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Voices from the Storm Curriculum

Perceptions and Realities of Race, Class and *Democracy*

Time Needed: 3-4 days

Materials: *Voices from the Storm*, large pieces of paper or poster sized Post-it notes, markers, handouts and background information/images on Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans.

Objective: Explore perceptions of class, race and democracy through an examination of Hurricane Katrina and multiple first-person narratives from *Voices from the Storm.*

Related Curricular Standards: Reading History RH.9-10.1, RH.11-12.1, RH.9-10.2, RH.11-12.2, RH.9-10.6, RH.11-12.6, RH.9-10.9, RH.11-12.9, Writing W.9-10.1, W.11-12.1, W.9-10.2, W.11-12.2, W.9-10.7, W.11-12.7, SL.9-10.1, Speaking and Listening SL.11-12.1, SL.9-10.4, SL.11-12.4

Connections: Worksheets for this lesson can be adapted and used for other narratives in the Voice of Witness series.

Narrative Excerpt: "Katrina was truly a disaster, but for me Katrina was a blessing 'cause it turned my life around. I've been wanting to leave New Orleans. You're not treated right in New Orleans, you're not treated fair. New Orleans is the city that forgot to care, and the city that care had forgotten about. You hear about the big easy, you hear about carnival. But man, we go through hell in New Orleans." —Patricia Thompson

Essential Questions:

- How does perception impact identity?
- How did racial and class divisions impact the national response to Katrina? How did the events of Katrina challenge our democratic ideals?

Overview: Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath provide an opportunity to examine race and class in contemporary American society as they are both perceived and acted upon. These lessons first encourage students to consider their perceptions of their own selves in relation to the rest of the world, and then to apply those differences to the catastrophe in New Orleans. Before Katrina, the perceptions New Orleans residents had of themselves, their city, and their government were informed by racial and class divisions, though largely unspoken or explicit. After the storm, these divisions became glaringly apparent and were also echoed and distorted in the media coverage of the disaster.

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Day One

Overview
In this lesson, students will reflect on and discuss perceptions of their own community in preparation for learning more about the impact of Hurricane Katrina.

Step One: Create poster activity, "Perceptions of My Community" as a warm up for the lessons/readings that follow. It is an opportunity for students to reflect on the many sources that shape perceptions in their community. If desired, have students reflect on the following prompts in writing for a few minutes before beginning the activity. Hang four pieces of large poster board or large Post-its around the room. On each poster write the following half sentences:

- (Your Neighborhood, Town or City) is ...
- People from (Your Neighborhood, Town or City) are ...
- Being from (Your Neighborhood, Town or City) means ...
- Young People in (Your neighborhood Town or City) are ...

Students then circulate around the room and finish each sentence according to their perceptions of their community. They should write at least one response for all four prompts (7-10 minutes).

Step Two: Students then do a Gallery Walk to examine all of the completed sentences (5 minutes).

Step Three: At the conclusion of the Gallery Walk, students identify the top three themes/perceptions from each poster. The class then charts the positive, negative and neutral perceptions. At the conclusion of this activity, discuss the following question (15 minutes):

- Where do the perceptions of our community come from?

Make a list of the sources (family, friends, internet, television, etc.)

Step Four: Before providing students with necessary background information of Hurricane Katrina, create a slightly altered version of the KWL activity for the class using the chart listed below. This chart should be centrally located in the classroom and be used throughout the unit for student questions and responses. *See attached handout.*

Step Five: The remainder of the class period should be spent going over background material (maps, timelines, reports) on Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans from the appendices of *Voices From the Storm* (p. 261). Use the student questions from the KWL chart and the community perceptions from the Poster Activity to frame and share information. (15-20 minutes).

Step Six (For Homework): Create reading groups for the following suggested narratives from *Voices from the Storm:*

- Patricia Thompson
- Dan Bright
- Father Vien The Nguyen
- Renee Martin
- Abdulrahman Zeitoun

Assign students to read the intro and the story of their assigned individual. If students need additional time to read, use some time at the beginning of the next class period. Students should do the Talk to the Text activity or incorporate other active reading strategies.

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WHAT I *KNOW*	WHAT I *WANT* TO KNOW	WHAT I *LEARNED*

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Day Two

Overview
In this lesson, students will delve deeper into the stories of their assigned narrators, filling out Expert Group worksheets on their narrator's experiences, and preparing a presentation for the class.

