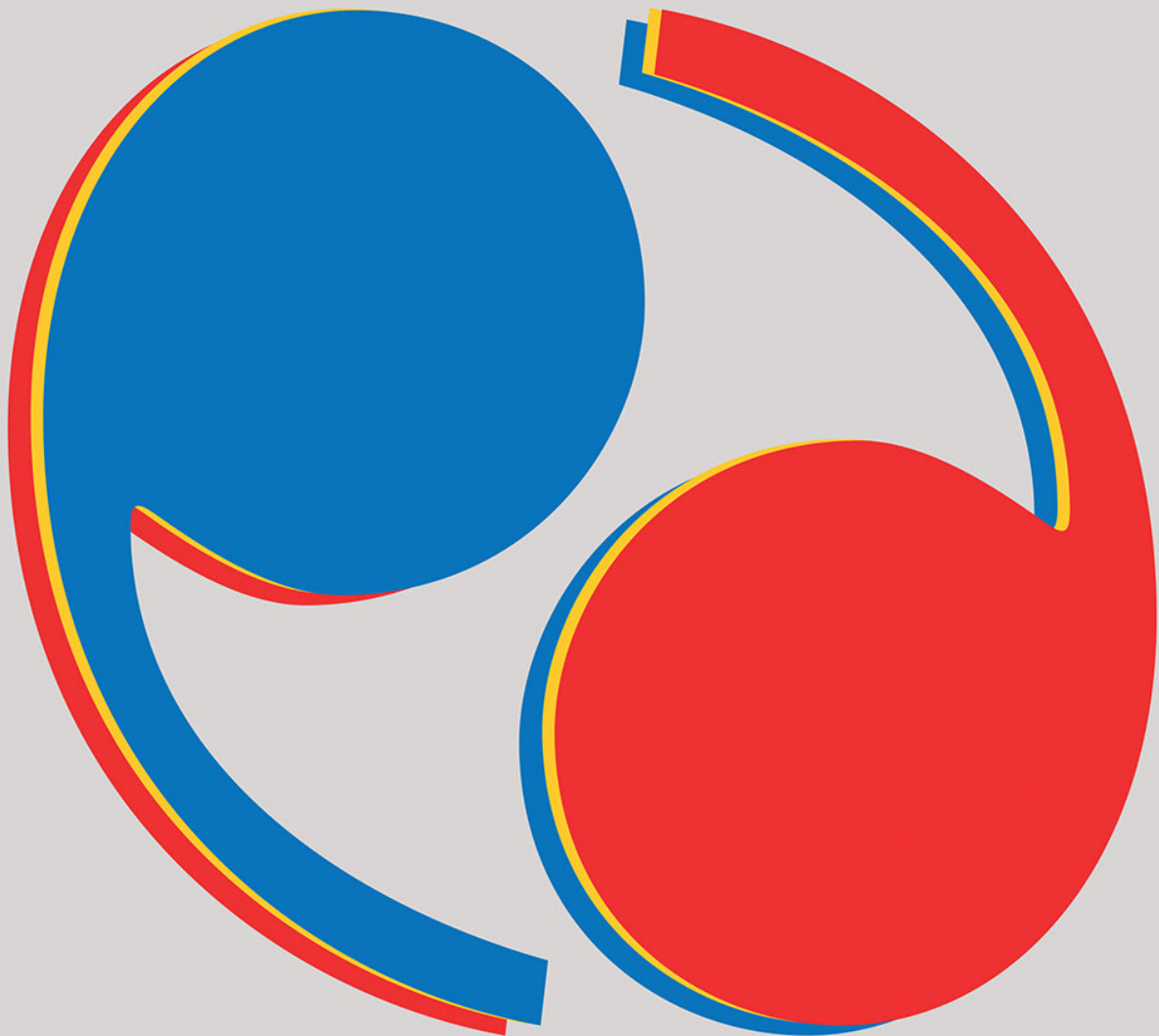


ACTIVE BRAVE CONVERSATIONS

Classroom voices that support and advocate for belonging and inclusion

Andrew B. Campbell



A Poetry Lesson for Classroom Use

Lesson: Identity and Self-Esteem

Remember to model and encourage respectful discussions.

