

The Power of Girlhood?

Let's Read Model Lesson

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Time: 60 minutes or two 45min lessons

Materials: A large piece of paper, tape, markers, 4 chairs, a bottle

Strategies: Story of My Name (variation), Group Mural, The Great Game of Power

Chapter Focus: My name, A Rice Sandwich, Born Bad, No Speak English, The Family of Little Feet, Sire, Beautiful & Cruel or any chapter that covers identity, gender, sexuality, power

Themes: Identity/Gender/Sexuality/Power

Essential question(s): What makes someone or something powerful? How can power create change in someone's life or future?

Learning Goal: Identify the concept of power and the struggle girls go through transitioning into adulthood in *The House on Mango Street*; make connections to their personal lives

ENGAGE: (10 min)

Story of My Superpower (Variation of Story of My Name)

A short discussion with students about the word power. *What is the meaning of the word? Would you like to have the power? What would you do if you had the power to change something?*

Possible definition **power**, *noun* – the ability or right to control people or events

Today we are going to delve into the concept of the power in a period of time between the childhood and adulthood. It is a complex stage of life when everyone strives to gain the wisdom of adulthood and at the same time preserves the innocence of childhood. We are going to brainstorm some ideas about where to find inner strength, courage, and the abilities to withstand difficulties and obstacles.

Standing in a circle, each student will share a brief description with a group about some new aspect of their names. Explain that students can share a brief description of their first name, last name, or a nickname. In this activity students can also invent a new name if they prefer, or they cannot remember the meaning of their original names. They will also be reminded of the vignette *My name* as a model for creating a new name: *“In English my name means **hope**. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness. It means waiting. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing...*

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X”.

The teacher models the process by sharing the description of his/her name as an example.

Next, give the students a moment to think about the “superpower” they have.

Each student will state his/her name and share what their “superpower” is. This superpower has to start with the letter of their name and a student has to act out a gesture or movement that represents this quality. This can be a special skill, a curious fact about their lives, valuable knowledge they can share etc. You can choose to make it more general, or keep things more personal as the way to know each other better. As one student introduces his/her superpower and acts out the movement everyone replies with e.g. *Hello, Adventurous A...* and acts out the given movement. Continue the activity until everyone has the chance to share their superpower and name.

REFLECTION

What did you notice about yourself as you participated in this activity? How did you feel? Where does your superpower come from?

What does it mean to you to have superpower? What do your new names tell us? Are they important? Why or why not? What has caused Esperanza to think negatively about her name? Explain.

Having students explore their own superpower will begin to understand their self-worth, recognize the power of building positive relationships with others, and help build the sense of community.

TRANSITION

*Esperanza is a young Mexican-American girl in a continuous search for her own power. She wants to change her name so that she can have **power** over her own future. Today we will find how she gains the power over her experiences.*

EXPLORE

Group Mural (20 min)

Explain that today the group will respond to some prompts using words and images to share their thoughts using the style of graffiti artists to communicate their opinion. Consider how color, shape, and line function in a graffiti art/wall mural. Invite the group to sit or stand around one large piece of blank paper on a table, floor, or taped to a wall surface and provide a large set of markers for writing/drawing. Or divide the group into smaller groups, each with their own piece of large, blank paper and set of markers. Students work silently and use words and images to respond to the prompt.

Each group will critically read the vignette looking for specific scenes or moments where Esperanza's power is exemplified such as the power of language or sexuality. Each group will analyze a different vignette and write or draw symbols, words, images or statements they have found of Esperanza's awakening. (You can divide students into two groups and each group will critically analyze vignette(s) *A Rice Sandwich*, *Born Bad*, *No Speak English*, or *The Family of Little Feet*, *Sire*, *Beautiful & Cruel*. Depending on the class or lack of time you can analyze only two vignettes e.g. *No Speak English* and *The Family of Little Feet*)

Play music while students work. After 10-15 minutes, gather around the Graffiti page(s) to reflect. Invite students to place a word or image as a respectful response to something made by another student in a final, silent round or to add further color or detail to an image/word already on the paper.

REFLECTION

What images/words stand out to you the most?

Are there specific words/phrases that appear on multiple pages? What connections can we make across the pages? What do you think what kind of power Esperanza has/will have? How is beauty used as a source of power? What is the power of the language? Can you make any connections to your own upbringing? Are there any similarities or differences?

NB Another way you might prompt the students for this strategy could be posing the two prompts: POWER IS... and POWER IS NOT...

Split the group in two. Let the students work silently and reflect on their Group Mural as a class.

TRANSITION

In The Family of Little Feet Esperanza, Nenny, Rachel, and Lucy are given a paper bag full of old high-heeled shoes. The image of shoes as a symbol of sexuality and womanhood has a powerful effect in this vignette. The girls had their first encounter with the dangerous world of men and how women are perceived in it. To further explore the power and dangers of the newfound sexuality students participate in the Great Game of Power. They will make a specific image of power/powerlessness in response to reading this vignette (e.g. the wonders of womanhood or the discomfort of the harassment).

The Great Game of Power (15 min)

Place a set of four chairs (all the same) in a row, along with a water bottle in front of a seated group. Ask a volunteer to silently arrange the four chairs and a water bottle in such a way that, in their opinion, one chair has more power than all the other chairs. Explain that any object can be moved in any direction or placed on top of each other, but none of the objects can be removed altogether from the space. Sit in the audience and wait for a volunteer to arrange the chairs. Once the chairs have been arranged ask that volunteer to return to their seat and to not reveal his/her

thinking behind the arrangement. Next, ask the group to interpret or “read” the image made by the chairs and water bottle.

What do you see? Describe the way the chairs are positioned. What does that position represent or make you think of? Which chair has the most power? Why? What does this image represent? Why?

Encourage different interpretations. Have another volunteer place and pose their body in the image in an effort to take power away from the chair. This leads to reading a body as image in relationship to an object.

What do you see now? Which object has the most power? Why? What does that image represent? Why?

REFLECTION

What are some of different ways we saw power represented in this activity? What makes someone or something powerful? Let’s think back to the characters in this vignette. Who would be the water bottle and who would be the chairs? Why? What makes you say that?

Is it possible to take power away from someone? How? What character would be the powerless chair? Why?

Who or what is powerful in your lives now? Who or what was powerful in your lives then? Why?

What are the lessons you have learned throughout those years?