was in a neighborhood called Hillbrow. She lived in number 203. Down the corridor was a tall, brown-haired Swiss German expat named Robert.”

“Hillbrow at the time was the Greenwich Village of South Africa. It was a thriving scene, cosmopolitan and liberal. There were galleries and underground theatres where artists and performers dared to speak up and criticize the government in front of integrated crowds. There were restaurants and nightclubs, a lot of them foreign-owned, that served a mixed clientele, black people who hated the status quo.” (25)

“Mom rented a new flat in Joubert Park, the neighborhood adjacent to Hillbrow, and that’s where she took me (27)

Q: Discuss what students notice about the way things are laid out. (How the more affluent areas mentioned are all central and on the north end of the city. Townships established for black workers much further out.)

### **Remaining 5-10 Minutes**

#### **5. Questions that come up:**

-Optional questions – pursue one question that comes up

#### **6. Writing option:**

Begin your autobiography - try to take on Trevor Noah’s style:

1. Start with an engaging funny, surprising story
2. Tell a story about your parents that relates to your immediate history/upbringing/ the context of where you grew up

#### **7. With any Remaining Time Read Ahead in the Book**

## Appendix B

### I Am Malala International Inquiry Unit

#### Dreams for a Better World:

#### Exploring Pakistani Culture, Girls' Education, and The Power of Dreams

Book: *I Am Malala (Young Reader's Edition)*

(9 Lessons – 90 Minutes each)

Homework for 3-week semester:

- Approx. 2 chapters of reading per night (about 10 pages/night)
- Some additional tasks as assigned
- Class 5: Mini dreamer assignment on dreamer of student's choosing
- Class 9: Passport Stamp Project: The Impact of One Person (culminating presentation on dreamer chosen for mini dreamer assignment)

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

1. Compare and contrast similarities and differences between China and Pakistan. Students will identify some of the aspects of Pakistan's culture and history that make it unique through an examination of
  - a. Pakistan's split from India
  - b. the Taliban's rise to power
2. Describe some of the differences in lifestyles for men/women, boys/girls living in Pakistan and identify a few of the barriers to girls' education.
3. Explore in-depth the impetus for dreams and the impact of at least two dreamers—Malala and another dreamer of the students' choosing. Apply these findings to the students' own passions and dreams for the future.

#### Broad Learning Goals:

As with all of our units, Students for Students hopes this unit will:

1. Strengthen students' language confidence through improving their speaking, listening, writing, and reading abilities in English.
2. Improve students' critical thinking skills through practices in questioning, drawing comparisons, and reasoning with evidence.

Classes:

1. **Prologue-Chapter 3:** Pakistani Customs, Differences for Men and Women
2. **Chapters 4-7:** Pakistani History, Red Flags of Conflict in the Region
3. **Chapters 8-11:** Islam in Pakistan and the Taliban's Rise to Power
4. **Chapters 12-15:** Girls' Education in Pakistan, Dreams for a Better World

5. **Chapters 16-19:** Inspiration and Courage—Mini Dreamer Presentations
6. **Chapters 20-23:** The Attack Against Malala, Opposition to Dreamers
7. **Chapters 24-27:** Connecting the Dots, Setbacks
8. **Chapters 28-31:** The Importance of Allies, Perseverance and Support
9. **Chapters 32-Epilogue:** The Power of Dreams (sub-topic: Differences between Pakistan and England)—Passport Stamp Presentations (The Impact of One Person)

### **Lesson 1: Prologue-Chapter 3**

Pakistani Customs, Differences Between Women and Men

#### **Pre-Class Activities**

1. Read the Prologue and Chapters 1-3 of *I Am Malala* (pgs. 1-28) **(Heavy Reading Day!)**
  - a. Guided Reading Questions: How do women's lifestyles in Pakistan differ from men's? Why do these differences exist?

#### **Lesson**

1. Intros (20 min)
  - a. Go around, say who we are, where we're from, and what we hope to get from this course. Describe our artifact (that shares something about us that is important/something that people often don't know).
  - b. Question Practice (practice student-to-student engagement) – At the end of each person's intro, they have the chance to ask the class a question on any topic (e.g. What is your favorite activity to do outside of school? If you could invite anyone to dinner, dead or alive, who would you invite?)
2. Agreement-Setting (15 min) – Each student has the opportunity to suggest an agreement. Write the agreement on whiteboard to refer to in next class
3. Setting the Stage: Explore maps of Pakistan (15 min) (map of Swat Valley from the front of the book + Google Maps—explore distance from students' provinces to Swat Valley and from Swat Valley to Boston)
4. Discuss Guided Reading Questions (20 min)
  - a. Create Venn diagrams or mind maps of students' choice to compare/contrast differences between men and women's lifestyles in Pakistan.
  - b. How do these lifestyle differences compare and contrast with the lifestyles of men and women in China?
5. See, Think, Wonder (15 min) (Don't reveal context of the photo yet, will explore within the article reading for next class.)



(Source:

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/28/asia/women-voters-pakistan-intl/index.html>)

6. Closing (5 min): Preview homework for next class/answer final questions

### Homework

1. Read Chapters 4-7 (pgs. 29-51) of *I Am Malala*; skim “A Timeline of Important Events” (pgs. 209-224) (**Heavy Reading Day!**)
  - a. Guided Reading Questions: What warning signs exist that trouble is coming to Swat Valley? How does Malala’s family change their lifestyle in response to these warning signs?

