

*instructional voice* handbook  
DreamYard In School Programs

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## How to Use This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to give teaching artists examples of community building exercises and art making activities that can be used in the classroom to introduce and explore social justice issues. These activities have all been used by senior teaching artists and lay a good foundation to build upon when planning units.

While several of the activities can be done verbatim, it is our hope that the ideas in this guide be adjusted to meet the specific needs of the students and schools we partner with.

There are five sections in this guide:

### **Creating Safe Spaces & Building Community**

This section contains community building activities that should be used in conjunction with full lessons. These can be used as stand-alone community ice breakers but can also be tailored to fit the theme of the unit you are teaching. We encourage you to have at least one community building activity for each lesson during the first four weeks. Then, as you see fit, you can continue to use them through out the residency. For a sample activity of setting classroom norms, see page 31.

### **Main Activities**

Each activity is outlined step by step with tips on how to modify it for younger or older students. There is also a ranking of low, medium, and high risk activities that speak to the level of vulnerability students maybe experience during the activity. Activities with high risk should be done mid year and not within the first four weeks.

### **Tips & Tools for Planning**

In this section you will find guiding questions to ask yourself as you plan your residency. This section focuses on looking at the year as a whole in order to thoughtfully plan individual units and lessons.

### **Worksheets & Resources**

Through out this guide, you will be referred to examples and/or further reading. These examples are at the back of the book, in the resource section. Many of the handouts in this section can be photocopied and used as is, but you may need to tailor them to meet your needs.

## About Instructional Voice

DreamYard's Instructional Voice came out of DreamYard's 2011-2012 strategic planning. We desire to unify all of DreamYard's programs and DY Prep, so that students who move from program to program and from school to school recognize a DreamYard classroom by the experience they have, the way they learn and create, the way they share their work and discuss it, the projects they undertake and the communities in which they collaborate.

The underlying philosophy and tenets of DY's Instructional Voice will also guide hiring, professional development, program evaluation and development.

## *instructional voice*

We provide an educational experience that inspires all students to develop character, scholarship and artistic voice to create change. These core values describe our commitment to teaching for equity, justice and hope. At DreamYard art is action.

### Artistry

- DreamYard teachers and students develop technical skills to express our artistic voice.
- DreamYard teachers and students use our artistic voice to respond, connect and “talk back” to the world.
- DreamYard teachers and students explore culture, self and history, to learn how art becomes action.

### Character

- DreamYard teachers believe students are active citizens who understand and analyze themselves, their society, and their ability to make a positive change.
- DreamYard teachers believe students are collaborators, working effectively with others and engaging with their family, school, neighborhood, city, and world communities in both critical and meaningful ways.
- DreamYard teachers believe students are determined to persevere in their lives as artists, learners and activists.

### Scholarship

- DreamYard teachers are devoted to pushing academic rigor through a variety of instructional strategies.
- DreamYard teachers position students to ask essential critical questions about what they’re learning and how it relates to their society.
- DreamYard teachers provide opportunities for student learning to be self directed and shared with the larger community.

## Six Elements of Social Justice Curriculum Design

Bree Picower, 2007

1. **Self-love and Knowledge:** Teachers provide opportunities for students to learn about who they are and where they come from. A sense of dignity in their culture, heritage, ethnicity/race, religion, skin tone, gender etc. is cultivated in the classroom. Students learn about different aspects of their identity and history associated with it. Negative stereotypes about students' identities are deconstructed.
2. **Respect for Others:** Teachers provide opportunities for students to share their knowledge about their own cultural background with their classmates. The goal is to create a climate of respect for diversity through students learning to listen with kindness and empathy to the experiences of their peers. Students deconstruct stereotypes about their peers' identities.
3. **Exploring Issues of Social Injustice:** Teachers move from "celebrating diversity" to an exploration of how diversity has differently impacted various groups of people. Students learn about the history of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, religious intolerance etc. and how these forms of oppression have affected different communities. Teachers make links that show how the historical roots of oppression impact the lived experiences and material conditions of people today.
4. **Social Movements and Social Change:** Teachers share examples of movements of iconic and everyday people standing together to address the issues of social injustice they learned about in element three. Rather than leaving students feeling overwhelmed and defeated, teachers help students understand that working together, ordinary people have united to create change.
5. **Raising Awareness:** Teachers provide opportunities for students to teach others about the issues they have learned about. This allows students who feel passionately about particular issues to become advocates by raising awareness of other students, teachers, family and community members. It is important to recognize that while raising awareness is a necessary and important pre-cursor for action, it by itself does not translate into change.
6. **Taking Social Action:** Teachers provide opportunities to take action on issues that affect students and their communities. Students identify issues they feel passionate about and learn the skills of creating change firsthand.

*creating safe spaces & community*

### Signature Game [page 32]

- Participants are given a handout with a list of questions and are instructed to ask their peers a question from the list. If their answer is yes, participants should get the signature of the person they asked. \*Only two signatures per person. Students must ask each other individually. They can't simply shout out, "Anybody born in July?" The point of this activity is to encourage students to talk to one another and get to know each other.
- Reflection: instructor goes through a few (or all) of the questions and asks participants to share their experiences. [example: Did you learn something about one of your peers? What did you learn? How did you feel doing this activity. What did we find out about who's in the room—whose birthday is in July? Who's never traveled to the west coast?]

### Modification Tips

- This activity can be a game—who ever has the most signatures wins a prize.
- Give students a challenge and by giving them a certain amount of time to get signatures.
- Unit Connection: Make all questions relevant to the theme(s) you are covering in your unit,

### Risk

- Low

### Mingle Mingle

- Each participant will receive an index card with a question on it [ex: What did you do this summer? What is the last movie you saw? Favorite ice cream flavor? etc.]
- Participants are instructed to walk around the room and find a partner. Participants ask each other the question on their card. Instructor gives time for both people to go, and calls out, "Switch." Participants switch cards (so that they have a new question to ask their next partner) and repeat until Instructor ends the session.
- Reflection: What did you learn about a classmate? Who do you have something in common with? etc.

### Modification Tips

- Variation for Elementary Students: instead of using index cards, have students walk around the room and call out a number (2, 3, or 4). Students must get in groups according the number you called out. Ask a question to the classroom and have them discuss their answers in their small groups. Continue for a few rounds so that students talk to several people.
- Unit Connection: This activity can be used as an introduction activity for the main lesson. The questions can be around a certain theme.

### Risk

- Low



### Everybody Who

- Participants sit in a chair and form a circle. (There should be one less chair than there are people, like musical chairs).
- One participant stands in the middle of the circle. He/she states, "Everybody who..." and continues with **a statement that is true about them externally** (in other words, it can be seen by looking at the person). For example, "Everybody who is wearing a black shirt."
- At that point, any participant who this statement is true about must get up and find a new chair including the person who made the statement.
- The person left without a chair has to say the next statement.
- As the activity progresses, the participants are asked to make **statements about things that are not external** and would not be known by just looking at the person. For example, "Everybody who has seen violence in their community." or "Everybody who likes football."

