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  **Unmute: Finding Voice and Embracing Self-Acceptance Through Literature**

  **I. Rationale**: The journey of finding your own voice and coming to terms with excepting yourself is a unique and essential part of the adolescent experience, but it can also be an extreme challenge. Factors such as personal trauma, social pressures, and self-doubt often prevent adolescents from speaking their truths, and living their lives authentically, this can even carry into adulthood. With the help of literature, students can relate to characters who deal with, and navigate through these same struggles, which can in part help them look at their own lives as they develop their confidence and their voice all while developing empathy for others.

 Central to this unit is Laurie Halse Anderson’s “Speak” which is an extremely powerful novel focusing on a teenage girl’s experience of reclaiming her voice after trauma. The novel's exploration of resilience and silence provides an anchor for discussing empowerment and self-expression. Novels such as Chris Crutcher's “Whale Talk”, and Robert Cormier’s “After the First Death” serve as additional contemporary perspectives on things like speaking out against social injustice, courage, and identity. These novels also highlight the power of finding a voice and accepting yourself.

 Adolescents very often have a challenging time shaping their identities and understanding the importance of their voice. By engaging with these novels, as well as taking part in several group/classroom activities that will help them reflect with these themes, students will also dive into how speaking out and finding an identity can shape their own futures as well as change the world around them.

II. **Into the text**: This unit will help to guide students through a detailed exploration of the texts, this lesson will surround “Speak”. To engage students in the themes of speaking out and self-acceptance, the unit will start with an activity focusing on connecting to their individual experiences.

  **Poem analysis activity**: I will pass out a printed paper with three poems :

["The Voice" by Shel Silverstein](https://allpoetry.com/poem/8538793-The-Voice-by-Shel-Silverstein)

["Self-Portrait" by David Whyte](https://high-road-artist.com/9574/wisdom-wednesdays/self-portrait-a-poem-by-david-whyte/)

["I Am" by Ella Wheeler Wilcox](https://www.yourdailypoem.com/listpoem.jsp?poem_id=4176)

 I will go around and ask each student which poem spoke to them and why.

 **Song Analysis Activity**: I will play the song [“Brave” by Sara Bareilles](https://youtu.be/4Ny_LX3byp8?feature=shared). The hopeful message about embracing self and speaking out will set the tone for the unit. I will provide students with the printed-out lyrics of this song and ask them to identify lines that they can relate to. After this I will start a group discussion.

*What does it mean to be brave in the face of fear or silence?*

*Why do you think people hesitate to speak out, and how can we overcome this?*

At the end of this discussion, I will assign a personal reflection journal where students will write about an instance where they had a tough time speaking out or had a hard time embracing themselves. This intro into the unit gives the students a chance to emotionally connect with the themes at hand before diving into the texts.

**III. “Through” the text**: In this unit students will take what they are learning in the assigned texts and connect this to their own lives as adolescents. With creative activities like symbol analysis and quote analysis, students will not only be able to explore their own voices, but they will be able to gain confidence in speaking about issues they are passionate about such as standing up against bullying, being aware of systemic racism and doing what we can to address it, and even mental health. These activities will encourage students to use literature as a tool when it comes to self-acceptance and finding one's voice.

**First Text:** “Speak” by Laurie Halse Anderson

 This lesson will be focusing on the main character Melinda and her journey as she goes from silence and fear to self-expression. Activities will include:

**Symbol Analysis-** Students will look at the recurring motif of the “Tree project” in art class and discuss how the growth of this project her journey towards a voice and self-acceptance.

**Key quote Analysis-** “*It’s getting harder to talk. My throat is always sore, my lips raw*.” As a class we will discuss how this quote embodies the physical and emotional impact of staying silent.

**Second text:** Chris Crutcher's “Whale Talk”

This lesson will focus on TJs fight against Bullying as well as systemic racism while growing and accepting his identity.

Activities for this lesson will include:

**Character mapping**: As a class we will read this book and keep a chart to map TJs character growth throughout the novel. I will guide students to take note of things like how T.J comes to with his own sense of self as well as how he advocates for characters like Chris Coughlin.

**Key quote discussion:** “*You don’t understand the power of words until they’re directed at you.*” As a class, we will discuss the impact words can have on you regarding self-acceptance and identity.

**Optional text:** Robert Cormier's “After the First Death”

This Lesson will focus on the tensions surrounding fear when it comes to speaking out in intense situations.

Activities for this lesson will include:

**Class Debate**: As a class we will look at Kate's actions in the novel and ask the questions:

*Was she brave in the face of fear?*

*How does her internal fight to act mirror real life challenges we may have when it comes to speaking out?*

**Writing Prompt**: I will have the class do a one-page mini essay on comparing how Melinda from “Speak” and Kate from “After the First Death” find the courage to speak out. Can we learn from their struggle? If so, what can we learn?

**IV. Beyond the Text/Concluding activities**: This unit will be cumulative of all the themes in the three texts. In this unit students will apply what they learned through the texts and activities pertaining to the texts and apply it to creative projects. These projects will encourage students to use their own voices, see its importance, and apply that to the importance of YA literature.

The projects for this will include one Creative Project done in groups of three. As well as a solo self-reflection:

**Creative Project**: The groups of students will design a “Speak out” presentation like a PowerPoint, video, or posterboard that talks about a issue important to them that is relevant to one of the three texts, for example; mental health, bullying, etc. Each presentation much include a brief description on how the texts influenced this project and include one quote from either text.

**Self-Reflection:** Each group member will write a brief explanation of how speaking out against this issue mirrors their values or self-identity, or how it helped them find their voice.

**Final Activity:** The final activity will be a class discussion, as a class we will discuss current events and connect them to the importance of speaking out, for example climate change, BLM, ME 2 Movement, mental health awareness. We will talk about how these movements show the power of young voices.

 In conclusion, this unit of study deals with many YA themes such as Self-identity, self-acceptance, the importance of speaking out, and finding a voice with which to do so. I have used three texts we read in 112B this semester in my unit of study because they all dealt with similar themes and support this unit perfectly. In each of these texts there were characters that had values that most adolescents can relate to, and this may help students understand the themes more if they can relate to characters in the novels. Learning that literature not only provides remarkable stories but also life lessons, students will hopefully find love for reading if they haven't already. Through the activities in this unit that involve self-reflection, creativity, and critical discussions, students may find their own voice and learn the value of speaking out and having a voice.

 **Works Cited**

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