## Lesson 2: Chapters 4-7

Pakistani History, Red Flags of Conflict in the Region

### Lesson

1. Check In and Revisit class agreements (5 min)
  - a. See how many can be named without bringing out the list. Remind students of any unnamed agreements
2. Discussing the Big Picture/Goal-setting (10 min)
  - a. Why are we here? Instructor offers perspective based on their own language learning journey.
  - b. Each person shares their goal for the unit and for this particular class (e.g. “Ask other students questions about their thinking”) (can be related or unrelated to norms). Teacher offers their own goals first as an example.
3. Men’s and Women’s Lifestyles Jigsaw (25 min):
 

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/28/asia/women-voters-pakistan-intl/index.html>

  - a. Assign students to silently read either first section of article up until “Decades of Taboo Broken” or the “Conditioning” section. Screen grab the sections from the website above or from the following documents and send to chat for the group (5 min timer)
    - i. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qgv7y42mFMudKQy-zR-RsgxMzJrLuKDkqlun6b2CSq0/edit>

- ii. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lj\\_0dW\\_Y8PISADmJcbzeyCBamRHOQRJv3F1UCdecQiM/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lj_0dW_Y8PISADmJcbzeyCBamRHOQRJv3F1UCdecQiM/edit)
- b. Divide students into breakout rooms according to the section they read.
- c. Students discuss their section's main ideas for 5 min and prepare a brief presentation in the form of a breaking news broadcast to give to the other group. Check in on each group during their planning
- d. Each group presents their broadcast. Discuss the main ideas and implications whole-group. (Take-aways: There are multiple barriers to women being able to exercise their right to vote—men/the patriarchy/women's preference for the private life/culture. And not all women in Pakistan are the same. Some experience more liberties than others. Some want the right to vote, while this may not be others' priority.)
4. Discuss Guided Reading Questions (20 min) – Each student shares 1-2 warning signs they identified that trouble is coming.
5. Watch segment of *He Named Me Malala* (Netflix) (34:22-35:43) about the ban on TVs and videos (2 min)
6. Review timeline at back of book (5 min) – Discuss how Pakistan's split from India (in VERY recent past) left a power vacuum that can explain some of the Taliban's motivations.
7. Prediction practice with warning signs (15 min) – Using the chat box, students complete one of the following sentences in writing: "I predict that Malala will...", "I predict that the Taliban will...", or "I predict that Swat Valley will...". Students use evidence to support their predictions.
8. Introduce Think, Puzzle, Explore ☞ Guide Students in discussing what they think they know about different regions in Pakistan, and what puzzles or curiosities they have about these regions) (10 min) – Students select one of Pakistan's four provinces (Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, or Sindh). Linking to the questions they generated, they should select a particular aspect of culture within their selected province to research (e.g. history, music, religion, food, sports). They should be prepared to share their findings during the next class.

### Homework

1. Read Chapters 8-11 (pgs. 52-72) of *I Am Malala*.
  - a. Guided Reading Questions: How does Malala describe terrorism? Identify at least two ideas that the Taliban uses to gain power.
2. Finish exploring one aspect of the culture within your selected Pakistani province. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.
3. Come to class with the names of 3 dreamers (dead or alive) who inspire you.

### Lesson 3: Chapters 8-11

#### Islam in Pakistan and the Taliban's Rise to Power

### Lesson

1. Revisit class agreements (5 min)

- a. See how many can be named without bringing out the list. Remind students of any unnamed agreements
2. Students share their findings about Pakistani provinces from their Think, Puzzle, Explore. (20 min). What new questions does this new information raise for you about Pakistani culture?
3. Discuss Guided Reading Questions (20 min)– Introduce the ways in which the Taliban manipulates religious beliefs as a way to gain control/followers/power if students don't raise this idea when sharing their answers. Encourage students to use evidence from the text to support their argument.
4. Perspective-taking activity (25 min) – What if you were in Malala's situation, escaping to the bathroom mirror to practice your speeches on girls' education? What would you say to convince people of your stance on girls' education?
  - a. Students take 10 min to write a speech to a local TV station in Swat Valley arguing why girls have a right to an education.
  - b. Students share their speech with the class and provide peer-to-peer feedback (one piece of praise and one area of growth)
5. Students give the names of their three dreamers and a brief description of why each one inspires them (10 min)
6. Introduce mini dreamer presentation (10 min)
  - a. Give a 3-min biographical presentation about your dreamer that answers the questions below. (Your presentation should incorporate a visual element (e.g. PowerPoint, Mind Map, Digital Storyboard, etc.):
    - i. What is your dreamer's cause and what is their dream?
    - ii. What or who inspired their dream?
    - iii. Has your dreamer experienced any setbacks or barriers to achieving their dream?
    - iv. Has your dreamer's dream been realized/achieved, or is it still in progress?

### Homework

1. Read Chapters 12-15 (pgs. 73-95) of *I Am Malala*
  - a. Guided Reading Questions: What steps does Malala take to campaign for social change? How would you respond if all the girls in your community were forbidden from attending school?
2. Select which of your 3 inspiring dreamers you'd like to present on for your mini dreamer presentation.

### Lesson 4: Chapters 12-15

Girls' Education in Pakistan, Dreams for a Better World

### Lesson

1. Students announce the dreamer they've selected for their mini dreamer presentation and explain why (5 min)

2. Discuss Guided Reading Questions (20 min)—Steps Malala took. What would you have done? (Push students to think of successful campaigns for various social causes in their context, working within limitations from local governments/contexts.)
3. Watch segment of *He Named Me Malala* (Netflix) (45:50-52:58) about raising your voice for what you believe in no matter the cost (10 min)
4. Discussion/Debate (35 min): What does it mean to be a dreamer? What are the most pressing/urgent issues in your community? In the world?
  - a. In breakout rooms, have student pairs list social causes in their communities and in the world that need attention
  - b. Share lists whole-group and vote on the two most important social issues on the list
  - c. Divide students (if possible based on their preference) to one of two teams (e.g. Global Warming vs. Income Inequality)
  - d. In breakout rooms, each team prepares main argument, predicted rebuttals, and closings
  - e. Debate
    - i. Main argument (Team 1&2)
    - ii. Rebuttal (Team 1&2)
    - iii. Closing (Team 1&2)
5. Watch segment from *Class Dismissed* and discuss questions whole-group (20 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrhp386XsIE> (4:08-13:55) (Warning that closed captions are not perfectly translated.)
  - a. What questions or confusions do you have from the video?
  - b. Describe the relationship between Malala and her father? Who inspires whom? Does it remind you of any relationships in your own life?
  - c. Why does Ziauddin think Malala's impact can be greater if she becomes a politician, rather than a doctor? Do you agree or disagree with his reasoning?
6. Goal Check-In (10 min): In Class 2, we discussed our goals for the unit. How are you making progress toward your goal? What else do you need from your teacher or your peers to be able to reach your goal(s) for this unit? (Provide encouragement and feedback with regard to students' progress where necessary.)