### Modification Tips

- If you want the questions to focus on a certain theme, ask the person in the middle to make their statement about that theme. For example, you might say, "For the next 3 rounds, make statements about your favorite places" or "For the next 3 rounds make statements about your community."

### Risk

- Low/Medium

### Sun & Moon

- Split the group in half and ask Group 1 to form a circle.
- Group two will stand in front of Group 1 (face to face) creating an inner circle.
- Instructor will ask a question to the entire group and give time for both people to speak.
- Instructor will ask the inner circle to move to the right, and will ask another question. (Questions: talk about a time you were lost, talk about a fun activity you did this summer, etc.)
- Repeat. \*Facilitator walks around the circle, listening in to get a feel for what students are talking about.

### Modification Tips

- This activity can also be used to reflect on a unit, introduce a topic, or build trust within a group. Depending on your questions, students can share more personal things or it can be used to reflect on an experience they had in class.

### Risk

- Low/Medium

### **Graffiti Walls**

- Soft music plays as participants silently walk around the room and “tag” the chart paper, answering the prompts written in the middle of the chart paper. Participants are instructed not to talk or respond to anyone’s statement.
- Prompts: Favorite book, Favorite Singer, Sports I Play, Goals for this School Year, etc.
- Reflection: instructor reads out a few answers from each chart paper and leads a discussion about “who’s in the room” [“We have basketball players, lovers of hip-hop, etc. How many of you play basketball, etc.]

### **Modification Tips**

- Based on what you’d like to discuss later in class, you can base all the questions on a particular theme. This can be used to introduce a new topic/issue or to reflect at the end of a unit/lesson.
- For students who may not want to write, they can respond by drawing an image in response to the word.
- If there is not enough space in the room to put the chart paper up, put desks together and place the paper in the middle of the table.
- If students can’t handle getting up and moving around the room, keep them with their table groups and give each group a sheet of paper with a prompt on it. Students can work with their table groups. They can pass their papers after a certain amount of time, or you can have each group share out about their prompt.
- NOTE: if you are asking questions that require students to be more vulnerable, you might want to give every student the same color of marker so that no one will know who wrote what.

### **Risk**

- Low/Medium

### **Stand Up If**

- Teacher gives the following instructions: “This is a silent activity. I will make a statement and if the answer is “Yes” for you, please stand. Take a look at those who are standing with you and those who are not to notice who you have something in common with.
- Teacher reads a statement, starting with something less personal or serious and eventually asks more personal/serious questions. [Stand up if you do not have a middle name...Stand up if you live with both your biological parents]
- Note: make 5-8 statements, more than that can be too many and less than that can lessen the impact

### **Modification Tips**

- This is a great activity to use for lessons that might have higher emotional risk. Adjust the questions from less personal to more personal by the end of the activity.

### **Risk**

- Medium/High

### **Cross the Line**

*A variation of Stand Up If*

- Participants make two lines facing each other.
- Teacher asks the class to cross the room (walk over to the other side) if the statement is true for them. This is a silent activity. Statements should become more revealing/serious as the activity progresses.

### **Modification Tips**

- This is a great activity to use for lessons that might have higher emotional risk. Adjust the questions from less personal to more personal by the end of the activity.

### **Risk**

- Medium/High

### **Alphabet Game**

- Divide the class into two groups.
- Index cards are on the floor faced down. Each card has one letter from the alphabet written on it.
- Without talking, participants must work together to figure out what the index cards create (the alphabet).
- Discussion: after the activity, ask the group how it felt to work together, who were the leaders of the group, how were they selected, etc. Introduce (or review) the word "Collaboration" and talk about how in this class students will work together to create art.

### **Modification Tips**

- If the class size is too big for two groups or there is no space in the room to have the index cards on the floor, have small groups of students work together at their desk to put the index cards in order.

### **Risk**

- Low

### **Puzzles [page 33]**

- Participants work in small groups to put a puzzle together in a certain amount of time. Each group should have a puzzle that introduces or reinforces the learning goal/unit theme. For example, if you are talking about civil rights leaders you might have a puzzle of Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, and Baynard Rustin. If you will be creating art about the Bronx, the puzzles can be of Bronx landmarks.

### **Modification Tips**

- If students will be unfamiliar with the people/place in the puzzle, type up a short bio or description that each group can have so that once they put the puzzle together they can learn about the person/place.

### **Risk**

- Low

### **Body & Face Warm Up**

- Teacher demonstrates an emotion at level 1-5-10. Teacher shows them happy at all levels. (1 being least happy, 10 being very happy) without making any sound or moving around the space. Participants remain in their seats and are given prompts: Show me Loneliness, Show me Frustration, Show me Shame, Show me Fear, etc. at level 1-5-10.

### **Modification Tips**

- This can be used a simple, fun theater game but it also allows students to practice empathy, name emotions, and identify and adjust body language. Unpack the activity with students and ask them what it felt like to put on different emotions. Ask them if they have ever been one of those emotions. They can share out loud or write about it.

If you are doing character studies (in theater or ELA) ask students which characters are feeling one of the emotions they tried on today.

- Use this activity to introduce a book, poem, or work of art that might evoke difficult emotions. After the activity, tell the class, "Today as we read/make art about....you might feel some of these emotions on many different levels. It's okay to feel these emotions."

### **Risk**

- Low [may have medium/high risk if students share out times they felt those feelings]

### **Elevator**

- TA gets the class to gather around each other as close as they can—more of a huddle than a circle.
- TA tells the group: “Okay class, we are on an elevator. We have to get to the top floor as soon as possible. There are 12 floors and in order to reach the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, we have to count the numbers out loud. No one can say a number at the same time. If two people say a number at the same time, we’ll have to go all the way back down to the first floor and start over. Ready?”
- Class attempts to make it to the top floor. Eventually, they will come up with a way to signal each other so they are not talking at the same time, but inevitably, it will take a few tries to make it.

### **Modification Tips**

- Fix the number according to the age/grade level and ability of students. This should be a reachable challenge, not too easy but not too hard either. If 12 is too many or not enough floors, adjust the number.

### **Risk**

- Low

### **Fortunately, Unfortunately**

- Teacher asks the class to define the words fortunate and unfortunate.
- Students sit in a circle. Teacher starts a story and each student gets a turn at developing part of the story by beginning the sentence with “fortunately” or “unfortunately”. \*Teacher ends story.

Example:

**Teacher:** The Johnson family left town for their summer vacation.

**Student 1:** *Fortunately*, all the kids could come because none of them had summer school.

**Student 2:** *Unfortunately*, the mini van ran out of gas on the way there.

**Student 3:** *Fortunately*, a nice man helped them.

### **Modification Tips**

For Visual Art Classes: have students order photos or images to tell a story.

