



All resources, strategies and text in this document are meant as tools to support you and your students as you grapple with complex issues, and form deeper connections, opinions and questions.

Some of the text shared is meant for you, the educator. Often we don't spend much time reflecting on these issues ourselves, and subsequently walk into our classrooms emotionally unprepared to lead these important conversations. Hopefully, these resources will prove helpful in providing some much needed reflection for both you, and your students.

While many of the resources included may have content too complex for younger students, Facing History's approach and strategies used to engage in difficult conversations translate to students of all ages. In the first section, "**Strategies and Resources**" you'll see examples of ways in which you can begin to address questions and concerns younger students (or students of any age!) bring into our learning spaces.

### **Goals for our students and ourselves:**

- Learn to research, and ask questions, before cultivating an opinion or point of view about a particular issue.
- Assume best intentions when engaging with others in complex conversation
- Lead our students safely into, and out of, difficult classroom content
- Build space for reflection
- Provide room for discourse, helping students see the difference between disagreement and disrespect
- Maintain the values inherent in us, and the Jewish institutions for which we work, and be a light onto the nations.
- Find reliable information about a particular issue or current event?

### **Essential Questions to Consider:**

- How do our religious, ethnic, and national identities shape the way we construct our universe of moral responsibility?
- What does it mean to be an Upstander? Bystander? Perpetrator?
- What's our definition of community? Who is part of our community; who is outside it?
- What are we capable of ignoring, turning our back on or rationalizing when we put distance (physical or metaphorical) between ourselves and others?
- What are the myriad ways in which we can choose to speak up when we perceive a wrong is being committed?
- What is justice? Why is justice important?
- For whom is justice important; does everyone deserve it?



## **STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES**

### **Assess Your Comfort Level**

**Adapted from Teaching Tolerance “Begin With...” Series:** <http://bit.ly/2kz37kB>

Many educators avoid talking about social issues. It can be uncomfortable, controversial and may call for skills few of us possess. Often, this avoidance comes down to fears of misspeaking, or exacerbating differences or hurting feelings.

Part of getting students ready to engage in discussion around social issues and currents events is to first deal with our own feelings and experiences.

After reflecting on your own comfort level and experience, think about ways to grow confident.

- **Do you worry about your ability to answer students’ questions?** If so, commit to accepting that you don’t have all the answers, and embrace the opportunity to learn with your students.
- **Do you feel ill-prepared to talk about current events or social issues?** If so, commit to learning more about the issues by studying history and following current events.
- **Do you reroute classroom discussions when you sense resistance or anger in the room?** If so, commit to riding out the discussion next time.
- **Do you feel isolated in your experience?** If so, commit to identifying a colleague with whom you can co-teach, plan or debrief.

Educators play a crucial role in helping students navigate current events and talk openly about the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of social inequality and discrimination. Learning how to communicate about topics like police violence, economic inequality, mass incarceration and white privilege requires practice, and facilitating these conversations demands skill—regardless of who we are, our intentions or how long we’ve been teaching.

### **Address Strong Emotions**

Students’ reactions to talking about social issues will vary. They may react passively, show sorrow, express anger or respond unpredictably. Some students may become visibly upset; others may push back against discussing these topics in class. Many of these reactions stem from feelings such as pain, anger, confusion, guilt, shame and the urge to blame others. Seeing members of the class respond emotionally may elicit reactions from you or other students. Guilt and shame can lead to crying that may immobilize conversation. Anger might lead to interruptions, loud talking, sarcasm or explicit confrontations—all of which can impede important dialogue. Your role is to remain calm and assess the situation. If the tension in the room appears to be



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prompting dialogue and learning, continue to monitor, but let the conversation play out.

If the tension boils over in confrontation that jeopardizes student safety (emotional or otherwise), take steps to diffuse the situation.

### **Find Comfort in Discomfort**

Teaching about structural inequality such as racism requires courage and confidence—from you and from your students. It’s normal to feel discomfort or anger as you reflect on your own experiences with racial inequality. But the more you engage in and moderate difficult conversations, the more confident you’ll become. The conversations may not necessarily get easier, but your ability to press toward more meaningful dialogue will expand. Stay engaged; the journey is worth the effort.