I'm in Love With My Hair

by Canute Lawrence

After months of solitary confinement
Staring at myself and who I've become
My hair declares its roots run deep and strong
I've denied it, fried it and even maligned it
But my hair, like an ever faithful friend
Calmly reminds me that we are one
That we belong together forever
Despite your disapproval and celebration of Bether
My hair is Kilimanjaro
Why do you stare? I'm in love with my hair.
You bar me from school, you deny me the job
You say my hair is unbecoming
But the real reason is: my hair is a muse
For creativity and upliftment
Its curls are tight like inseparable lovers
Its texture thick like fine wool
I don't need your replacements
Promising me some other thrix
For my hair is my strength – my crown jewel
I love my afro, my braids, my Nubian knots
I love everything my hair dares to express
Because my eyes are wide open to who I really am.
I'm in love, so in love, with my hair.
(Lawrence, 2021, p. 33)

Anticipatory Set

- Capture students' attention by reading or playing a recording of "I'm in Love With My Hair."
- Instruct students to take out their notebooks and make notes of anything that resonates with them during a second reading.
- You might do a third reading so that every child has the time to write something in their notebook. (6 minutes)

Discussion and Building Oral Communication Skills

- Ask students: What does your hair mean to you?
- Allow as many of them as possible to share their perspectives.
- If a student didn't write notes or a response to the poem, use prompts to build a conversation/discussion about hair. (15–20 minutes)
 - How does your hair influence your identity?
 - Are you 100% satisfied or in love with your hair? Explain why or why not.
 - How do you relate to this poem?

Exploring Themes

- Ask students to briefly explain the main message in the poem. (5 minutes)

Identifying Literary Devices

- Ask students to identify three figures of speech used in the poem and explain their usage or effectiveness. Students can take a few minutes to look for them and write their responses in their notebooks. (10 minutes)

Vocabulary Development

- Ask students to identify three unfamiliar words in the poem:

Find words you never saw or heard before today. Let's do a mini research and find their meanings.

(6 minutes)

- Ask students why they think the poet used *Kilamanjaro* and not the correct spelling of *Kilimanjaro*. Examine how the sound of “Kil-a-man-jaro” alludes to the many historical crimes and injustices against enslaved Africans and people of African descent because of their physical features. Discuss how poets can deliberately alter words to expand their meaning and significance. (3 minutes)

Spoken Language

- Assign individuals, pairs, and groups to read different lines of the poem as a choral speaking activity. Let them practice a few times, experimenting with different volumes, intonations, pace, and pitch. (20 minutes)
- Have volunteers share how they feel after the choral speaking exercise. (5 minutes)

Voices from the Field

I have gathered perspectives from students, colleagues, and hallway safety monitors to hear their take on how racism can be dismantled in the classroom and schools. It is important that teachers, principals, superintendents, other system leaders and community partners listen keenly to these voices as their voices matter too.

Questioning and challenging curriculum sharpens students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

- Teachers should teach lessons specifically on empathy.
- Teachers should ensure that empathy is an ability that is modelled and taught not just once, but throughout the year. This is a good suggestion, and district school boards should also demonstrate this leadership by providing workshops to teachers on teaching empathy. The poem, “Jamie” by Elizabeth Brewster is an ideal poem to teach both middle and high school students empathy, especially toward persons who are living with a disability and those who are social outcasts.
- Constantly check your bias. Some teachers have false assumptions about some students. For example, asking a student about their life in the Philippines when in fact, the student and their parents are not from the Philippines.
- Teachers should treat every student like a human being. Don't be color blind.
- Telling students, “I don't see color” is in essence denying the student of their identity as Black, Brown, or any other ethnicity.

Teachers should encourage students to question the curriculum. Students should be encouraged to challenge the contents of the curriculum and ask what is missing. For example, are there individuals and groups whose lives and experiences are visibly missing from the curriculum?

— Muslim student