### **Risk**

- Low

**Sherlock Holmes/Who Started the Motion**

- One person leaves the room.
- The rest of the class chooses a leader.
- Leader begins a series of motions (claps, raising hands, etc.) and the class has to follow him trying not to give away who the leader is.
- Person re-enters the room and has 3 guesses to figure out who the leader is.

**Modification Tips**

- n/a

**Risk**

- Low

### Listening & Sharing: the story of stuff

- Students are asked to select an object that has meaning to them. It can be something they are wearing, something from their book bag, a book in the room, etc.
- Students choose a partner (or teacher puts partners together).
- Each pair chooses who will be #1 and who will be #2.
- The group is given the following instructions:

This is an activity about listening and being present for someone. Each of you will have 5 minutes to talk about your object. Why you chose it, what's the story behind it—why do you like it, who gave it to you, how often you use it, etc.

While you are speaking, your partner can't ask questions or interrupt. They can only listen and observe. If the person speaking runs out of things to say, the other person can't start talking or asking questions. The two of you can sit in silence and just be in the space. If the person who was talking thinks of more to say, they can resume speaking.

*Listeners please be mindful that you might have to share what you learned about your partner. Talkers, when you share, please be mindful that information might be shared, so do not share anything you are uncomfortable with your partner repeating.*

Each of you will have a turn.

- Person #1 shares, then person #2.
- After everyone has shared, give the following instructions:

Please sit in the circle and DO NOT sit next to your partner. You will be sharing the story you heard as if you are talking about yourself. So instead of telling us, "Renée said that she liked her bracelet because..." you will speak in first person, "I like this bracelet because..."

When you are finished sharing, your partner will know it is their turn to share. We will continue to go until everyone has gone. \*Emphasize that they are not mimicking the person, but sincerely sharing the story they just heard. They should capture the mood but not necessarily make that person's gestures, etc. This might need to be modeled by the CT and TA.

- Discussion Questions: how did it feel to talk for 5 minutes? How did it feel to only be able to listen? Did you learn something about someone that surprised you? Did you find out that you and someone else have something in common? Do you think it is important to share stories? Why? How was it to hear someone else tell your story? What do you think about the fact that these simple objects held such stories?

### Modification Tips

- Ask students to bring in a special object from home that is meaningful so that they have put more thought into what they are talking about.
- If you do not have enough time for everyone to share at the end because of a short class period, split the group and have the CT sit with one group and the TA sit with the other so that all students get to share. It is important that everyone shares in the same class period.
- For younger students (or a class that is less verbal) cut down the time from 5 minutes to 3 minutes, or even 2.

### Risk

- High

*unit plan sample visual art*



## Unit/Project Description

*Brief summary of what students are going to do. Include the purpose of the project and its projected outcomes. Out of all of the kinds of projects you could do, why this one?*

Students will learn the fundamental art and design principles of drawing comics. Students will create a 6-panel sequence, that explores a conflict/resolution theme between 2-4 characters. Students will explore mood, gesture, proportion, perspective, scenery and detail, to tell their story. Manga comics are extremely popular with the students at MH. Many have expressed interest in exploring this art form.

*What will be your guiding question/s?*

- How can a drawing tell a story?
- What is a scene? What details are needed to create atmosphere and mood?

### Learning Goals

*What will your students need to learn in order to do this project?*

**Arts Goals** (No more than 3)

*What art making skills will students master in this unit? Refer to the DOE BluePrint for ARTMAKING Strand for your age group. (e.g. "Students will be able to: Use a variety of vocal skills, including volume, pitch and tempo." 2nd grade, Theater)*

- Awareness of intended audience
- Integration of drawing and text

**Curricular Learning Goals** (No more than 3)

*Must come from conversation with your teaching partner. Refer to the NYS Learning Standards.*

- Produce a narrative account
- Produce work in at least one genre that follows the conventions of the genre
- Participate in peer to peer and group meetings

### Learning Activities

*Describe the MAIN ACTIVITIES for each lesson of your unit along with that lesson's objective, assessment activity and resources.*

<i>1 Proportions of the body + Perspective</i>	Students will be given a series of drawing lessons that breaks down the necessary skills to create their comic.	Students will learn: 1) Proportions of the body (front/side/3/4 views) 2) Basic one point perspective (panorama a city scene and an interior)	Students write self reflections: What was successful? What was challenging?	Book: Manga for Beginners
<i>2 Story</i>	Students will create an open	Criteria for storyline (Who/What/How):	Students will share their ideas for their	Conflict/resolution stories

	ended story (one that has two possible endings) on a conflict/resolution theme.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) 2 - 4 characters</li> <li>2) 6 sequences total</li> <li>3) 1 xtra sequence that gives another possible ending</li> <li>4) Specific place (city/interior/forest)</li> <li>5) Clear conflict/resolution story plot</li> </ol>	<p>comic with their peers and receive critical peer feedback following the Critical Response Protocol:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you notice?</li> <li>2. How does it make you feel?</li> <li>3. What does it remind you of?</li> <li>4. What questions/suggestions do you have?</li> <li>5. Speculate. Answer these questions</li> </ol> <p>Shareback with the entire class</p>	
<i>3 Creation of Comic</i>	Students will create their seven panel comic.	<p>Criteria for open ended comic:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) 2 - 4 characters</li> <li>2) 6 sequences total</li> <li>3) 1 xtra sequence that gives another possible ending</li> <li>4) Specific place (city/interior/forest)</li> <li>5) Mood and feeling</li> <li>6) Handwritten text must be integrated into the style of the comic and legible</li> </ol>	Students share work in progress.	Comic examples
<i>4 Creation of Comic continued</i>	Students will finish their seven panel comic	<p>Criteria for open ended comic:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) 2 - 4 characters</li> <li>2) 6 sequences total</li> <li>3) 1 xtra sequence that gives another possible ending</li> <li>4) Specific place (city/interior/forest)</li> <li>5) Mood and feeling</li> <li>6) Handwritten text must be integrated into the style of the comic and legible</li> </ol>	<p>In class sharing.</p> <p>Students will present their final comics to each other and discuss alternate possible endings for their conflict/resolution comics.</p>	

## Sharing Description and Criteria for Success

### Sharing Description:

Students will share their work with their classmates on 2/16 and discuss alternate possible endings to their conflict/resolution comics.

Students will exhibit their work in May at a school-wide year-end exhibition.

### Criteria for success:

*List the qualities of successful student work you will be teaching and looking for in the project.  
How will the students know they were successful?*

Completion of a seven panel comic  
Clear conflict/resolution storyline  
Characters and place are well developed  
Expression, mood and atmosphere are evident in their drawing  
Use of text is stylized and legible

*project ideas* visual art

## *her in hero project*



This project is designed to lay a ground work of information about women as heroes. The influence of mass media is not always a positive or a realistic presentation of real people. The women chosen for this project come from varied backgrounds and ethnic origins-also many shapes and sizes.