### **Being uncomfortable should not mean being unsafe.**

With your students, establish classroom norms that include a list of specific words and phrases that students commit to not using. The contract might include such statements as “Try to understand what someone is saying before rushing to judgment” or “Put-downs of any kind are never OK” or “Speak directly to each other, not the teacher.” Established norms or a contract can help students support a healthy classroom environment and reduce the likelihood that you will have to intervene.

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**In-the-moment student reaction:** When students have an emotional response to a topic such as this, how can we create a safe space in which to slow those moments down, turning them into a chance to learn?



### **“Lion Face/Lemon Face”**

- Have students stand and give them the prompt “Lemon face.” In response to that prompt, students should scrunch their faces, and hands, legs and body as tight as possible, like their whole body just tasted a lemon.
- Next, say “Lion face!” to which students do the exact, physical opposite, stretching out their hands, faces, mouths wide as they can and growl like lions.

You can repeat this as much as necessary. You can also do it during class if you feel like you need a minute to regroup and recharge. It’s a wonderful way to help diffuse anxious energy!

### **Name The Fear**

Ask students to think about something they were afraid of, but aren’t afraid anymore.

- What was it?
- How did they get over their fear?

**Only by learning about something, trying to understand what makes it work, can we prevent it from scaring us, and other people.**

- Seeking information, even about scary things, is powerful and important!
- The more something scares us, the more questions we ask!
- What do we need to know about this person, this situation, this moment in history that will help us better understand and get rid of our fear?

### **“Putting it Together” (*puzzle piece print outs attached to email*)**

This activity is a great way for students to explore a current event or social issue and develop research and digital media skills. This offers a way for students to seek facts and better understand a challenging or “hot-button” issue.

### **Step by Step: Ask students (or you can suggest topics) what issues they are interested in pursuing.**

- **Step One:** What are the questions we would need to answer to better understand this issue?
- **Step Two:** Students generate questions. Make sure, if it’s not already suggested, to add the question “What can we do to help address this form of injustice?”
- **Step Three:** Break the class into pairs or small groups and “assign” each group one of the questions.
- **Step Four:** Students receive a puzzle piece cutout and research their question, writing the information they’ve found onto the puzzle piece, along with the sources they used to get the information.
- **Step Five:** Students come back together and each group shares out the info they’ve gathered.
- **Step Six:** Students place their puzzle pieces back together, forming a complete puzzle.



**Reflect on activity:** No issue/person/situation is made up of one story or one perspective; there are multiple perspectives and stories that make up an issue. It's our job to explore these perspectives to get a better sense of what is wrong/what is needed/what we can do.

### **Sentence Starters**

If students are expressing fear, anger etc. and are unable to verbalize, try these sentence starters...students can answer them verbally or write them down. Helps refocus their feelings and also highlights why talking about tough subjects is important.

- The hard part of talking about \_\_\_\_\_ (whatever the current issue) is
- The important part of talking about \_\_\_\_\_ is
- I have heard people say \_\_\_\_\_ about (whatever the current issue is)
- I wonder/really want to know \_\_\_\_\_

### **Setting the Setting:**

Before class even begins, think about a structured, physical activity that helps students focus and energize.

Possible suggestions:

- Modified “sun salutation” yoga pose.
- A short guided meditation

### **“Take a Breath.”**

If there are a few students expressing emotions in relation to challenging material, ask the room (as a collective) to stop, take a deep breath, hold it for a count of three and then slowly release. Gives their crazy bonkers brains a chance to process a bit.

After so doing, ask each student to share the “what” and “why.”

- What am I feeling (in one word)?
- Why am I feeling it?

In this moment, you'll be able to start to untangle the connections the students are making, which can lead to a more meaningful conversation that can hopefully link back to the content you're studying.

### **"This is scary!"**

The desire to turn away from something that scares us is totally normal, no matter how old we are. Can we, then, help our students see the benefit in turning towards these things instead?



