

**LESSON**

# Agency, Choice, and Action

## Overview

### About This Lesson

There is a popular saying: “Hindsight is 20/20.” All too often, when reflecting on moments of decision-making in life and in literature, we can be quick to say what someone should have done without considering the risks and rewards involved in their choices, nor the many factors impacting their agency in the moment. In this lesson, students will apply their thinking about power and agency to four personal narrative essays written by young people. Complex questions about the relationship between someone’s agency and their choice of action or inaction in moments that might feel uncomfortable, or even scary, surface in these stories. Engaging with these questions deepens students’ understanding of human behavior, while also inviting them to draw connections to their own lives and preparing them to read and discuss a short story in the next two lessons.

### Essential Questions

- How do I empower myself to take action on behalf of myself and others?

### Guiding Questions

- What factors might impact an individual or group’s agency in a given situation?
- How can analyzing an individual’s choices and decision-making process help us to understand the relationship between someone’s agency and their choice of action or inaction?

### Facing History Learning Outcomes

- Engage with real and imagined stories that help them understand their own coming-of-age experiences and how others experience the world.
- Identify examples of injustice and unfairness in the literature they read and in the world today. Examine how an individual’s identity, group membership, and relationship to systems of inequity can impact their sense of who they are and their agency when faced with a moral dilemma or choice.

## What's Included

This lesson uses the following texts and materials. Access materials and a lesson Plan-on-a-Page in this [Google Folder](#).

- **Plan on a Page: Agency, Choice, and Action**
- **Reading: The Man Box**
- **Reading: T.S.A. and Cinnamon Buns**
- **Reading: Safia's Story**
- **Reading: José's Story**
- **Handout: Analyzing Actions and Outcomes**
- **Reading: As You Were**, Part 1 (assign pages 1-7 for homework)

## Preparing to Teach

### A Note to Teachers

#### 1. Applying the Analyzing Actions and Outcomes Handout to Personal Narratives

While the Analyzing Actions and Outcomes handout was originally developed with fiction in mind, it is easily adaptable to other genres. Explain to students that the young-adult author of the text they are reading in Activity 2 is the “character” they should consider. Some of the texts have a specific moment of decision-making, while others have more than one. In those cases with more than one, you can instruct groups to choose one to focus on, or they can look for patterns of decision-making across the story.

#### 2. Framing the Readings Intentionally

The personal narrative essays in this lesson and the short story “As You Were,” which students will start to read for homework this evening, include young persons’ reflections on divorce and discrimination based on race, religion, and sexual orientation. Depending on your context, you may need to let the class know that they may find one or more of the stories emotionally challenging and invite them to check in with you if they would like to talk more. You can also provide suggestions and support for how they can process their feelings as they read—for example, by “talking to the text” with margin notes, reflecting in their journals, or reaching out to a friend.

#### 3. Reading “As You Were” in Two Parts

The original version of Bethany Morrow's short story, published in the young-adult collection *Take the Mic: Fictional Stories of Everyday Resistance*, does not have sections; however, we have designed the student-facing reading so you can pass it out in two parts. If you are not able to assign the first part for homework, you will need to add additional time to this text set so students can read in class.

## Lesson Plan

### Activities

#### 1. Review Exit Tickets to Improve "Coverage"

Take a few minutes at the start of class to address any "coverage" issues that emerged in the exit cards from the previous lessons.

#### 2. Read and Discuss Young-Adult Personal Narrative Essays

- Explain to students that they will be reading and discussing personal narrative essays in which young people describe moments in their lives when they had or didn't feel like they had agency. Divide the class into groups of four and explain the [jigsaw](#) strategy. Give students in each group copies of one of the following personal narrative essays: **The Man Box**, **T.S.A. and Cinnamon Buns**, **Safia's Story**, or **José's Story**. Each student also needs a copy of the **Analyzing Actions and Outcomes** handout.
- Instruct "expert" groups to read their texts and complete the graphic organizer on the first page of the handout. Then let them know that they should discuss the first three questions on the second page of the handout.
- Have students move into new "teaching" groups of four so there is one student with each reading in the group. Prompt them to briefly summarize their narrative and then discuss questions 3 and 4 together. Debrief as a class, focusing the conversation on questions 3 and 4.

#### 3. Reflect on New Understanding

- Use the [Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World](#) teaching strategy for a final reflection in journals or on the strategy's [handout](#). If time allows, have students share one idea in a [Wraparound](#).

## Homework

Let students know that for the next two lessons, they will be reading and discussing the short-fiction piece "As You Were" and reflecting on the relationship between belonging and agency and the ways in which both can impact a young person's decision-making process. Instruct students to read and annotate the first part of "As You Were." You may have taught specific annotation strategies that you want your students to use. Or you can instruct them to try the following:

- Place a heart by moments in the story that resonate with you, perhaps because of who you are or your experiences in the world.
- Place a question mark in places where you feel confused, perhaps because you don't understand a vocabulary term or the author assumes you know something you don't know.
- Place emoji (smiling, frowning, angry, etc.) by moments that elicit an emotional response.
- Underline places where you see the narrator have a sense of belonging and a sense of agency.