



# POWER AND POSITIONALITY

THEME  
Power

LENGTH  
Two 50-min  
lessons

GRADE LEVEL  
9-12

SUBJECT  
English Language  
Arts  
(US History  
Integrated)

By Mariah Rankine-Landers

*To think through one's culture, power, positionality and possibility.  
Students will explore their surface, shallow and deep culture, link this  
understanding to their positionality, and begin to see where power resides.*

In this lesson students will explore their surface, shallow and deep culture. They will link this understanding to their own positionality and begin to see where power resides. They will be asked to think futuristically about what their possibilities are and how their positionality can be used for change.

# LESSON OBJECTIVES

## CREATIVE INQUIRIES

**What is the power of your positionality?**

**How does my positionality affect the way I understand the world?**

**How can I use my positionality for possibility and change?**

## FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE

*Students will know...*

- Culture affects the way you understand the world. Students will gain insight and understanding to what epistemology is.

## PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE

*Students will be able to...*

- Identify how the levels of culture build a perception of how they see and interact with the world and how others see and interact with the world.

## CONCEPTUAL INQUIRY

*Students will understand...*

- That they have a “position” in the world that is built by their epistemology.

## PERFORMANCES OF UNDERSTANDING

*Students will demonstrate...*

- Accordion Journal Reflection
- Self Portrait

## LESSON PREREQUISITE

Optional pre-reads:

- Surface/Shallow/Deep Culture Blog: [Columbia Teachers College](#)
- Zaretta Hammond: Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain — Definitions of surface, shallow and deep culture.

## EXTENSIONS

- Six Word Memoirs, Life Stories, [NPR](#)

- [Takacs: "How does your positionality bias your epistemology?"](#)

## DIFFERENTIATIONS/□ CONSIDERATIONS

- Scaffold discussions to be self-reflective rather than sharing publicly for students carrying deep trauma.

- Support students to understand privilege as an examined tool for social change, not as a negative term.

## HAMILTON HOOKS

### Song #1: Alexander Hamilton



#### ALEXANDER HAMILTON — Opening Number

Listening to the intro song of Hamilton, what is the story that informs and shapes who Alexander is?

Consider this: In Ron Chernow's novel on Alexander Hamilton, Alexander is spoken of as an immigrant to America. Historian Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz tells us that at that point in history, white men could freely travel from one country to another. It was called a “relocation” and was not thought of as immigration. How does this change your perception of Hamilton?

LESSON 1 OF 2

# SELFIE DRAWINGS AND CULTURAL EXPLORATION

LESSON  
OVERVIEW  
LENGTH  
50 min  
GRADE LEVEL  
9-11  
SUBJECT  
ELA

## GOAL

► **How does my positionality affect the way I understand the world?**

## MATERIALS

- One sheet standard 9x12 black construction paper per student
- One light colored crayon or pencil per student
- 3 transparency sheets per student or acetate
- Colored Sharpies
- 2" mirrors if available, 1 per student
- Accordion Journals

SESSION 1 OF 2  
*Selfie Drawings and  
Cultural Exploration*

## OUTLINE

### 1. Quick Selfie Drawings

Using the black construction paper and a crayon/pencil, facilitate students through drawing a self portrait. Utilize phones for mirrors or have students take a selfie with their phones if available. Distribute mirrors if available. Follow the instructions attached or watch the YouTube video: Self Portrait (4 min) or Self Portrait Instructions for Kindergarten (6 min).

### 2. Layering Culture

Students will use words, symbols, signs and drawings to explore their surface, shallow and deep culture.

- a. Introduce Surface, Shallow and Deep Culture image. Have students read through each section.
- b. Beginning with surface culture. Allow students 3 min to think about their surface culture and write down ideas in their journal.
- c. Invite students to draw an image, set of words, signs or symbols that express their surface culture on their first transparency. Use permanent markers on transparencies or acetate.
- d. Repeat the above for Shallow and Deep culture explorations.
- e. When all four images have been completed, bind them by layering the self portrait, deep culture image, shallow culture image and surface culture image. Staple at the sides or top to make a book. Images can also be bound with thread and needle if available.
- f. Share finished products in small groups, gallery walks or whole group.
- g. Return to thinking about Alexander Hamilton. What was his surface, shallow and deep culture? In what ways did his culture frame his vision of the world? How did it inform the way he understood the world?

LESSON 2 OF 2

# DEEP INVESTIGATION OF POSITIONALITY

LESSON  
OVERVIEW  
LENGTH  
50 min  
GRADE LEVEL  
9-11  
SUBJECT  
ELA

## GOALS

- **What is the power of your positionality?**
- **How can I use my positionality for possibility and change?**

## MATERIALS

- Accordion Journals
- Printouts or downloads: Takacs “How does your positionality bias your epistemology?”

SESSION 2 OF 2  
*Deep Investigation  
of Positionality*

## OUTLINE

### 1. Unpacking Epistemology

In small groups provide the text: Takacs excerpt: “HOW DOES YOUR POSITIONALITY BIAS YOUR EPISTEMOLOGY?”

### 2. Individual Reading

Have students read the text on their own first. (10 min)

### 3. Group Discussion

Support groups in having a discussion about the key idea of the text. If students struggle with where to start, have them circle words of interest to each person and create a list poem to show the words.

- a. What seems important about this excerpt?
- b. What resonates? What doesn't make sense?
- c. Looking at the layers of your personal culture, how would you describe your own positionality? How are you making sense of the world around you?

### 4. Accordion Journal Writing

Using accordion journals have students write openly to the understanding goals for this lesson:

- What is the power of your positionality?
- How does my positionality affect the way I understand the world?
- How can I use my positionality for possibility and change?

# CRITICAL REFLECTION 10 MIN

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## Set-up

Hamilton is one of the most prolific writers in History and wrote incessantly more than any other person recorded at that time in US History. The records of his life offer us much information about who he was, his positionality in life and his position on issues.

## Prompt

► *What is your life story in 6 words?*

## Task 5-15 min

Write a 6 word memoir that describes your positionality. (A 6 word memoir uses descriptive and concise language to summarize large ideas.)

## Scaffold in the following ways:

1. Generate a list of descriptive words among the class of learners.
2. Build an exemplar together: (i.e. Brown Trans Freedom Fighter Seeking Liberation or Happa Minded Artist Soaked in Revival and Theory)

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## RESOURCE

- Six Word Memoirs, Life Stories — [NPR](#)
- [Takacs: "How does your positionality bias your epistemology?"](#)