## **FACING HISTORY TEACHING STRATEGIES**

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library?search=teaching%20strategies>

**Big Paper:** <http://bit.ly/1hhp7DN>

**Contracting for a safe and reflective classroom**

- **Link to strategy on FH website:** <http://bit.ly/2uF5HaC>
- **Link to more teacher info in FH Bully Study Guide (Page 7):** <http://bit.ly/2fDMrb1>

**Graffiti Board:** <http://bit.ly/2uByH7r>

**Jigsaw:** <http://bit.ly/1WFBTl9>

**Journal Reflection:** <http://bit.ly/2vTDzEF>

**Save the Last Word:** <http://bit.ly/1kzkspE>

**Text to Text:** <http://bit.ly/2w22UNn>

**Think Pair Share:** <http://bit.ly/1C3Mrz6>

## **ARTICLES/RESPONSES ON CHARLOTTESVILLE**

**How to talk to your kids about the violence in Charlottesville:**

<http://lat.ms/2wGSuzM>

**The first thing teachers should do when school starts is talk about hatred in America. Here's help:** <http://wapo.st/2vAK78C>

**Jewish Leaders Condemn Charlottesville Violence:** <http://bit.ly/2w2nT2h>

**'Jews Will Not Replace Us,' Why White Supremacists Go After Jews:**  
<http://wapo.st/2uBCaTh>

**Resources for Educators to use in the wake of Charlottesville:** <http://n.pr/2i0fp5T>

**We Can Do Better: Lessons from Charlottesville:** <http://bit.ly/2wZtWRS>



## **FACING HISTORY RESOURCES**

**www.facing.org**

### **Bringing the “Beloved Community” to the Classroom:**

<http://facingtoday.facinghistory.org/author/steven-becton>

### **“The Danger of a Single Story”:** <http://bit.ly/2fDXXmE>

- Or watch all, or parts of, the author’s TED Talk (18:49): <http://bit.ly/1kMOnud>

### **Facing Ferguson: News Literacy in a Digital Age:**

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/facing-ferguson-news-literacy-digital-age>

### **Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide to Classroom Conversations**

*Attached to email*

### **How to Assess the Strength of a Democracy:** <http://bit.ly/2kpWOha>

### **How to Use History to Teach Kids About Race:** <http://bit.ly/2i2bPb4>

### **Inspire Students with Hope In Times of Uncertainty:** <http://bit.ly/2uAXqbU>

FHAO has partnered with the Hearts on Fire Movement to offer teachers tools to fire up their students and inspire them to become future leaders for social justice and change.

### **Post-Election Support for Difficult Conversations:** <http://bit.ly/2jOe5Q1>

### **Reconstruction Era and the Fragility of Democracy**

<https://www.facinghistory.org/reconstruction-era>

### **Sacred Texts, Modern Questions: Connecting Ethics and History Through a Jewish Lens:** <http://bit.ly/2hWoSuK>

### **Standing Up to Hatred and Intolerance:**

<https://www.facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance>

### **Three Angles to the Confederate Monument Controversy:** <http://bit.ly/2uFloPg>

### **Upstanders: Profound Risks, Incredible Rewards:** <http://bit.ly/2uX9PCq>

### **Use these four guiding principles in difficult conversations:** <http://bit.ly/2uBDsxK>

### **Use these four tips to welcome new students into your classroom:**

<http://bit.ly/2wl05hc>

### **“We Need to Talk”:** <http://bit.ly/2gh9zsB>



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**"Dear Jews" A Letter by Josh Radnor**

<http://letterstotherevolution.com/josh-radnor>

**Educating for a Diverse Democracy:** <https://www.tolerance.org/>

**In Charlottesville, the Local Jewish Community Presses On:** <http://bit.ly/2uEh8nn>

**Bryan Stevenson's Four Elements for Creating Change:**

*Bryan Stevenson is the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative*

1. We must get “proximate” to suffering and understand the nuanced experiences of those who suffer from and experience inequality. If you are willing to get closer to people who are suffering, you will find the power to change the world.
2. We must change the narratives that sustain problems. Narratives that fail to acknowledge or accurately portray the reality of inequality only serve to perpetuate it. Stevenson references the politics of fear and anger that led to “zero tolerance” policies and armed officers in schools that promote a narrative that students in schools are criminals to be punished rather than children to be taught.
3. We must stay hopeful about what we can do to end injustice.
4. We must be willing to do things that are uncomfortable. Fighting, sometimes in vain, for the rights of some of the most downtrodden members of society can feel uncomfortable. However, there is restorative power in doing so. We must commit to working for equality not only because we want to fix a broken system, but because we recognize our own brokenness in the brokenness of those we serve.

