

Sara K. Ahmed

BEING THE CHANGE

STUDY GUIDE

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH

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Welcome

As I was planning *Being the Change*, I often came back to the people, resources, events, and conversations I've had with students, educators, and community members over the years. I am grateful to have been surrounded by many PLC's throughout my career who have challenged me to do better and be better. There's nothing quite like reading and digging in together. It's a commitment that yields tremendous outcomes not only for us but for the learning experiences of our students. Thank you for taking this on.

It's because I've seen the power of educators working together that I recommend experiencing the lessons in this book first not with your students, but with your peers. This examination is just as valuable for adults as it is for kids: I have used the core elements of these lessons with adults in professional development sessions for years.

More importantly, if we want to teach students to be compassionate, complex thinkers, we must first muddle through this work ourselves. Otherwise we may not be prepared for the outcomes: the fight or flight, the tears, the crawling of skin, the desire to shake the tables. As Robert L. Fried writes in *The Passionate Teacher*, "Any of us, when we're nervous or when things threaten to get out of control, is likely to revert to a more controlling or defensive posture" (2001, 150). Rather than retreating to control or going on the defense, we have to dig deep. The more we are able to be introspective upfront, the more comfortable we may become with the *discomfort* of powerful discussions that can move all of us to new levels as learners and critical thinkers, and to sometimes Herculean feats of humility.

In my experience, the best way to take on this work is in a group. Try a gradual build starting with pairs, then small groups, then large groups, establishing norms for discussion as the number of voices grows. It is with others that we learn to listen; as we hear new ideas and points of view, we grow in understanding. W. Kamau Bell says, "I believe in the power of awkward conversations to initiate change. When we can talk with and laugh with (instead of at) each other, then we can slowly figure out ways to make more room for each other's humanity." If your own discomfort is too great, read through the suggestions in this chapter on your own until you're comfortable diving in

with others. Keep in mind that we are asking kids to turn and talk constantly. To solve what we think needs solving, to be the change we wish to see, we have to engage in this talk, too.

In the book, each chapter ends with a reminder to have students keep track of their new learning and understanding in the “At First I Thought . . . Now I Think” journal page. In this guide, I’ll ask you to do the same. You may choose to look at larger social comprehension themes of the chapter, for example: Identity, Being Informed, or Microaggressions. So, for example, in the chapter on identity, a comment in the “At first I thought” column might be: *identity was made up of culture, religion, hobbies*. The corresponding comment in the “Now I Think” column might be: *Identity is how we choose to identify. We should be careful not to define someone’s identity for them*.

For each chapter, the guide also includes exploratory questions, a prompt to consider what small changes you might make as a result of this work, and resources for furthering your study of the chapter’s social comprehension skill.

Finally, I hope you’ll join the conversation about the work you do within the pages of this book and with your PLC, so that we can all learn together. Use #BeingtheChange on Twitter to share ideas or resources you’ve found helpful in your own work with social comprehension—or even selfies of your groups in action. Sharing builds community, and knowing that there are others out in the world taking on this work can inspire others to take action, too.

Foreword by Terrence J. Roberts, PhD.

(page xi)

If you're not already familiar with the work of Terrence J. Roberts, who did me the great honor of writing the foreword to this book, learning more about his life is a powerful way to launch your work with social comprehension.

As a teenager, Dr. Roberts was one of the Little Rock Nine—the first African-American students to attend Little Rock Central High School. After an angry mob prevented the students from entering the school, President Eisenhower sent U.S. Army troops for the entire school year to ensure that the students could safely enter the school. Over 40 years later, President Bill Clinton awarded him the Congressional Gold Medal “in recognition of the selfless heroism they exhibited and the pain they suffered in the cause of civil rights.” Today, he works with organizations to promote understanding and healthy relationships between people of different backgrounds.

Resources for Expanding Your Social Comprehension Skills

Website

<http://terrenceroberts.com/about/>
Dr. Roberts' biography statement on his firm's website gives an overview of his life's work.

Interview

<http://wfpl.org/little-rock-nine-member-terrence-roberts-talks-lessons-from-integration/>
Dr. Roberts discusses his experience at Central High as well as building relationships with people with whom you don't agree.

Readings

Lessons from Little Rock by Dr. Terence Roberts
A narrative account of the Little Rock integration told by Dr. Roberts.

Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High by Melba Pattillo Beals
Melba Pattillo Beals's firsthand account of integrating Little Rock Central High School as a member of the Little Rock Nine.

A Letter to Readers/Introduction

(pages xii-xvi; pages xxi-xxxii)

At First I Thought . . .	Now I Think . . .

What resonated
with me? Why?



Where in this section did I
feel tension? What did that
tension feel/look/sound like?



What take-aways do I want
to explore further?



Who in my life did this section make me think of? Why?



What am I still wondering? What questions might I have for my personal and professional practice?

After reading this section, what are some actionable steps I can take *tomorrow* in being the change?



Resources for Expanding Your Social Comprehension Skills

Readings

Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the world, Michael Lipka <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/09/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>
Results of a survey answering key frequently asked questions and global perspectives about Muslims.

Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors by Hena Khan
An informative picture book that shares the culture and traditions of Islam as related to colors.