In using women from a broad range of backgrounds and accomplishments this project strives to bring an element of humanity and connection to each woman hero; re-enforcing the belief that everyone can make a difference in the world. Definitions of words relating to human rights, social justice and creative process are discussed as they relate to the heroes.

The art making techniques taught are collage, basic composition, design and color. The completion of the card is made by layering paper and patterns.

*\*adapted from Arts for Change*

## *self portraits: rewriting the truth of who we are*

In this unit, students read news stories and magazine articles that tell a portion of the story of their neighborhood, age group, or ethnic group. They remix these articles and create self portraits. Students create an artist statement that tells who they really are or something they wish the news would report.

Modification Tip: students can research an injustice (past or present), famous speeches, poems, etc. and create self portraits of empathy in solidarity with the person who suffered the injustice. For example, "I am Emmet Till" or "I am Matthew Shepherd."





*\*adapted from RAW Arts*

*my favorite place is...*

In this workshop, students will get a chance to explore their neighborhood and imagination as the group travels on a short meditative sensory walk to explore the idea of favorite places, which will lay the groundwork to create Romare Bearden-inspired collages using construction paper and oil pastels.



*Romare Bearden, The Block*  
*\*lesson adapted from Arts for Change*

*more art & social justice projects*

#### **Coat of Arms**

Study the history of coats of arms and have students design their own based on their values and beliefs. Younger students may need a template.

#### **Superheroes in My Backyard**

Students learn about local community heroes and interview them. Based on the information they learn about their local heroes, they create audio and silkscreened portraits of local superheroes.

#### **Global Masks**

Children will create their own masks while learning about the roles of masks in other cultures.

#### **Quilting**

Quilts (paper or fabric) can be created under the following themes:

1. A Quilt For... (Haiti, or Our Fallen Soldiers, etc.)
2. A Quilt of Honor: for ancestors, past civil rights leaders, historical women, etc.)
3. Classroom Quilt: every child gets his/her own square to represent who they are.
4. A Quilt of Dreams: each student creates a square that represents their hope for their community or school.
5. Identity Quilt: each student creates a square that represents a hidden talent, a precious memory, or favorite thing.

#### **Awareness & Protest Posters** [See page 36]

After studying a social issue (bullying, racism, environmental issues, etc.), students create posters using one fact or statistic and a slogan.

#### **Editorial Cartoons** [See page 35]

*Adapted from Teaching Tolerance*

Artists often use an editorial cartoon as a means to show their opinion about something in our society. Just as columnists or op-ed writers use words to express their opinions about a wide array of topics, artists use pictures to make statements. Activities will help students see how artists can use cartoons to express their opinions about society and culture.



*main activities* poetry & theater

# The Power of Role Playing [worksheets begin on page 38]

Adapted from *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*  
Linda Christensen & Bill Bigelow

*"Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand."* -Albert Einstein

Role Play – being able to become someone or something else comes quite naturally to most children from an early age. It is a vital activity for children, stimulating their imagination and enhancing their social development, encouraging friendship through cooperation, listening and turn taking. It can improve their language and movement skills and can help them to understand different points of view, go into the future or the past, and travel anywhere in the world and beyond. Through role play we can explore moral issues and problems safely.

The following activity description is a framework that can be used for multiple stories and issues.

## Structuring Role Plays for Elementary Students

### Preparation

#### Creating the Story

- Chose a historical or current event where people are fighting for rights or standing up against an injustice. [workers rights, civil rights, women's voting rights, etc.]
- Create a script of the story with dialogue and narration included [you may be able to use children picture books for text.]
- Make copies of the story [make enough so that multiple students can have the same story strip/role]
- Cut the story into slips of paper and number the sections in the corner so that students will know when to read.

#### Creating the Atmosphere

- Find photos that you can hang in the classroom or show on a projector during the activity. This will help set the tone for the in class activity. You might also want to have era music softly playing in the background.

#### Activity

- Hang the photos or show them on a projector [slideshow loop so that they can show for the entire activity]
- Explain to students that they will be role playing a story today about XYZ. Explain the directions and pass out the story strips.
- Take students through a time travel exercise to set the mood [Okay, class, we're going back to 1963. Television is black and white and Americans live segregated lives. We're in Montgomery, Alabama and it is hot, hot day...]
- Students go through the role play.

#### Reflective Discussion Questions

- What part did you play?
- What do you think the person you were pretending to be felt in real life? What did you feel as you played that character? Are those feelings the same? Different? Why do you think that is?
- \*Other questions can be unpacking the content of the story to assess student comprehension.

### Art Making Activities

- Students can write monologues or poems from someone else’s perspective (one of the characters from the role play)
- Students can write a new ending (if the outcome was negative).
- Students can discuss modern issues (or feelings) that are similar to the ones in the story and create a piece about a current event.

## Structuring Role Plays for Middle and High School Students

### Preparation

#### Creating the Characters

- Chose a historical or current event that have many types of people involved, rather in passive or active ways.
- Create character cards for the major players in the event. These can include unsung heroes, nameless people, such as “worker” or “protester,” as well as “Martin Luther King” or “Maya Angelou.” [see pages 39–44]
- Make copies of the character cards. [There will be a few students who are playing the same person.]
- Create an interview worksheet for students to fill out about the people they meet. [See page 38]

#### Creating the Atmosphere

- Find photos that you can hang in the classroom or show on a projector during the activity. This will help set the tone for the in class activity. You might also want to have era music softly playing in the background.

### Activity

- Instruct students to read their card silently. What have they learned about their character? Based on what they know about their character, how do they think that character talks—how would that character introduce his or herself? As a class, everyone says, “Hello, my name is...” at the same time to practice how their character talks.
- The class stands and practices walking like their character: “If your character could walk around today or if you had the chance to meet your character, what do you think they would walk like? What would their mannerisms be?”
- The students are instructed that they will become this character and walk around the room to meet other people. They are to take notes on the people they meet. [see page 38]
- After students have had enough time to meet and greet at least 3 people, the group gathers to discuss the activity.

### Reflective Discussion Questions

- Students identify who they were in the role play: “Raise your hand if you were\_\_\_\_\_.”  
Can one of you tell us something you learned about that person?”
- Who do you think would have been friends in this group? Why?
- What do you think your person was proud of? What do you think they feared?
- \*Other questions can unpack the overall theme and how these characters played a role in the particular theme you are teaching.

### Art Making Activities

- Students can write monologues or poems from the character they played.
- Students can write a poem of questions to that character or a letter to that character.
- Students can discuss modern issues (or feelings) that are similar to the ones in the story and create a piece about a current event.