### Homework

1. Read Chapters 16-19 (pgs. 96-113) of *I Am Malala*
  - a. Guided Reading Questions: What does Malala leave behind when her family flees Swat Valley? How does Malala's cause begin to gain momentum during this time of her life?
2. Work on Mini Dreamer Presentation (due XX, xx XX<sup>th</sup>)
  - a. Give a 3-min biographical presentation about your dreamer that answers the questions below. Your presentation should incorporate a visual element (e.g. PowerPoint, Mind Map, Digital Storyboard, etc.):
    - i. What is your dreamer's cause and what is their dream?
    - ii. What or who inspired their dream?
    - iii. Has your dreamer experienced any setbacks or barriers to achieving their dream?



- iv. Has your dreamer's dream been realized/achieved, or is it still in progress?

## Lesson 5: Chapters 16-19

### Malala's Campaign, Prioritizing Change

#### Lesson

1. Place class norms in chat box as a reminder to the class.
2. Chapter Title Activity (15 min)
  - a. Assign each student a chapter (16-19) to review and retitle. Each student should share their new title with the class and explain their reasoning.
3. Discuss Guided Reading Questions (15 min)
4. Watch remainder of *Class Dismissed* (20 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrhp386XsIE> (14:28-32:40). (Warning that closed captions are not perfectly translated.) Students should write down ways in which the video aligns with the chapters assigned for this class.
5. Discuss questions about the video whole-group (20 min):
  - a. What questions or confusions do you have from the video?
  - b. What similarities or differences did you notice between the video and the chapters you read for today's class?
  - c. How does the video display Malala's willingness to disagree with and disapprove of her father? How does this differ from most father-daughter/male-female relationships in Pakistan?
  - d. 18:08: "A mother doesn't give milk to a child when it doesn't cry, so if you don't cry, you won't have anything, especially in the third world countries like us. You have to scream for everything." What does Ziauddin mean when he compares Pakistanis to crying babies?
  - e. What does the word "bunker" mean?
  - f. What evidence suggests that Ziauddin and Malala feel unhappy with both the Taliban and the Pakistani Army?
7. Closing Question (10 min): During Malala's visit with U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke (pg. 102/24:34), Holbrooke seems to imply that girls' education is not his first priority in Pakistan. How should a country prioritize its social issues? Use our debate from our last class to help you think about your answer. If you were a Chinese diplomat, which issues would you address first?
8. If time permits: Practice mini dreamer presentations with a partner in breakout rooms
9. Review class norms. Did we accomplish them? (5 min)

#### Homework

1. Read Chapters 20-23 (pgs. 115-130) of *I Am Malala*
  - a. Guided Reading Questions: What does Malala hide from her parents to keep them from worrying? Make a prediction: What happened to Malala in the Khushal School bus?
2. Practice for your Mini Dreamer Presentation (due XX, xx XX<sup>th</sup>)

- a. Give a 3-min biographical presentation about your dreamer that answers the questions below. Your presentation should incorporate a visual element (e.g. PowerPoint, Mind Map, Digital Storyboard, etc.):
  - i. What is your dreamer's cause and what is their dream?
  - ii. What or who inspired their dream?
  - iii. Has your dreamer experienced any setbacks or barriers to achieving their dream?
  - iv. Has your dreamer's dream been realized/achieved, or is it still in progress?

## Lesson 6: Chapters 20-23

Dreamers (Named and Unnamed), What if?

### Lesson

1. Read and discuss the following article (15 min):  
<https://newsela.com/read/michelleobama-pakistan/id/12669/>
  - a. How have other countries supported girls' education in Pakistan?
2. Discuss guided reading questions (20 min)
3. Malala often acknowledges the other people who are also fighting for her cause (see quotes below). What if Malala had never been born? Would her campaign still exist? Discuss students' thoughts (10 min).
  - a. Pg. 113: "My dear friends, they were as generous as could be and only wanted to share in my success. I knew in my heart that any one of us could have achieved what I had; I was lucky that I had parents who encouraged me despite the fear we all felt."
    - i. Watch segment of *He Named Me Malala* (Netflix) (11:36-12:45) about Malala's extraordinary parents (3 min)
  - b. UN Speech – min. 3:01: "Do remember one thing. Malala Day is not my day. Today is the day of every woman, every boy, and every girl who have raised their voice for their rights. There are hundreds of human rights activists and social workers who are not only speaking for their rights, but who are struggling to achieve their goal of peace, education, and equality. Thousands of people have been killed by the terrorists, and millions have been injured. I'm just one of them. So here I stand. So here I stand one girl among many. I speak not for myself but for those without voice can be heard. Those who have fought for their rights—their right to live in peace, their right to be treated with dignity, their right to equality of opportunity, their right to be educated."
4. Writing prompt (5 min) (Students save their answers to share at the end of their mini dreamer presentations): What if your dreamer had never been born? Would the world be different? If so, how? Are there others doing similar work to that of your dreamer who might have made a similar impact?
5. Mini dreamer presentations with visual element (30 min)
  - a. Peer-to-peer feedback and follow-up questions after each presentation
  - b. Students read their answers to the writing prompt above following their presentation

6. Introduce Passport Stamp Presentation (5 min)
  - a. Give a 5-min **autobiographical** presentation about yourself and your dream for a better world.
    - i. What is your dream?
    - ii. What or who inspired your dream?
    - iii. Have you experienced any setbacks or barriers to achieving your dream?
    - iv. Who helped you along the way?
    - v. Have you achieved your dream or is it still in progress?
    - vi. Are there others in the world who are working to achieve similar accomplishments to your own?
    - vii. How do you want to be remembered?
  - b. Following each presentation, we'll have 3 minutes of question and answer time.