Podcast

<https://blog.heinemann.com/sara-ahmed-being-the-change-a-story>
I share the story of my father's journey in America past and present.

1

Exploring Our Identities

(pages 1-29)

LESSONS IN THIS CHAPTER

Affirming Our Identities: Identity Webs

We introduce the elements of our own identities (such as *sister, athlete, bilingual, reader*) and look for connections to or wonders about the identities of others.

Placing Ourselves in the World: Stories of Our Names

Using a mentor text, we write the stories of how we got our names, how our names make us feel, and our experiences with our names.

Journeying into Our Family Histories: "Where I'm From" Poems

We use the structure of a "Where I'm From" poem to share our family histories, storied objects, and memories.

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Readings

The Water Princess by Susan Verde

A picture book tells the story of Georgie Badiel's experience as a little girl traveling to collect water, showing a diversity of life that offers some perspective.

Locomotion by Jacqueline Woodson

A novel in verse with so much voice that tells the story of Lonnie & a teacher who supports him in getting his trying feelings down on paper.

TED Talk

The Danger of a Single Story

https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript

The background of the page is white and features several large, expressive brushstrokes in black, teal, and blue. Some of these strokes form arrow shapes pointing in various directions. In the center, there is a small blue square containing the number 2.

2

Listening with Love

(pages 30-40)

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Readings

A Young People's History of the United States: Columbus to the War on Terror, by Howard Zinn, abridged by Rebecca Stefoff

First person viewpoints from slaves, immigrants, women and those whose history is often told for them—the people who lived the histories of the United States. A great companion to Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*.

"Eleven" by Sandra Cisneros
A poignant short story about eleven-year old Rachel and the teacher who refused to see her humanity.

TED Talk

We Need to Talk about Injustice
https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice

Bryan Stevenson, human rights lawyer and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, discusses America's justice system with candor and insight.

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Being Candid

(pages 41-74)

LESSONS IN THIS CHAPTER

Seeing Our Own Bias: Drawing Activity

We learn about how bias works, and we use an activity to help us see some of our own bias and brainstorm how we can confront it.

Understanding Microaggressions: Poem Analysis

We analyze examples of microaggressions to understand what they are and how they affect people, and we look for microaggressions in our own lives.

Refusing to Let Others' Biases

Define Us: Identity Statements

We assert who we are with confidence. We recall labels others have tried to put on us, reject those labels, and choose how we define who we are.

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Resources for Expanding Your Social Comprehension Skills

Films

25 Mini-Films for Exploring Race, Bias and Identity with Students

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/learning/lesson-plans/25-mini-films-for-exploring-race-bias-and-identity-with-students.html>

This collection of short films, shot by the *New York Times*, offers a range of perspective on topics such as race, bias, and identity.

Readings

"T.S.A." by Amit Majmudar
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/90107/tsa>

A poem expressing the sheer frustration of being profiled in airport after airport and how that dehumanizes the writer and those that share his experience.

4

Becoming Better Informed

(pages 75–98)

LESSONS IN THIS CHAPTER

Understanding How Our Identity Affects Us: Our News

We identify what is happening in our world—personal events, news stories, media—and consider how our identity shapes what we give our attention to.

Moving Beyond Our Initial Thinking: Mini-Inquiries

We use a mini-inquiry to learn more about a topic and examine how new information changes our perspective.

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Resources for Expanding Your Social Comprehension Skills

For more reading and to spark ideas for "news" and inquiry.

Readings

New York Times UpFront

Scholastic News

Both magazines subscriptions offer a plethora of news-worthy topics for kids to pore over and pique interest for potential inquires.

Media

"What's Going on in this Picture?" <https://www.nytimes.com/column/learning-whats-going-on-in-this-picture>

A weekly photo by the NYT staff that elicits discussion about and inquiry into the lives of others around the world.

5

Finding Humanity in Ourselves and in Others

(pages 99-125)

LESSONS IN THIS CHAPTER

Broadening Our Ideas About Who We Are Responsible To and For: Our Universe of Obligation

We consider who we feel responsibility for and why. We also consider how that responsibility can change in certain situations.

Understanding Others' Perspectives: Intent Versus Impact

We work to understand two sides of a divisive issue by listening to both perspectives.

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Media

25 Mini-Films for Exploring Race, Bias and Identity With Students

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/learning/lesson-plans/25-mini-films-for-exploring-race-bias-and-identity-with-students.html>

These remarkable short films share individuals' perspectives on race, explain key psychological concepts that result in bias, and explore individuals' identities as American people of color.

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Facing Crisis Together

(pages 126-135)

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Readings

"When the World hands us a curriculum."

https://www.heinemann.com/pd/journal/2017/daniels_world_hands_us_curriculum.pdf

My friend and mentor, Smokey Daniels, writes about what teachers can do when news from beyond the classroom—a classmate moving away, a death, national news that frightens students—"preempts the curriculum."

"What Well-Intentioned White People Can Do About Racism"

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/culturally-speaking/201608/what-well-intentioned-white-people-can-do-about-racism>

This article lays out some action steps towards change that we can all take on especially when we are feeling despair or hopeless. It gives a framework of suggestion that the authors themselves are working through and also links to other readings that would be excellent readings for schools. Because as the authors state, "we know we can do better."