## Forum Theatre

Excerpt from Act On Info

Forum theatre was created by the innovative and influential practitioner Augusto Boal as part of his "Theatre of the Oppressed." Originally the technique was developed by Boal as a tool for political change but since then it has been widely adapted and used in educational contexts.

A scene is shown, usually containing some kind of oppression, for example a classroom teacher and teaching artist would show a scene during an anti-bullying drama or smoking prevention workshop showing someone being bullied or pressured by their peers. We would show this scene twice. During the replay, with younger students, we ask them to put up their hands when they see behavior that they do not like, or if they see something they would not like to happen to them and the facilitator would shout, "Freeze." With older students they can shout "Freeze!" whenever they choose. The actors freeze at this point, we describe it like pressing pause on a DVD. We use these freezes to take a deeper look at what is going on in the scene, the facial expressions, body language and emotions of the characters in the scene.

The facilitator would then ask for suggestions as to how the students would change the characters behavior, and invite them to take the role of the characters to see how effective their suggestions are. Suggestions can be tried out by different students showing how they could change the situation to create a different outcome. This way of working breaks down barriers between the students and the situation – it puts them in the action. It is a great tool to enable students to try out different courses of actions in a safe environment that they can then apply to their own lives.

# Poetry : Voices Rising

## Protest Poems

Although writing for social justice does not always have to be a protest poem, the activity we are highlighting here gives an example of how educators can teach students about historical and current events in creative ways, inspiring them to write about those events and put to practice the artistic skills they are learning.

Below is an outline of the steps to take when doing a lesson on protest poetry or empathy poems. The template on page 37 can be used for several subjects and can be tailored for any grade level. The goal is to help students understand the facts of an event and also give them a way of expanding their vocabulary and experimenting with the juxtaposition of words. It also allows students to practice empathy, to look at events with a critical eye and use their voice to speak out on behalf of someone else.

### Lesson Outline

- After an appropriate and relevant warm up activity, students read an article (or selected text) and are asked to underline words or phrases that stand out to them.
- Discuss the content and make sure students know the important facts.
- Share the sample poem (see two suggested poems below).
- Ask students to refer back to the information they learned from the article and compare and contrast what facts the poet used and where the poet used their imagination.
- Have students fill out the chart (see page 37) and create their own poem.

### Suggested Poems

- 41 Bullets Off Broadway by Willie Perdomo  
Overview: students learn about Amadu Diallo through articles and Perdomo's poem.
- Emmett Till's Name Still Catches in My Throat by Marilyn Nelson  
Overview: students learn about Emmett Till through articles and Nelson's poem.

## Celebration Poems

Writing for justice can be a joyous thing, a time for students to define their own community, their own families. So many times students are given the dire statistics about their neighborhoods, their ethnic group. Giving them permission to honor their everyday lives can be empowering for them and enlightening for others.

Using the same template on page 37, teachers can ask their students, "What is Home to You?" or "When you think of the Bronx, what comes to mind?" Using the words from their chart, they can write a poem in celebration of their home. [See Sample Poem on page 25]

A Praise Song for the Bronx  
by Haydil Hernandez, DY Prep graduate

Praise the fiery cardinal that rises past my windowsill  
on Tuesday mornings before the sun rises.

Praise yesterday, I dreamt of the nights I would slide underneath my parent's covers,  
listen to my father's snores, monstrous noises escaping his gullet. I imagined it  
to be Pandora's Box, releasing demons and at times, some leftovers.  
With thick pillows against my face, the clamor penetrating my earlobes would ease.

Last night, as I laid in my college dormitory,  
I missed my father's way of inhaling the world,  
than meticulously exhaling his own version.

Praise the Scholastic books I got in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade,  
those bubbly bibles of printed parables that made even housing projects magic treehouses, the dim  
lit hallways were my caves. My mission—find a way out.

Praise my mother's voice. The orchestra stationed in her throat, applying mascara  
by the bathroom sink, singing Ana Gabriel under her breath.  
Praise the clutter of the 2 train riding uptown, the kickety rack racks of metals colliding, kickety rack  
racks making music, kickety rack.

Praise the seven continents imprinted on my knees:  
when I was three I would play hop scotch in between multiple dimensions, entered black portals that  
became sewers and I was the yellow teenage Mutant Turtle,  
karate kicking my way into my twin sized bed.  
I would stomp into galaxies and watch them leave their markings on my legs.

Everyone thinks falling is for the derailed, but I fall on purpose,  
with purpose. I drop this weight  
on the concrete to see how fast I can heal. Best time: 34 seconds.

Praise the imagined fiery cardinal that swoops by my window,  
backlit by reaching red rays  
Praise my grandfather's heartbeat. They way it hammers unto his chest 66 times per minute.  
Praise these fingers, their promised diabetic gene, their jittering dance,  
the way they coalesce when my thoughts surpass their speed limit,  
praise the calluses they await and the words that come out of them.

Praise my Metrocard, the guarantee of an adventure with a promise to find home.  
Praise the spirit nestled in my hair.  
Praise my little sister's eyes, those two moons God lost in his back pockets.  
Praise me praising these reflections of living.  
Praise those gates I call ribs, extracting and lung knockin' with every breath, praise those breaths.  
Praise.

## *raising awareness* element five

Picower, 2007

Teachers provide opportunities for students to teach others about the issues they have learned about. This allows students who feel passionately about particular issues to become advocates by raising awareness of other students, teachers, family and community members. It is important to recognize that while raising awareness is a necessary and important pre-cursor for action, it by itself does not translate into change.

1. School Hallway
2. Bulletin Board
3. Local shops in neighborhood
4. Town Hall
5. Hospitals
6. Visit other schools and share at an assembly or Skype with another class for a sharing
7. Parks
8. Send Art
9. Social Media\*
10. Art Gallery
11. Open Mic
12. Teach a younger class
13. Share at home and get feedback
14. Guerilla Art/Street Art\*
15. Invite another class in for a sharing

\*Check with school administration and make sure there is parent consent.  
Make sure proper protocols are set in place for these activities.

*tips & tools for planning*



## Planning Tool

Use this as a guide to help you plan how you will use the artistic sample in your lesson

Creator of Work

Title of Work

Appropriate Grade Level

How will you present the work to them? (projector, handout, chart paper, read aloud, recording, etc.)

What do you want students to notice about the piece?

What other art forms (visual art, music, movement, performance, creative writing) can you incorporate in the lesson to introduce, enhance, or reflect on the piece?

What sequence/ process will you lead them through? What questions will you ask?

What will you do after presenting and discussing the piece? Where will you go from there?

# Teaching Syllabus & Learning Objectives

## Planning Your Syllabus

As a guest artist in the classroom, you are juggling many things—the goals of the organization, the goals of the school and classroom teacher, and of course your own artistic and teaching goals. Add to the mix special performances, field trips, testing dates, and holidays and it becomes clear that planning ahead is crucial to the success of your residency.