### **Homework**

1. Read Chapters 24-27 (pgs. 131-150) of *I Am Malala*
  - a. Guided Reading Questions: What are Malala's main concerns while she's in the hospital? Why was Malala taken to Birmingham?
2. Respond to the following question in 1 paragraph (5-10 sentences): What is your dream for a better world? What will it take for you to achieve it?
3. Begin working on your Passport Stamp Presentation (due XX, xx XX<sup>th</sup>)
  - a. Give a 5-min **autobiographical** presentation about yourself and your dream for a better world.
    - i. What is your dream?
    - ii. What or who inspired your dream?
    - iii. Have you experienced any setbacks or barriers to achieving your dream?
    - iv. Who helped you along the way?
    - v. Have you achieved your dream or is it still in progress?
    - vi. Are there others in the world who are working to achieve similar accomplishments to your own?
    - vii. How do you want to be remembered?
  - b. Following each presentation, we'll have 3 minutes of question and answer time.

## **Lesson 7: Chapters 24-27**

The Attack Against Malala, Dreams of our Own

### **Lesson**

1. Research Activity (20 min)
  - a. Connect back to previous class—Who else is advocating for girls' education like Malala? Students take 10 min to research non-profits/individuals who are fighting for girls' rights to education.
  - b. Students share out their findings whole-group (10 min)
2. Chapter Title Activity (15 min)
  - a. Assign each student a chapter (16-19) to review and retitle. Each student should share their new title with the class and explain their reasoning.
3. Discuss Guided Reading Questions (15 min)

4. Watch segment of *He Named Me Malala* (Netflix) (3:03-5:10) about Malala's shooting and initial experience in the hospital (3 min)
5. Explore map of the UK (observe distance from Swat Valley to Birmingham on Google Maps) (5 min)
6. Read and discuss the following article to give students insight into the arrests that followed the attack against Malala (15 min):  
<https://newsela.com/read/malala-shooting/id/5211/quiz/0/>
7. Pair and Share (14 min)
  - a. Divide into groups of 2 using breakout rooms to share your answer to the homework prompt (What is your dream for a better world? What will it take for you to achieve it?) (6 min)
  - b. Return to whole group and summarize your partner's answer from the breakout room (What is your partner's dream for the world? What will it take them to achieve it??) (8 min)

### Homework

1. Read Chapters 28-31 (pgs. 151-171) of *I Am Malala*
  - a. Guided Reading Questions: The last sentence of Chapter 29 highlights the irony of Malala's situation. Look up the definition of "irony." Why is Malala's story ironic? What is Malala's sad realization when Mr. Zardari comes to visit?
2. What aspects of Pakistani customs or history raise questions for you? Write down 2 questions to ask our guest from Pakistan and bring them to class.
3. Continue working on Passport Stamp Presentation (due XX, xx XX<sup>th</sup>)
  - a. Give a 5-min **autobiographical** presentation about yourself and your dream for a better world.
    - i. What is your dream?
    - ii. What or who inspired your dream?
    - iii. Have you experienced any setbacks or barriers to achieving your dream?
    - iv. Who helped you along the way?
    - v. Have you achieved your dream or is it still in progress?
    - vi. Are there others in the world who are working to achieve similar accomplishments to your own?
    - vii. How do you want to be remembered?
  - b. Following each presentation, we'll have 3 minutes of question and answer time.

### Lesson 8: Chapters 28-31

Sudden Fame, Insights from Pakistan

#### Lesson

1. Watch segment of *He Named Me Malala* (Netflix) (9:38-11:16) about Malala's sudden fame (5 min)
  - a. Where do we find mention of Malala's fame in the readings for this class?
2. Discuss Guided Reading Questions (10 min)
3. Watch segment of *He Named Me Malala* (Netflix) (42:29-44:10) about Malala's understanding that she can't return to Pakistan (5 min)

4. Q & A with Pakistani Guest (20 min) (If unable to invite a guest from Pakistan, have students watch a video about the day in the life in various areas of Pakistan.)
  - a. Pakistani guest introduces themselves
  - b. Students switch off asking prepared questions re: Pakistani customs/history
  - c. Guest asks students a couple of questions about their learning/how Malala's journey applies to their own lives
5. Circle of Viewpoints (20 min)—Chapter 29
  - a. Students silently reread last paragraph of pg. 159-pg. 161
  - b. Students take on one of 3 roles (Dr. Fiona, Malala's mom, Malala's dad)
  - c. Students answer the following questions:
    - i. What emotions did you experience during these 16 days?
    - ii. Describe a difficult decision that you made during this timeframe. What informed your decision? Why was it difficult?
  - d. Students ask one question of another player in the scenario
6. (eliminate #s 6-8 if discussion with Pakistani guest goes over time) Review peer feedback protocol (5 min)
7. Practice Passport Stamp Presentation with partner in breakout rooms (14 min—7 min each)
8. Discuss practice sessions whole-group (students share out praise for their partner and/or advice for the whole group) (5 min)
9. Answer any last-minute questions re: Passport Stamp Project (5 min)

### Homework

1. Read Chapters 32-Epilogue (pgs. 172-193) of *I Am Malala*
  - a. Guided Reading Questions: List three or more ways that Malala's life has changed since moving to Birmingham. What is Malala's dream for the future?
2. Finish and practice your Passport Stamp Presentation (due XX, xx XX<sup>th</sup>)
  - a. Give a 5-min **autobiographical** presentation about yourself and your dream for a better world.
    - i. What is your dream?
    - ii. What or who inspired your dream?
    - iii. Have you experienced any setbacks or barriers to achieving your dream?
    - iv. Who helped you along the way?
    - v. Have you achieved your dream or is it still in progress?
    - vi. Are there others in the world who are working to achieve similar accomplishments to your own?
    - vii. How do you want to be remembered?
  - b. Be prepared to ask each of your classmates a question after their presentations.

