

**LESSON**

# Finding Belonging in the World

## Overview

### About This Lesson

Being seen as you want to be seen is an invaluable gift, and students will understand how feelings of belonging and connection that come from supportive relationships have a powerful impact on self-esteem and self-development. In this lesson, students will engage with a short animated film to understand the power of cultivating positive and supportive relationships.

### Essential Questions

- How do we become who we want to be in the world?

### Guiding Questions

- How can words of wisdom from role models and mentors help us cultivate our own sense of identity and belonging in the world?
- Why is it important to develop relationships that help us feel seen, valued, and secure in our sense of belonging?

### Facing History Learning Outcomes

- Practice perspective-taking in order to develop empathy and recognize the limits of any one person's point of view.
- Develop the tools, efficacy, and voice to envision and enact positive changes in their personal lives, communities, and world.

### What's Included

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

- Handout: "Pearl of Wisdom" Graphic Organizer

## Preparing to Teach

### A Note to Teachers

#### 1. Choosing a Short Animated Film for the Lesson

- In this lesson, students will watch and discuss a short animated StoryCorps film about how the wisdom and lessons we receive from role models can shape our sense of who we are and where we belong. We have provided you with four options. Preview the videos before teaching the lesson and choose one to show to your students. If you have a block period, consider choosing more than one so students can make comparisons across stories.

- [The Door She Opened](#) (02:40)
  - [Lessons Learned](#) (03:09)
  - [Lola's Work](#) (02:58)
  - [Silvia's Legacy](#) (02:29)
- The StoryCorps videos feature individuals sharing personal stories about people who have mattered to them in their lives. Take time to review your classroom contract with students before beginning the lesson so they are ready to engage with the story you chose. This extra step will help to reinforce the norms you have established for engaging with texts and the idea of the classroom as a brave space for students to raise questions or express emotions that may arise.

## 2. Framing The Door She Opened with Intention

One of the short animated films, *The Door She Opened*, focuses on an adult's reflection on how she developed an understanding of her gender identity and who supported her on that journey. Introducing and modeling the use of respectful language when talking about gender and the gender spectrum will help to foster an inclusive learning environment that supports a sense of belonging for all students. You might find it helpful to review the NPR feature "[A Guide to Gender Identity Terms](#)" as part of your lesson preparation process.

## 3. Understanding How Pearls Are Made

This lesson focuses on the saying "pearls of wisdom" and will require you to briefly explain how a pearl is made. You might emphasize the idea that it involves something that is originally irritating or intrusive being changed over time into something beautiful: a pearl! The following definition from *Britannica Kids* may be helpful, but any basic overview will do: "Mollusks make pearls as a protection against irritants that sneak into their soft tissue. They do so by exuding layer upon layer of shell material. For some animals, this material is nacre, or mother of pearl."<sup>1</sup>

## Lesson Plan

### Activities

#### 1. Reflect on Supportive Relationships

- Remind students about the discussion they had in the previous class about what it means to "feel seen." Let them know that in today's class, they are going to think about how supportive relationships can help them feel seen and valued. While they are the authors of their own identities and have the power to express who they are and how they want to be seen, they can also gain strength and affirmation from the role models and mentors in their lives. So they will spend time reflecting on these individuals and the ways in which

<sup>1</sup> *Britannica Kids*, s.v. "[pearl](#)," accessed September 20, 2022.

their words of wisdom have helped students understand aspects of themselves and the world around them.

- Prepare to watch the short animated film you chose for this lesson (see Teaching Note 1) by having students reflect in their journals on what it feels like when someone sees you for the unique individual that you are and encourages you to be your true self. Let them know that they will not be required to share what they write.
- Use the following questions to prompt students' thinking. Invite them to think about friends, family members, teammates, members of their church, mosque, or synagogue, teachers and coaches, or other mentors and role models in their life:
  - Who are the people in your life, past and present, that have made you feel like you belong and that you can be your true self?
  - What are some of the things those people have said or done to help you feel this way?
- If students feel comfortable, have them share ideas from their journal responses with the class. You can model risk-taking by sharing your own story of someone in your life who made you feel seen and valued.

## 2. Watch a Short Animated Film about "Pearls of Wisdom"

*See Teaching Note 1: Preview the films and select one (or more if you have a longer class period) before teaching this activity.*

- Let students know that they will be watching a short animated film. In the film, an adult will be reflecting on a time when they were young and received "pearls of wisdom" in the form of important life lessons from a family member, mentor, or role model. Explain to students how pearls are created (see Teaching Note 3) and let them know that this is why the phrase "pearls of wisdom" is often used to describe a positive lesson learned over time from an experience that was once painful or challenging.
- Show the StoryCorps short animated film that you selected for this lesson.
  - [The Door She Opened](#) (02:40)
  - [Lessons Learned](#) (03:09)
  - [Lola's Work](#) (02:58)
  - [Silvia's Legacy](#) (02:29)
- Project the following questions one at a time and ask students to respond in a [Think-Pair-Share](#) discussion:
  - What was the most impactful, important, or memorable moment in the film for you? What makes you say that?
  - What "pearls of wisdom" or important life lessons did the speaker(s) learn that they shared in the film? Who did they learn these lessons from?

- How do you think these “pearls of wisdom” impacted their sense of identity and/or belonging in the world when they were growing up?
- Debrief students’ discussions as a class by asking a few pairs to share their ideas. Then discuss the following question together: Why is it important for us to develop relationships that help us feel seen, valued, and secure in our sense of belonging?

### 3. Create and Share “Pearls of Wisdom”

- Let students know that they are going to have the opportunity to think about the “pearls of wisdom” they have received from people who have made them feel like they are seen, they are valued, and they belong, and they will consider how these life lessons have helped or are helping them be their best selves. For this activity, students will write and design “pearls of wisdom” graphics to be posted in the classroom or somewhere in your school.
- Start by having students respond to the following prompt in their journals about the pearls of wisdom they have received:

Write about a wise saying, piece of advice, important lesson, or idea that has been passed on to you from someone who has supported you and made you feel seen and like you belong.

- Then distribute the [“Pearls of Wisdom” Graphic Organizer](#) and tell students that they are going to write, draw, or make a collage depicting a piece of wisdom that is meaningful to them. Gather art supplies—colored pencils, pens, crayons, magazines—and then let students get to work creating their own pearls of wisdom.
- There are many ways that students can share their “pearls” with the class. They can post them around the room for a [gallery walk](#), present them in a circle discussion, or share them in pairs or triads.