Though the plan will most likely change, it is important to have something to guide you and your teaching partner. It is also important to have the big picture in mind so that you can make decisions in each unit that address your overall goal for the year.

## Creating the Timeline

- Figure out your teaching day and get a school calendar so that you can immediately cross out holidays, testing days, breaks, special performances, etc.
- Start at the end. If you know what your culminating event will be, plug that in. Will you need to rehearse, set up? Add final revisions or touches? Add in those dates. So, you might have 2 rehearsals and then the performance. In that case, the last three weeks of your residency are planned.
- From there, go to the first four sessions. What must students know and understand before they can move on? Plug those days in.
- Now you have the first four, the last three sessions and time out of school marked off. From there, you will see just how much teaching time you actually have and can plan accordingly.

## Things to Remember

- Your syllabus is a guide. Don't restrict yourself to the point that if you need to change something, you are throwing everything off.
- Plan for certain lessons to take more than one day.
- Think in terms of units or themes.
- Talk to your classroom teacher and figure out ways to compliment and integrate into existing curriculum.

*sample handouts & resources*

## What's Wrong With This Scenario?

### Objective

To demonstrate inappropriate behavior in order to come up with group norms and expectations.

### Summary:

Teachers will improv a short scene for each expectation and facilitate a discussion about what respect should look like. For example, after acting out the scene for One Mic, the teacher asks the group, "What's wrong with this seneario?" "What can we do to fix the problem?" Once there is a clear understanding, present the "Rule" on chart paper or somewhere in the room where it can stay for the remainder of the year. Repeat these steps until each scene is acted out.

### **One Mic**

While Person #1 is presenting to the class, Persons #2 and #3 whisper to each other.

### **Be Present**

While Person #1 is sharing during Art Share, Person #2 is writing in their notebook, working on their own poem.

### **Step Up, Step Back**

Persons #1, #2, and #3 are working together on a group project. Person #2 is dominating the conversation. Even though she/he asks for input from the others, when they try to speak she/he cuts them off because she/he is so excited about her/his own ideas.

### **Challenge Ideas not People**

Person #1 asks Persons #2 and #3 what they think the next volunteer activity should be. Persons #2 and #3 can't seem to agree. Person #2 attacks Person #3, not the idea (something like "you're stupid, we should...")

### **Respectful Language**

It's lunch time and Person #1 overhears Person #2 and #3 talking using inappropriate language ("that's so gay" "he's a retard" etc.)

# getting to know you ice breaker

## How many signatures can you get?

Get to know your peers by asking them a question from your list. If their answer is yes, get their signature. \*Only two signatures per person.

1. I am an only child. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I have a dog. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I do not have a middle name. \_\_\_\_\_
4. I was not born in the United States. \_\_\_\_\_
5. I attend church on a regular basis. \_\_\_\_\_
6. My favorite flavor of ice cream is chocolate. \_\_\_\_\_
7. I like to sing. \_\_\_\_\_
8. I have been to California. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Math is my favorite subject at school. \_\_\_\_\_
10. I enjoy writing poetry. \_\_\_\_\_
11. My birthday is in the summer. \_\_\_\_\_
12. I know how to play an instrument. \_\_\_\_\_
13. I am afraid of dogs. \_\_\_\_\_
14. I do not know how to swim. \_\_\_\_\_
15. I have had my tonsils taken out. \_\_\_\_\_
16. I am the oldest in my family. \_\_\_\_\_
17. I am afraid of heights. \_\_\_\_\_
18. I enjoy drawing. \_\_\_\_\_
19. I have never traveled by airplane. \_\_\_\_\_
20. I am left-handed. \_\_\_\_\_
21. I have taken classes from DreamYard before. \_\_\_\_\_
22. I am the youngest in my family. \_\_\_\_\_
23. I do not like spicy food. \_\_\_\_\_

24. Winter is my favorite season. \_\_\_\_\_

## Making Puzzles

1. Print out the image you want to make a puzzle of.
2. Glue it to cardboard (you can use a shoebox) or cardstock paper.
3. Turn the image face down (so that you are looking at the back of the cardboard).
4. Take a sharpie marker and make curved lines dividing the cardstock into sections of different sizes.
5. Cut along the lines to create your puzzle.
6. Put the puzzle pieces in a zip lock bag to keep all the pieces together.

# Editorial Cartoons

Examine the cartoon below.



*Artist: Peray, Thailand. Teachers may purchase individual cartoons for other lesson plans at [www.politicalcartoons.com](http://www.politicalcartoons.com).*

Look at the top of each character. What is similar about the design on each character's head? What is different?

What is the angry character "saying" to the crying one? What is the artist's message? How do you think this artist feels about respect and disrespect?

## Activities

1. Form small groups. Discuss the following questions in your group:

A) Why do you think people are sometimes disrespectful to people who are different from them?

B) Is it important to show people respect even if you don't agree with them? Why or why not?

2. Create a poster in the same style as the editorial cartoon above that promotes tolerance. Try to rely solely on images and symbols (without text). Be sure that your poster truly sends people a message about how your group thinks about respecting someone who is different from you.

## **"Who Wants to Be An Activist?"**

**POSTER Challenge, Spring 2011**



Dear Contestants,

This is your second challenge-- for this challenge you must use your creativity, art skills, brain power, and as always work as a team.

**To be in the running to win this challenge,** your poster must include:

- your group name
- the name of the topic/issue/problem
- one statistic
- one question
- a compelling central image

**Your poster will be assessed on the following criteria:**

	<b>***</b>	<b>**</b>	<b>*</b>
<b>Use of color, texture, dimensionality</b>	Utilizes media creatively and is layered, textured, and full	Utilizes simple conventions, mono-textural	Minimal use of color, texture, and dimension
<b>Overall “look and feel” &amp; composition</b>	Is cohesive, legible, “clean”, effective, and engaging	Is interesting to look at, but lacks cohesion	Is bland, boring, confusing, or inaccurate
<b>Central Image, question, and statistic</b>	Compelling image, thought-provoking question, and captivating statistic	Solid image, nice question, and useful statistic	Weak image, poorly phrased question and a statistic that is mis-matched or ineffective

Good luck!

Your hosts and judges

Created by DreamYard Teaching Artist, Ama Codjoe

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### Creating Your Poem

1. Choose 4 phrases or words from the reading that stands out to you.
2. Think of 4 emotions that describe how you feel about what you read.
3. Think of 4 images that stood out to you or that came to mind during the reading.

