

LESSON PLAN TITLE: Say What?

Writer-in-Residence: David Wade

Grade Level: High School

Model Works Used: “A Peculiar Evolution” by Dahlak Brathwaite

Literary Learning objective(s): Students will be able to utilize humor and performance to address serious subject matter.

Themes: Race, Identity, Inclusion

MDE/SEL Standards: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

Materials Needed: Internet, Writing Materials

Opening Activity

Imagine one of your ancestors from the 1800’s is transported to your neighborhood today via time travel, and you are responsible for getting them accustomed to this new world. What would they make of modern society, seeing it for the first time? What would be the strangest practices and technologies they encountered? What would be most similar to the past they left behind? Answer these questions in your journal.

Pre-Discussion

Are there words that some people can say, but are “off limits” to other groups of people? What are some *healthy* ways to communicate to a friend who uses offensive words the impact that their choices are having on those offended? Make a list.

Model Poem Discussion

Our reading for this lesson is Dahlak Brathwaite’s poem “[A Peculiar Evolution](#)”. Take time to watch the poem twice, taking notes on any lines or moments of performance that stick out to you. Then answer the following questions in your journal or discuss with a friend.

- Which lines or moments especially stood out to you in this performance? Why?
- What impact does Brathwaite’s use of humor in his performance have on the audience?
- How important is context in the use of “the n-word”?

- Brathwaite blends rhyme and narrative in this poem to create a “story poem”. What effect does that have on you as an audience?

Prewriting

Make a list of words that you and your friends use that have multiple meanings, words that other people might not understand in the context of how you use them.

Writing Prompt

Look at the list of “context words” and choose one to write a poem about. Like Brathwaite, tell a story (real or made up) in which someone uses the word in the wrong context. Then go on to explain the true meaning of the word. Try to incorporate humor and rhyme into your story poem. Alternatively, you may also return to the opening exercise and turn the scenario of your time traveling ancestor into a story poem, in which you describe their journey through this new world. As always, use images that engage the five senses!

Share / Reflect

If working in a group, share what you wrote with family or friends. If working solo, reflect on the following: Is it hard to explain things (words, attitudes, culture) that are normal in your context to others outside the group? Why or why not? Are *you* a good learner/listener when people from other groups try to explain their context to you?

Supplemental Materials

Poem: “A Peculiar Evolution” by Dahlak Brathwaite
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNdJMTHADuk>

Check/Highlight all that apply

- Text by a contemporary/diverse author
- Translated text



- Visual Thinking Strategies
- Close reading or other analysis
- A step of the writing process
- Planning & Reflection Strategy
- New device, concept or theme
- Social-Emotional Learning
 - Self-Management
 - Social Awareness
 - Relationship Skills
 - Responsible-Decision Making
 - Self-Awareness

Celebrating the power of youth voice since 1995.

www.insideoutdetroit.org