

Lesson

Fitting in Versus Belonging

Overview**About This Lesson**

Humans have evolved to seek out belonging in groups that provide us with acceptance, support, and a sense of identity. This deep desire to belong may lead us to feel as if we need to sacrifice one or more of our values in order to fit in. This tension between our desire to fit in and our need to express our own individual identity can feel especially challenging for young people, who may be navigating a new school, shifts in peer groups, and increasing responsibilities at home and in their communities.

In this lesson, students will listen to an excerpt from a podcast and read a short personal narrative in order to consider the difference between fitting in and belonging, as well as the ways in which our desire to seek approval can result in us camouflaging who we really are and want to be.

Essential Questions

- What are the forces that shape belonging?
- How can we reduce barriers to belonging for ourselves and others?

Guiding Questions

- What does it mean to “fit in”? How is fitting in different from belonging?
- How might sacrificing our values to fit in affect our relationships, self-esteem, and overall well-being?

Facing History Learning Outcomes

In order to deepen their understanding of the text, themselves, each other, and the world, students will . . .

- Engage with real and imagined stories that help them understand their own experiences and how others experience the world.
- Analyze the internal and external conflicts that characters face and the impact these conflicts can have on an individual’s choices and actions, both in the text and in the

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real 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](#).

- **Reading:** "Chameleon" by David L.
- **Audio:** Belonging, Fitting In, and Acceptance (*Dear Anxiety* podcast)

Preparing to Teach

A Note to Teachers

1. Accessing the Lesson's Podcast

In this lesson, students will listen to a short clip from the *Dear Anxiety* podcast episode [Belonging, Fitting In, and Acceptance](#). Please note that you will need to access the episode via a link to an external website, so it is important to ensure that you can access the site from your classroom before teaching the lesson.

Lesson Plan

Activities

1. Reflect on Fitting In at School

Before the lesson, project an image of a chameleon on the board. You can find open-source images like [this one](#) on websites like Wikimedia Commons and Pexels. Let students know that today they will be thinking about chameleons—reptiles that can change color to blend or fit into their environment. While chameleons actually change color to communicate with other chameleons and in reaction to temperature and mood, the idea of changing an aspect of oneself to blend in is a powerful one that students will be pursuing in this and upcoming lessons.¹

Invite students to respond to the following questions in their [journals](#). Let them know that they will be sharing their ideas with a partner.

- What are some things that students do to fit in at school?
- In your opinion, is it worth sacrificing your values to fit in? Why or why not?

¹ Laura Clark, "[We Finally Know How Chameleons Change Their Color](#)," *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 11, 2015.

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Have students do a quick pair-share, and then see if any volunteers would like to share with the class.

2. Listen to a Podcast Excerpt about Fitting In versus Belonging

Let students know that they will be listening to an excerpt from a podcast in which the hosts explore the difference between fitting in and belonging.

Prompt students to make a T-chart in their journals and label the left-hand column “Fitting In” and the right-hand column “Belonging.” Model by making a T-chart on the board. **Play minutes 02:17 to 05:54** of the *Dear Anxiety* podcast episode [Belonging, Fitting In, and Acceptance](#). As they listen, students can jot down notes in each column that help them understand the difference between the two concepts.

Have students compare T-charts in pairs and add any new ideas to their notes. If time allows, play minutes 04:00 to 05:54 a second time so students can check and add to their notes.

Then discuss the following questions as a class. As you discuss the first question, you can populate the T-chart on the board with students’ ideas.

- What does it mean to “fit in”? How is fitting in different from belonging?
- How can our desire to fit in influence the choices we make in our lives?

3. Read and Discuss a Personal Narrative

Let students know that they will be reading a personal narrative in which a student reflects on the lengths they went to to fit in while they were a freshman in high school. You will read the first part of the story out loud and then pause to allow students to make a prediction about what happens in the end. Pass out copies of the reading [“Chameleon” by David L.](#) to the class. Prompt students to fold their paper below the fourth paragraph so they cannot see the ending of the story.

Then read the first four paragraphs out loud. Pause and have students discuss the following question in pairs: *What do you think happens next? What makes you say that?* Have a few volunteers share their predictions.

Read the final paragraph out loud. Then project the following questions one at a time for a class discussion:

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- In the podcast episode, cohost Renee Jain discusses the different ways that someone might try to fit in, like trying to camouflage or turn oneself into a pretzel. What approach does David take to fit in at his high school?
- What values do you think David may have sacrificed in his attempt to fit in? How can this reading help you answer the question you explored in an earlier lesson: Why do we sometimes make decisions that are not aligned with our values in order to try to fit in?
- How might sacrificing our values to fit in affect our relationships, self-esteem, or overall well-being? How do the podcast and David's story help you answer this question? How do your own experiences help you answer this question?
- In your opinion, is it possible to stand out and belong at the same time? If so, what conditions are necessary for this to happen? If not, why not?

4. Create a Headline about Fitting In versus Belonging

To help students synthesize what they have learned, follow the steps of the [Create a Headline](#) strategy to have pairs of students compose a headline that responds to one of the lesson's guiding questions and captures important information from this lesson's sources. Students could do this activity for homework if there is not time during the lesson.