PHRASES/WORDS

EMOTIONS

IMAGES

**POETRY CHECKLIST: Your poem is complete when you have the following:**

- \_\_\_ 3 or more stanzas
- \_\_\_ 3 or more facts from your chart
- \_\_\_ 2 or more emotions from your chart
- \_\_\_ 3 or more images from your chart
- \_\_\_ 1 or more places of repetition

# Tea Party

1. Read your role.
2. Write the passage or key points about your character in the space below.
3. Write at least two questions or thoughts you have about your character after reading the description.
4. Write about each of the other characters you meet at the tea party. Write notes as the person introduces him or herself to you.

#1

#2

#3

#4

5. What qualities do you think your activist needed to have in order to do what he/she did? List them.



## Baynard Rustin

“To be afraid is to behave as if the truth were not true.”

Every movement has someone working behind the scenes. I was one of Dr. King’s advisors. I was deep into activist work with the War Resisters League when I was asked to help Dr. King organize the bus boycott. I am most known for organizing the March on Washington in 1963, where Dr. King gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. This march was one of the largest nonviolent protests ever held in the United States.

There were people who wanted to shut us down—some because of my color, others because of my sexual orientation. I was silenced, threatened, arrested, beaten, imprisoned and fired from important leadership positions all because I was a gay black man. Proud of it and I refused to back down. I believe everyone has the right to freedom.

## Medgar Evers

“Our only hope is to control the vote.”

I worked for the NAACP and focused my activism work on desegregating the University of Mississippi. I worked hard to get my fellow brothers and sisters to boycott any place that did not respect blacks, this included gas stations that would not allow blacks to use their restrooms, but would allow us to buy their gas.

One of my passions was fighting for voting rights. I believed that if there would ever be true change in policies and laws that blacks had to vote.

I fought so hard for freedom because with my own eyes I saw what hate could do. I’ve seen my friends hung on trees, my own house was bombed, and I was in constant threat of being killed.

I paid a price for what I believed in. On June 12, 1963, I was gunned down in my driveway, leaving my wife and three children to continue my legacy.

Maya Angelou

Mahaila Jackson

“Faith and prayer are the vitamins of the soul;  
man cannot live in health without them.”

I grew up singing gospel music. Living in a world of darkness, I needed God's light to get me through. When Dr. King stepped on the scene, I was well known in the Christian community. I was selling out concert halls and packing churches with hundreds of people. I wanted to help Dr. King raise money for the movement, so lots of times I would put on a gospel concert and donate the money to the cause. I'd sing and he'd come out a preach. We were a good team. God was so good me, he opened up a door for me to even sing at President John F. Kennedy's inaugural ball. After that, I was really a national star. King asked me to sing at the March on Washington and I think that was the biggest crowd I sang for-- 250,000 people! One of the saddest days of my life was singing at King's funeral. I sang his favorite song, Precious Lord, Take My Hand.”

Claudette Colvin

"I had the right to sit on the bus, but I didn't want to be the only one."

Mary Church Terrell

"Seeing their children touched and seared and wounded by race prejudice is one of the heaviest crosses which colored women have to bear."

Even though I was the daughter of former slaves I ended up being one of the first African-American women to earn a college degree. I was what folks call a forerunner of the civil rights movement. Most of my work was done long before King came on the scene. In 1909, I joined a group of like-minded friends and together we started the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). It makes me so proud to know that a dream I had long ago is still an organization today. Besides my work with the NAACP, I fought for women to have the right to vote. I used my writing as a form of activism. As a journalist, I wrote many articles about what it is like to be a black woman in America. In 1950, I began the fight to desegregate public places and schools in Washington, DC. God blessed me to be able to live long enough to see the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling in 1954—the day schools were desegregated. I died two months later at the age of 90.

Johnny

Charles Albert Tindley

"I Shall Overcome."

I am known as one of the founding fathers of American Gospel music. I was the son of slaves and I taught myself to read and write at age 17. I worked as a janitor while attending night school. In 1902, I became pastor of the Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia--the church where I had been the janitor. I wrote a song titled, "I'll Overcome Some Day." Years later it became the anthem of the civil rights movement. Marchers and protesters would sing "We Shall Overcome," as they walked and fought for freedom.



Meredith

“This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.”

I was tired of not being able to drink out of a clean water fountain, of not being able to get service at a restaurant when I wanted something to eat. I was a freshman in college when I heard about the non-violent movement college students were doing through out the south—Sit Ins. We would go into a restaurant and sit in the section that that served whites only, refusing to get up, refusing to argue, refusing to respond with violence. I knew I could be arrested and go to jail but to me, the risk was worth it.

Ray

“If I don’t take a stand, who will?”

I was a high school student when I joined the movement. We were peacefully marching and protesting the unfair, segregated ways of Birmingham, Alabama when we were hit by a high-pressure fire hose from the fire department. My mom was nervous about me protesting but I couldn't just stand by and not fight. I had to fight. I had to stand up for what I believed in.

# Resource List

## **Books on Understanding & Working with Adolescents**

Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms by Gloria Ladson-Billings  
Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys: Dan Kindlon, Michael Thompson  
Reviving Ophelia by Mary Pipher  
Smart & Sassy: The Strengths of Inner-City Black Girls by Joyce West Stevens  
Sugar in the Raw by Rebecca Carroll  
The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children by Gloria Ladson-Billings

## **Books on Teaching Methods & Lesson Plan Guides**

Preparing Teachers for Cultural Diversity by King, Hollins, Hayman  
Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural justice by Wayne Au  
Rethinking Our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice by Bill Bigelow  
Teaching for Joy & Justice by Linda Christensen  
Reading, Writing & Rising Up by Linda Christensen  
Rethinking Mathematics: Teaching Social Justice by the Numbers by Gutstein & Peterson  
Teaching & Learning Anti-Racism by Derman-Sparks Phillips  
The Line Between Us: Lesson Plans on Immigration & the Mexican Border by Bigelow  
Games for Actors and Non-Actors 2nd Edition by Augusto Boal  
Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal

## **Online Resources for Curriculum Ideas**

[www.zinnedproject.org](http://www.zinnedproject.org)                      [www.nycore.org](http://www.nycore.org)  
[www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org)              [www.teachingtolerance.org](http://www.teachingtolerance.org)  
[www.childrenandnaturenetwork.org](http://www.childrenandnaturenetwork.org)

## **Classes & Conferences**

NYCORE Conference: NY Collective of Radical Educators  
Urban Word's Preemptive Education Conference @ NYU

# The Trouble with the Common Core



It isn't easy to find common ground on the Common Core. Already hailed as the “next big thing” in education reform, the Common Core State Standards are being rushed into classrooms in nearly every district in the country. Although these “world-class” standards raise substantive questions about curriculum choices and instructional practices, such educational concerns are likely to prove less significant than the role the Common Core is playing in the larger landscape of our polarized education reform politics.