Step One: Additional reading time, if needed (10-15 minutes)

Step Two: Warm Up Activity (5 minutes): *See attached KWL chart handout.*

Step Three: Four Corners activity (10 Minutes):

In each corner of the room, hang one of the following signs: **strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree**. Then give the following instructions:

"We'll be doing an activity in which you'll be moving around the classroom, stating your opinion and supporting your point of view. Bring your warm-up paper with you. I'll be reading the statements from the warm-up. After I read the statement, stand in the corner of the room under the sign that represents your opinion—strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. After you move there, I'll be asking different people in that opinion group to back up their opinions with explanations."

Depending on schedules and engagement, this activity can take longer and be even richer.

Step Four: Expert Groups (20 minutes)

In groups, students work together, but each fills in a worksheet on the individual assigned to them. Make sure to note the difference between questions 1 and 2. *See attached Expert Group Worksheet handout.*

Step Five: Presentation Charts (5-10 minutes)

During the next class period, groups will be making short presentations on their assigned narrators. In preparation for this, give each group a Presentation Chart that they will fill out for their presentations. With any remaining class time, groups can begin writing responses on their chart. *See attached Model Presentation Chart handout.*

Step Six: For homework, students write reflections of the following questions (one page):

- What in the Katrina stories surprised you?
- What is most important to you in the stories you read and heard?
- How do you think these people's situations could have been improved?

- Other than the Hurricane itself, what other factors contributed to their struggles

Day Three

Overview
In this lesson, students will reflect on how their reading has changed their perceptions of New Orleans, present basic information on their assigned narrator to the class, and revisit the KWL chart together to include new reflections and considerations.

Step One: Pair/Share (10 minutes)
Students pair up and share written reflection answers. Each pair then shares their answers with the class. Students should be encouraged to use direct quotes from their reading.

After a short "gallery walk," allow students to share their responses to repeating the activity using New Orleans as a model. Consider the following questions:

- Have your perceptions of New Orleans changed as a result of your reading?
- In your opinion, what are the sources that have shaped perceptions of New Orleans?

Step Two: Expert Worksheets & Presentation Charts (10 minutes)
Groups finish their Expert Worksheets and Presentation Chart from the previous day.

Step Three: Presentations (30 minutes).
Each group presents basic info on their assigned narrator while the rest of the class takes notes on the Presentation Note-Taker Worksheet for comparing experiences. As presentations unfold, the teacher asks groups probing questions, elicits comments/questions from class members and pulls out comparisons from class members. Students incorporate responses from their Note-Taker Worksheets. *See attached Note- Taker Worksheet handout.*

Step Four: Conclusion: KWL Chart and Poster Activity (10 minutes): Students revisit KWL chart—adding to the W and L sections, in addition to repeating the first step of the Poster Activity (on paper or whiteboard), with the following changes:

- New Orleans is ...
- People from New Orleans are ...
- Being from New Orleans means ...

Consider the following question:

- Have your perceptions of New Orleans changed as a result of your reading? In what ways?

Possible Oral History Project: Class creates an oral history project exploring local examples that reflect perceptions and realities of race, class, and democracy. Projects could also have an environmental injustice framework, collecting stories from a variety of individuals in the community.

Media Option: Documentary Films:

When The Levees Broke (dir. Spike Lee) HBO Films, 2006
http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/when-the-levees-broke-a-requiem-in-four- acts/index.html

Trouble the Water (dirs. Tia Lessin and Carl Deal) Elsewhere Films, 2008
https://tv.apple.com/us/movie/trouble-the-water/umc.cmc.53lckm7sir1cm5fe02g1m9yf1?action=play

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Multiple Perspectives Fishbowl Discussion

Description: A "fishbowl" is designed as an inclusive, participatory group discussion format that encourages all participants to share their opinions and listen respectfully to the opinions of others. It can be used and adapted for classrooms, community groups, book clubs and more. This iteration of the fishbowl format is focused on a discussion of multiple perspectives from Dan Bright's story in *Voices from the Storm*.

Set Up: The basic set up is to create a circle of chairs (usually between six and ten) for discussion participants, and another circle of chairs (numbers can vary) outside of that for discussion observers/listeners. During the activity, each participant will be able to engage as a discussion participant and as an observer/listener.