### Lesson 9: Chapters 32-Epilogue

The Power of Dreams (sub-topic: Differences between Pakistan and England) Passport Stamp Presentations (The Impact of One Person)

### Lesson

1. Watch segment of *He Named Me Malala* (Netflix) (17:55-20:20) about the differences Malala's family experiences between Birmingham and Swat Valley (3 min)
2. Not everyone is happy with Malala and her family's decision to move to Birmingham. See pg. 173 "It came as hard news when I found out that there were people in Pakistan who were critical of me. People who said I was a pawn of the West, "hobnobbing" with Richard Holbrooke. People who said I was a bad Muslim. People who even said my father shot me as a stunt so we could live overseas in luxury."
  - a. Watch segment of *He Named Me Malala* (Netflix) (1:01:33-1:02:25) about people's criticisms of Malala (2 min)
3. Discuss Guided Reading Questions (20 min)
  - a. Discuss the role reversal of Malala and Ziauddin (pg. 184/185)
4. Watch UN Speech with cc (25 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rNhZu3ttIU> (Warning that closed captions are not perfectly translated.)
  - a. "Ok Stop": Students raise their hand when they hear a line that they find especially impactful or interesting. Stop the video for student to explain why the line stands out to them.
  - b. "One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world." (16:35/pg. 192)
5. (Alternative to watching the UN Speech above) Watch segment of *He Named Me Malala* (Netflix) (1:08:45-1:25:45) for overview of the shooting, Malala's recovery, and her dream for girls' education (20 min)
6. Passport Stamp Presentations (30 min)
  - a. Give a 5-min **autobiographical** presentation about yourself and your dream for a better world.
    - i. What is your dream?
    - ii. What or who inspired your dream?
    - iii. Have you experienced any setbacks or barriers to achieving your dream?
    - iv. Who helped you along the way?
    - v. Have you achieved your dream or is it still in progress?
    - vi. Are there others in the world who are working to achieve similar accomplishments to your own?
    - vii. How do you want to be remembered?
  - b. Be prepared to ask each of your classmates a question after their presentations.
    - i. Q&A after each presentation
    - ii. Peer-to-peer feedback after each presentation
7. Discuss class takeaways (10 min)
  - a. Have students finish the following sentences:
    - i. "I used to think..."
    - ii. "Now, I think..."
    - iii. "I would like to explore\_\_\_\_\_further."
  - b. Award passport stamps and explain how students will receive them

### Homework

1. Keep dreaming!

Notes:

- Malala Day (July 12<sup>th</sup>—Internationally recognized by the UN)
- Example of opening message: Hi everyone! I'm excited to meet you all during our first class on Wednesday! Our unit over the next few weeks will focus on girls' education in Pakistan and the impact of dreamers. For Wednesday's class, please read pages 1-28 of "I Am Malala"—the PDFs that I'm about to send. This is our heaviest reading assignment of the unit, so it's a good idea to get started on this reading as soon as possible. As you're reading, please write down your thoughts in response to the following Guiding Reading Questions: How do some women's lifestyles in Pakistan differ from men's? What are some of the causes for these differences? Secondly, please bring to class an object that represents a positive impact you've had on your community. This impact can be within your school, neighborhood, or even your own home. We'll be sharing our object and an explanation of what it represents with the class on Wednesday. Please let me know if you have any questions over the weekend. I'll send out a Zoom link on Wednesday for all of us to join the first class! Thanks, Sarah
- Example of closing message: Thank you, @Sara and @小熊, for joining me this summer as we learned about Malala, girls' education in Pakistan, and the power of dreamers. Remember to never stop dreaming because even "one child, one teacher, one pen, and one book can change the world!" @Devon 戴伟 I am excited to announce that both @Sara and @小熊 have earned their passport stamp for Pakistan!

## Appendix E

### Character Tracking Sheet (Described in Super Hero Unit):

*When characters tell you their name, stats and backstory add notes below.*

<b>Name:</b>  Health Points(HP): 10/10  Strength: /6 Intelligence: /6 Charisma: /6  <b>Notes on Ability &amp; Backstory:</b>	<b>Name:</b>  Health Points(HP): 10/10  Strength: /6 Intelligence: /6 Charisma: /6  <b>Notes on Ability &amp; Backstory:</b>	<b>Name:</b>  Health Points(HP): 10/10  Strength: /6 Intelligence: /6 Charisma: /6  <b>Notes on Ability &amp; Backstory:</b>	<b>Name:</b>  Health Points(HP): 10/10  Strength: /6 Intelligence: /6 Charisma: /6  <b>Notes on Ability &amp; Backstory:</b>
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### Battle Tracking Sheet:

Can each roll to see who goes first (highest first, lowest last) at the start of a battle . List both the hero's and enemies here by who goes first to last. When a player is attacked, list the attack damage to the right of the health points (HP) (keeping a tab of how many HP are remaining) – when HP gets to 0, the player is unconscious and out of the battle unless they are healed somehow.