We know there have been many positive claims made for the Common Core:

- That it represents a tighter set of smarter standards focused on developing critical learning skills instead of mastering fragmented bits of knowledge.
- That it requires more progressive, student-centered teaching with strong elements of collaborative and reflective learning.
- That it equalizes the playing field by raising expectations for all children, especially those suffering the worst effects of the “drill and kill” test prep norms of the recent past.

We also know that many creative, heroic teachers are seeking ways to use this latest reform wave to serve their students well. Especially in the current interim between the rollout of the standards and the arrival of the tests, some teachers have embraced the Common Core as an alternative to the scripted commercial formulas of recent experience, and are trying to use the space opened up by the Common Core transition to do positive things in their classrooms.

We'd like to believe these claims and efforts can trump the more political uses of the Common Core project. But we can't.

For starters, the misnamed “Common Core State Standards” are not state standards. They're national standards, created by Gates-funded consultants for the National Governors Association (NGA). They were designed, in part, to circumvent federal restrictions on the adoption of a national curriculum, hence the insertion of the word “state” in the brand name. States were coerced into adopting the Common Core by requirements attached to the federal Race to the Top grants and, later, the No Child Left Behind waivers. (This is one reason many conservative groups opposed to any federal role in education policy oppose the Common Core.)

Written mostly by academics and assessment experts—many with ties to testing companies—the Common Core standards have never been fully implemented and tested in real schools anywhere. Of the 135 members on the official Common Core review panels convened by Achieve Inc., the consulting firm that

has directed the Common Core project for the NGA, few were classroom teachers or current administrators. Parents were entirely missing. K–12 educators were mostly brought in after the fact to tweak and endorse the standards—and lend legitimacy to the results.

The standards are tied to assessments that are still in development and that must be given on computers many schools don't have. So far, there is no research or experience to justify the extravagant claims being made for the ability of these standards to ensure that every child will graduate from high school “college and career ready.” By all accounts, the new Common Core tests will be considerably harder than current state assessments, leading to sharp drops in scores and proficiency rates.

We have seen this show before. The entire country just finished a decade-long experiment in standards-based, test-driven school reform called No Child Left Behind. NCLB required states to adopt “rigorous” curriculum standards and test students annually to gauge progress towards reaching them. Under threat of losing federal funds, all 50 states adopted or revised their standards and began testing every student, every year in every grade from 3–8 and again in high school. (Before NCLB, only 19 states tested all kids every year, after NCLB all 50 did.)

By any measure, NCLB was a dismal failure in both raising academic performance and narrowing gaps in opportunity and outcomes. But by very publicly measuring the test results against benchmarks no real schools have ever met, NCLB did succeed in creating a narrative of failure that shaped a decade of attempts to “fix” schools while blaming those who work in them. By the time the first decade of NCLB was over, more than half the schools in the nation were on the lists of “failing schools” and the rest were poised to follow.

In reality, NCLB's test scores reflected the inequality that exists all around our schools. The disaggregated scores put the spotlight on longstanding gaps in outcomes and opportunity among student subgroups. But NCLB used these gaps to label schools as failures without providing the resources or support needed to eliminate them.

The tests showed that millions of students were not meeting existing standards. Yet the conclusion drawn by sponsors of the Common Core was that the solution was “more challenging” ones. This conclusion is simply wrong. NCLB proved that the test and punish approach to education reform doesn't work, not that we need a new, tougher version of it. Instead of targeting the inequalities of race, class, and educational opportunity reflected in the test scores, the Common Core project threatens to reproduce the narrative of public school failure that has led to a decade of bad policy in the name of reform.

The engine for this potential disaster, as it was for NCLB, will be the tests, in this case the “next generation” Common Core tests being developed by two federally funded, multi-state consortia at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. Although reasonable people, including many thoughtful educators we respect, have found things of value in the Common Core standards, there is no credible defense to be made of the high-stakes uses planned for these new tests.

The same heavy-handed, top-down policies that forced adoption of the standards require use of the Common Core tests to evaluate educators. This inaccurate and unreliable practice will distort the assessments before they're even in place and make Common Core implementation part of the assault on the teaching profession instead of a renewal of it. The costs of the tests, which have multiple pieces throughout the year plus the computer platforms needed to administer and score them, will be enormous and will come at the expense of more important things. The plunging scores will be used as an excuse to close more public schools and open more privatized charters and voucher schools, especially in poor communities of color. If, as proposed, the Common Core's “college and career ready” performance level becomes the standard for high school graduation, it will push more kids out of high school than it will prepare for college.

This is not just cynical speculation. It is a reasonable projection based on the history of the NCLB decade, the dismantling of public education in the nation's urban centers, and the appalling growth of the inequality and concentrated poverty that remains the central problem in public education.

Nor are we exaggerating the potential for disaster. Consider this description from Charlotte Danielson, a highly regarded mainstream authority on teacher evaluation and a strong supporter of the Common Core:

I do worry somewhat about the assessments—I'm concerned that we may be headed for a train wreck there. The test items I've seen that have been released so far are extremely challenging. If I had to take a test that was entirely comprised of items like that, I'm not sure that I would pass it—and I've got a bunch of degrees. So I do worry that in some schools we'll have 80 percent or some large number of students failing. That's what I mean by train wreck.

Reports from the first wave of Common Core testing are already confirming these fears. This spring students, parents, and teachers in New York schools responded to administration of new Common Core tests developed by Pearson Inc. with a general outcry against their length, difficulty, and inappropriate content. Pearson included corporate logos and promotional material in reading passages. Students reported feeling overstressed and underprepared—meeting the tests with shock, anger, tears, and anxiety. Administrators requested guidelines for handling tests students had vomited on. Teachers and principals complained about the disruptive nature of the testing process and many parents encouraged their children to opt out.

Common Core has become part of the corporate reform project now stalking our schools. Unless we dismantle and defeat this larger effort, Common Core implementation will become another stage in the demise of public education. As schools struggle with these new mandates, we should defend our students, our schools, our communities, and ourselves by telling the truth about the Common Core. This means pushing back against implementation timelines and plans that set schools up to fail, resisting the stakes and priority attached to the tests, and exposing the truth about the commercial and political interests shaping and benefiting from this false panacea for the problems our schools face.

Rethinking Schools has always been skeptical of standards imposed from above. Too many standards projects have been efforts to move decisions about teaching and learning away from classrooms, educators, and school communities, only to put them in the hands of distant bureaucracies. Standards have often codified sanitized versions of history, politics, and culture that reinforce official myths while leaving out the voices, concerns, and realities of our students and communities. Whatever positive role standards might play in truly collaborative conversations about what our schools should teach and children should learn has been repeatedly undermined by bad process, suspect political agendas, and commercial interests.

Unfortunately there's been too little honest conversation and too little democracy in the development of the Common Core. We see consultants and corporate entrepreneurs where there should be parents and teachers, and more high-stakes testing where there should be none. Until that changes, it will be hard to distinguish the “next big thing” from the last one.