**(Southern Poverty Law Center) Ten Ways To Fight Hate:** <http://bit.ly/2uIHh05>

## QUOTES/TEXT:

### The Danger of Distance

The idea Bryan Stevenson (*Founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative*) discusses of getting "proximal" to issues we're exploring. Often, our students look at people in need as "others" and keep or create distance. "Those people" need help etc. Not in a malicious way, but our students can tend to be somewhat removed from the world around them. Only by recognizing that when someone happens to one of us, it happens to all of us, can we act justly.

“The Torah tells us, ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself, so we make it impossible for them to be our neighbor.’ - Rabbi Heschel

“Even with the evidence before our eyes, we hesitate to accept the worst.”

- Professor Larry Langer



People make choices. Choices make history.

"I used to think that the most important line in the Bible was "Love your neighbour as yourself". Then I realised that it is easy to love your neighbour because he or she is usually quite like yourself. What is hard is to love the stranger, one whose colour, culture or creed is different from yours. That is why the command, "Love the stranger because you were once strangers", resonates so often throughout the Bible. It is summoning us now. A bold act of collective generosity will show that the world, particularly Europe, has learned the lesson of its own dark past and is willing to take a global lead in building a more hopeful future. Wars that cannot be won by weapons can sometimes be won by the sheer power of acts of humanitarian generosity to inspire the young to choose the way of peace instead of holy war." —Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

"Confronted with knowledge of dozens of apparently random disasters each day, what can a human heart do but slam its doors? No mortal can grieve that much. Our defense is to pretend there's no thread of event that connects us, and that those lives are somehow not precious and like our own."

- Barbara Kingsolver, Author

"...I needed to do what I ask our students to do. When confronting different historical moments or current events, I ask students to resist generalizations, to judge responsibly, to consider reliable sources, and to make conclusions without prejudice. I ask them to avoid retreating from uncomfortable conversations, to participate in them actively and thoughtfully instead...I know that if I fall into the troubling pattern of seeing these experiences only from my own perspective, it would lead to drawing simplistic and divisive conclusions...As I engaged in conversation with others, I was reminded of the privilege and responsibility of living in a democracy, even an imperfect one."

- Facing History Staff Member, Steve Becton

How do we live with moral difference and yet sustain an overarching community? "The answer is conversation- the disciplined act of communication- the disciplined act of communicating (making my views intelligible to someone who does not share them) and listening (entering into the inner world of someone whose views are opposed to my own). Each is a genuine form of respect, or paying attention to the other, of conferring value on his or her opinions even though they are not mine. In a conversation neither side loses and both are changed because they now know what reality looks like from a different perspective. That is not to say that either gives up its personal convictions. That is not what conversation is about. It does mean, however, that I may now realize that I must make space for another deeply held belief. That is how public morality is constructed in a pluralistic society- a sustained act of understanding and seeking to be understood across the boundaries of difference."

- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*



"Ask questions. Discuss and deliberate and you will find yourself in a different place. We all have the same materials. How you look at it will depend on where you enter the discussion. Turn the questions around and find yourself in a different place."

- *Father of Helise Lieberman, Educational Director for the Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland Foundation*

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– Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*

#### **Psalm 82:3-4**

Defend the poor and the orphan; deal justly with the poor and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

#### **Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5**

Therefore, only one person was created to teach you that whosoever kills a single soul the Bible considers to have killed a complete world. And whosoever sustains and saves a single soul, it is as if that person sustained a whole world.

#### **Pirke Avot 2:5**

Hillel said, do not separate yourself from the community.

#### **Midrash Tehillim 82:3**

Defend the poor and the orphan; do justice to the afflicted and needy.

#### **Rabbi Shelom of Karlin (18th Century)**

If you want to raise a person from mud and filth, do not think it is enough to keep standing on top and reaching a helping hand down to the person. You must go all the way down yourself, down into mud and filth. Then take hold of the person with strong hands and pull the person and yourself out into the light.