Team A:	
1. Name:	HP 10 -
2. Name:	HP 10 -
3. Name:	HP 10 -
4. Name:	HP 10 -
Team B	
1. Name:	HP 10 -
2. Name:	HP 10 -
3. Name:	HP 10 -
4. Name:	HP 10 -



## Appendix F

### Superhero Writing Unit

#### Learning Goals:

- **Note: Prior to this class, we had already practiced and introduced three types of essay writing.** These lessons were designed in part as an engaging way to practice these three types:
  - i. Storytelling Based Writing (narrative writing)
  - ii. Individual TOEFL Essay Writing (i.e., In 5 paragraphs, explain why you agree or disagree with a given stance, such as “Students benefit from taking a year off between high school and college.”)
  - iii. Integrated TOEFL Essay Writing (i.e., Consider two opposing views (one written, one spoken) – where three points are made about a topic – write an essay summarizing the two points of view and where they contrast.)
- Students will have opportunities to cultivate collaborative and independent discussion dispositions.
- Students will have opportunities to holistically develop oral, listening reading and writing abilities.
- Students will have opportunities to cultivate and utilize their creativity through improv-based role play and writing.

#### Class 1: Super Hero Review Quest – Part 1 (Storytelling and beginning our individual essays)

##### Pre-Class HW:

@Teacher – come up with your own superhero story (or can use the default one below) – ultimately it needs to end with you having a bit of a mysterious background and then coming to lead the Excelsior League of Justice 😊

Note sent to students 1 week before class:

Hello Team,

Had fun reading some of the fan fiction and am glad to see our integrated writing abilities starting to come along with practice. Here is our homework for this next class.

Task: Write a 1-2 page story about your superhero origin story. In one or more paragraphs, explain where you are from and your earliest childhood memories. In two or more paragraphs, describe the exact moment when you received your superpowers, take us there with a “Ba-Da-Bing”<sup>8</sup> – what were you doing, what did you see, what did you think? Then, in two or more paragraphs, take us to a moment where you learned more about your powers or were challenged to use them.”

Also – your character has stats – you may add 2 points to your character based upon their abilities :

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<sup>8</sup> Trailofbreadcrumbs.net Video: Ba-Da-Bings--Or Getting Your Reader to See Things the Way You Do

3/6 – Intelligence/Wisdom

3/6 – Athletics/Strength/Attack

3/6 – Charisma

Hit Points: 10

(e.g. If your character is really smart, and a little athletic – you could add 1 to intelligence, and 1 to strength, so your stats become 4/6 intelligence, 4/6 Athletics, 3/6 Charisma. If your character is very charming, but not in good shape or particularly wise, you can add 2 to charisma so your stats become 3/6 – Intelligence, 3/6 Athletics, 5/6 Charisma.) In your introduction, please add one line to a paragraph that helps introduce your skills in relation to your character.

Thanks,

Devon

## **0. How's it going! (5-10 minutes)**

### **1. Game/ Ice Breaker (5-10 minutes)**

#### **2. Enter the “Excelsior League of Justice” – Story of Self (30+- minutes)**

“You walk down Appian way – a street on the outskirts of town you had only walked down once or twice before. You arrive at an old mansion that appears to be abandoned and think to yourself, “Why have I never noticed this place before? It’s beautiful although clearly abandoned.” You knock on the door - no response. You walk through the tall grass around the building, just making sure you’re not missing anything. As you approach the house, the woman you saw from the hologram appears suddenly – “Key’s under the mat” – then she flashes away. You reach under the mat, put the key into the back door, and as you enter into the small room at the entrance of the house, suddenly a light scans your face, the room around you turns blue, and you’re shot down an elevator, going deep underground. When the elevator doors open, you find yourself in a massive underground chamber, with white marble pillars, the front of a huge door. As you enter into the front door, you see a few figures sitting at a table in the center of the room, and you hear a few others coming in behind you. A few figures come in with you from different elevators, and a deep voice says, “Welcome to the Hall of Justice” – state your story!!!!”

#### **Students read stories one by one**

**\*Take down students’ stats based upon character (can use character tracking sheet in Appendix E) – can help them add the 2 points to strength, intelligence and charisma.**

#### **Captain Insano (Teacher’s default superhero story – can change name or story):**

*“I don’t remember much from my childhood. My first memories were of being alone. I raised myself alone on the streets of New York. I would sleep in a warm sewer duct I had come across, where steam from the subway systems would ventilate. At nights I would be immersed with steam and I couldn’t see more than a few inches in front of me most nights. From a young age I learned that I was agile. I could sneak away food from a cart and the owner would never notice. And, if they did, I could easily get away in seconds.*

*One day, I was bored and was running around a field on the outskirts of town. I looked up and saw a person watching me closely from the side of the field. He called to me but I thought to myself, "I better lose this creep" and ran away. He came back to the field several times but I would stay out of range and far away from him, playing on my own. One day, when I returned to the spot, a new soccer ball, jersey and letter was left where I often went to play – "Consider coming to play for the Brooklyn Jets. Meet me at the Jets' Stadium office if you're interested." After much back and forth, I went and, before long, began to play on the team where I adapted to the game of soccer very quickly despite never having played. That's when I discovered I had a powerful dash. I could charge forward with a momentary burst of steam and knock over any player, even some of the adults we played with.*

*Before long, I was noticed again, not by a better team but by the government. I was trained to run supplies, materials and top secret messages in dangerous areas. Eventually, I became jaded by the realities of war and decided to break away from things, starting a justice league – the Excelsior League of Justice!"*

### **3. Discussion (5-10 minutes):**

\*We have heard your stories and will discuss amongst ourselves – you may chat with each other for a few minutes.