For "Multiple Perspective" Discussion Participants:

- Discuss Dan's story from the perspective of his arresting officer on the night of Saturday, August 27.
- Discuss Dan's story from the perspective of one or more members of his family.
- Discuss Dan's story from the perspective of a guard at Orleans Parish Prison on Sunday, August 28, and a guard on the Broad Overpass from Monday, August 29 to Thursday, September 1.
- Discuss Dan's story from the perspective of one of the "older guys" in the prison during the storm.
- Discuss Dan's story from the perspective of one or more of his fellow prisoners, in both Orleans Parish Prison and the Broad Overpass.
- Discuss Dan's story from the perspective of an inmate and a guard at Hunt Correctional Center.
- Discuss Dan's story from the perspective of Dan Bright.

Discussion Agreements and Format: Before the discussion begins, classes or groups should review any group agreements regarding respectful discussions. Participants may find it worthwhile to respond to the prompts in writing before the activity begins. The observers /listeners should have specific tasks explained beforehand, such as taking notes, active listening, questions to pursue, emergent themes, etc. They might also take notes on the nature of the discussion itself, describing the details of what they feel constitutes a "good discussion." The discussion participants begin their conversation, and after fifteen minutes, the facilitator calls "switch," when the listeners/observers move into the inner circle to become the discussion participants, and the discussion participants move back to the outer circle to become the listeners/observers.

Activity Debrief: In addition to discussing the content covered and questions it raised, all participants should have a chance to comment on their experience as listeners/observers, and discussion participants—reflecting on takeaways from the overall experience as well as strategies for improving future discussions.

Model for Presentation Chart

Name of the person studied:
Location in New Orleans before Katrina

Life Before the Storm

_____ was like…	_____'s life was …
•	•
•	•
•	•

The Storm

Highlights from _____ 's experience during the storm and after the levees broke:	Descriptions of _____ 's state of mind during the storm and after the levees broke:
•	•
•	•
•	•

The Week After/Weeks After the Storm
Highlights after the storm – write your person's location and state of mind.

Looking Back
Highlights — where is your person now? How has their life changed?

Golden Description: What is the one story the rest of the class needs to know about the person you studied? If you could only describe their experiences in two sentences, what would they be?

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Worksheet

Read each of the following statements. On your own piece of paper, write whether you agree or disagree with the statement, then write a sentence explaining your opinion. You do not need to copy the statements on your paper:

1) If a *huge natural disaster* were to hit (*Your City or Town*) tomorrow, the city would be prepared to handle it.

2) If a *huge natural disaster* were to hit (*Your City or Town*) tomorrow, my family would be prepared.

3) City, state and federal government should be responsible for helping people deal with natural disasters.

4) The government helps all people equally when it comes to things like natural disasters.

5) In a natural disaster, prisoners and undocumented immigrants do not deserve the same assistance from the government as other people do.

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Student Name:

Date:

Expert Group Worksheet

While talking with other students who studied the same Katrina story as the one you read, fill in this chart to better understand the narrator's experiences.

Name of the person you studied:

Location in New Orleans before Katrina:

Life Before the Storm

1) What are three ways you can describe this person's personality? Give evidence for each description.

2) What are three ways you can describe this person's life before the storm? Give evidence for each description.

3) What are their perceptions of New Orleans? What do they say about living there? Give evidence for each description.

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The Storm

4) **Describe this person's situation as the storm approached/hit New Orleans. Where was he/she? With whom? How did he/she feel about the storm? Why was he/she still in the city?** *(you may not have a lot of information for this one, depending on which person's story you're studying)*

5) Identify three major things that happened to this person or that this person did after the levees broke (the morning of Monday, August 29) and in the following days (through September 4). Include locations, if you can.

6) How did this person respond to those events? What was their state of mind?

The Week After/Weeks After the Storm

7) What was life like for your narrator during the weeks after the storm? Where was s/he? Why?

8) How did this person respond to these weeks? What was their state of mind? How was s/he adapting to their environment?

Looking Back

9) Where is the person you studied living at this point? How does he/she feel about living in New Orleans? How have their perceptions of New Orleans been challenged?

10) Looking back, how does the person you studied seem the same and/or different because of their Katrina experiences? How does your person view life now?

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