\*Students are encouraged to ask each other questions about their characters

After a few minutes:

"I was just talking with the group, and . . . unfortunately . . . I think none of you will be accepted to join the Excelsior League of Justice. But I will give you a chance . . . to write an essay where you can agree or disagree with this position. . . And then we can either let you off, or you can stay in the flying fortress."

Challenge students with the following prompt:

*"As was stated at the end of class – "You have not been accepted to the League of Justice. This is a good idea. Do you agree or disagree?" In an individual essay format, respond to whether you agree or disagree. Some tips for writing your intro, main paragraphs and conclusion are included in the image below. At the start of our next session, you will share with us your writing, and I will make a final decision about whether or not you have been accepted to the League of Justice based upon your input."*

### **4. Write an individual essay (20 minutes)**

\*Captain Insano at this point will review the standard structure we recommend for individual essay (review structure prepared for Individual essay writing unit last week)

#### **4 Steps for Planning:**

- 1. State the situation in your own words.**
- 2. Weigh pros and cons and pick a side**
- 3. Write**
- 4. Proofread**

**(Note – in sharing this set of lessons we won't go in-depth about strategies for individual essay writing, but here is a basic structure provided for the Individual Task TOEFL Essay Writing in Magoosh's How to Ace TOEFL Writing<sup>9</sup>)**

I. Introduction

1. Very general statement about the world
2. Specify the topic
3. *Optional: show the other side*
4. Give your opinion

II. Body

1. State your first reason
  1. Explain the reason if needed
  2. Give a concrete example or detail
  3. *Optional: Second example or detail*
  4. Explain why the example supports your opinion
2. State your second reason
  1. Explain the reason if needed
  2. Give a concrete example or detail
  3. *Optional second example or detail*
  4. Explain why the example supports your opinion

III. Conclusion

A. Restate main idea

B. *Optional: Reference reasons or opposite opinion*

C. Real-world result of your argument

5. If Time – try to look up and report on piece of news (that is not a main headline)

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<sup>9</sup> Magoosh's How to Ace TOEFL Writing <https://magoosh.com/toefl/toefl-writing-pdf/>

## **Class 2 – Review Individual Essays, First Battle, Begin Integrated Essays**

Hello Collector, Memoryman and AI (Can use superhero names here)

Excellent work today portraying your stories with detail – helping us clearly visualize them and get to know your superhero origins. As was stated at the end of class – “You have not been accepted to the League of Justice. This is a good idea. Do you agree or disagree?” In an individual essay format – respond to whether you agree or disagree. Some tips for writing your intro, main paragraphs and conclusion are included in the image above. At the start of our next session, you will share with us your writing and I will make a final decision about whether or not you have been accepted to the League of Justice based upon your input. Also, feel free to write more and share with us other memories about your superpowers/origin story that may come to mind and we can hear about these next class.

Sincerely,  
Captain I

### **0. Introductions - how it's going (5-10 minutes)**

#### **1. Share your case for staying in the Excelsior League of Justice or LEAVVEEEE!! (30-40 minutes)**

\*Read essays, give feedback.

\*Should weigh the cases carefully – if any character decides to leave – state that they have proved that they show “humility” and can stay.

#### **2. Thou Hast Showed Their Worth – Enter into the Next Chamber! (20 minutes)**

\*As student enter into the chamber – a flying jet powered drone like robot flies around the room, the door slams shut, and it fires a laser at each of them – they each take 1 damage.

Projecting the character tracking sheet write students names (can list students in the order of their athleticism skills – stat points – e.g. level 5 athleticism goes first, then a 4, then a 3) :

Team A

Student Character A : 10 HP(health points) – 1 (for the laser)

Student Character B : 10 HP – 1

Student Character C : 10 HP – 1

Team B

Robot A : 12 HP

Robot B : 12 HP

\*Students decide what to do, if a student decides to attack, you do the roll for the dice.

<https://www.random.org/dice/?num=1>

### Battle Rules (From Chapter 7):

I came up with fairly simplified rules for this fighting style, inspired by the battle rules for Dungeons and Dragons (which are actually fairly complicated involving 15+ different stats, 6 different dice, etc.) We simplified things down to 3 stats:

- i. Athletics/Strength: 3/6
- ii. Intelligence/Wisdom: 3/6
- iii. Charisma: 3/6

Students had two extra points they could add to any one stat. For example, Accelerator was not physically strong or Charismatic so added his two points to Intelligence:

Athletics/Strength: 3/6

Intelligence: 5/6

Charisma: 3/6

In this case, there are generally three types of scenarios for what Accelerator can do during his turn.

1. If he attacks, tries to jump up to a high ledge, or do anything physical like this, he needs to “**do an athletics/strength/attack check**” where a 6-sided dice (normal dice) would be rolled. Since he has a 3/6 athletic/strength stat, a 1, 2 or 3 would be successful, and a 4/5/6 would fail. If he were attacking and rolled a 3, he would do 3 damage to another player; 2 would do 2 damage; and 1 would do 1 damage.

(Note: Each character has 10 health points (hp). Each time a player is attacked in battle, if the attack is successful, the damage is subtracted from their health points. For example, Accelerator attacked a character and rolled a 3, 3 points would be subtracted from the health points of that player. In the event Accelerator was hit by 2 damage from another player, his health points would decrease from 10, down to 8. If a player’s health points go to zero or below zero, the player passes out during the battle is no longer active in combat. At the end of a battle, all characters on the winning team are revived to full hit points).

2. If Accelerator wanted to check if he understood the weakness of a creature or the way something was made for instance, he would roll an **Intelligence check**. Since he is strong in this area (5/6), rolling a 1-5 would succeed, but a 6 would fail. A lower roll (e.g., 1 or 2) would mean he knows a little bit, a higher role (e.g., 4 or 5) would mean he’s an expert.

3. If Accelerator wanted to convince somebody, he would do a **Charisma Check**. Since he has 3/6 charisma, rolling a 1-3 would succeed, but a 4-6 would fail. A lower role (e.g. 1 or 2) would mean he barely convinced someone or the person may be up for talking to him, a 3 would mean he was fairly persuasive/charismatic.)

And for perhaps the most important rule – have fun and roll with things! The rules provided here are more meant to be guidelines to support play, shared improvisation and creativity, rather than being a strict pattern that dictates player action.

**A Character Tracking and Battle Tracking Sheet has been provided in Appendix E to assist with the documentation of character features and the tracking of battles.**

*Note: In the description of the final battle towards the end of this essay, there is a video clip of a portion of that battle. In it, you can see students doing multiple athletics/strength/attack checks and even an intelligence check (regarding summoning a snake).*

### **3. Enter the Next Chapter – The Halls of Rationale (30 minutes)**

On the table lies a weapon.

\*This is a weapon that no superhero has ever harnessed, and we're deciding whether or not they should.

\*Students hear the two perspectives and have to decide for themselves which they will do.

\*Remind students of the structure of the writing integrated essays.

\*Have students work, tomorrow they must present the integrated essay and a short statement about which side they agree upon

**(Note – in sharing this set of lessons we won't go in-depth about strategies for integrated essay writing, but here is a basic structure provided for the Integrated TOEFL Essay Writing in Magoosh's How to Ace TOEFL Writing<sup>10</sup> )**

- I. Introduction
  - 1. General statement about the relationship between the resources you heard and read.
  - 2. Short description of the structure of the lecture
- II. Body
  - 1. Paragraph on first point
    - 1. Paraphrase the professor's point (spoken)
    - 2. Contrast/compare with the reading
    - 3. *Give extra detail on the professor's point (optional)*
  - 2. Paragraph on second point
    - 1. Paraphrase the professor's point (spoken)
    - 2. Contrast/compare with the reading
    - 3. *Give extra detail on the professor's point (optional)*
  - 3. Paragraph on third point
    - 1. Paraphrase the professor's point (spoken)
    - 2. Contrast/compare with the reading
    - 3. *Give extra detail on the professor's point (optional)*
- III. Conclusion
  - A. *Restate the relationship between the two sources (optional)*

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<sup>10</sup> Magoosh's How to Ace TOEFL Writing <https://magoosh.com/toefl/toefl-writing-pdf/>

### **Reading/Written Essay**

Hawkings has provided the following written argument for using the bracelet weapon:

“This bracelet has the power to drain a human of their energy – miraculously sucking their energy into the bracelet and giving more power to the person wearing it. There are those who think that it should never be used, but, hopefully, readers of this essay will clearly understand the multiple benefits of using such a tool with incarcerated populations.

Firstly, people in prison do not need to use their energy for anything useful. The bracelet could take that untapped potential and put it to use for something positive.

Secondly, people are not scared of the relaxed rules of conventional prisons and the courts today. The knowledge that the bracelet exists, would strike fear into those who commit crimes and would prevent them from doing them in the first place.

Third, the bracelet is an antique of the superhero age. By using it, we would be respecting those who came before us, honoring their memory and efforts.”

Next, I shared the following spoken opinion from Professor Manray, reading it once aloud (as is done for the TOEFL essay).

### **Spoken Prompt**

“Hawkings has provided a formal response to the question, ‘should the Bracelet of Power actively be used to drain the life-force of those who have already committed crimes in the prison system?’ In this essay I hope to state why this is not a beneficial idea.

First, although it may appear that many people in prison don’t use their energy for something useful, many use that time to plan for what they wish to do post-release. Many prisoners put their energies towards useful things such as studies and fitness. In addition, it is not uncommon that prisoners are wrongfully accused, and sometimes their sentences will be reversed. Therefore, it would be unethical to use the bracelet on someone whose crimes are not certain, or who may have changed since committing the crime.

Second, scare tactics have proven to be ineffective for reducing crime. Rather than using the Bracelet of Power as a tool to scare potential victims, our energies would better be spent by reaching out to communities and populations most vulnerable to organized crime, due to poverty and poor living conditions.

Finally, it is actually unknown how old the amulet is and how long it has been used. It was unearthed from that ancient Mayan ruin by Captain Insano a few months ago, and although we suspect that it may have ancient super-human origins, we cannot say precisely what its specific origin is, or why it was created.”

(Remaining time working on integrated essay – remaining work will be finished as homework)



## **Class 3: The Journey Concludes – Review Integrated Essays, Discuss Ethics, Final Battle & Reflections**

### **0. How's it going (5-10 minutes)**

#### **1. Share the Integrated Essays (30-40 minutes)**

\*After reading the integrated essays that have been prepared.

\*Our superhero's are invited to make an additional comment on whether or not the league should utilize the bracelet.

**\*Captain Insano – considers the feedback.**

#### **2. Captain Insano Shares His Diabolical Plan – (20-25 minutes)**

\*I have brought you here because I need your help – we shall use this weapon to rain down chaos upon this town – together, we will rule, and start a new era where only super people will be allowed to live here! Who's with me!?

\*Students will ideally resist, and a battle begins. (If a student defects and decides to join Captain Insano – they join his team and a fight begins). (Note: if all students decided to join, or all but one, it turns out that Captain Insano was testing their integrity, and they failed, now he must fight them and take them to prison).

Captain Insano: 20 HP (Attacks – Dash charge, Insano Punch, Berserk double attack mode for a turn but then weakened for a turn – attacks do double against him when weakened.)

\*If Insano wins and is trying to take them to jail – they can try to use intelligence/charisma to change opinions.

#### **3. What Now? (10 minutes)**

\*What is your character going to do next?

#### **4. I Used to Think Now I Think? (10 minutes)**

Or one thing you took away/found interesting from the last few weeks.