

Yale 2017 PIER Summer Institute: Africa and the World

BORDERS AND BRIDGES OF IDENTITY: WHAT CAN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE TEACH ME ABOUT MYSELF?

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Subject Area(s): Philosophy, Existentialism

Grade Level(s): First and second year college students.

Time Allotment: Three lessons provided by instructor and one final project presented by students.

Lesson Description: Include- why is this important for students to know?

This lesson for introduction to philosophy courses aims to encourage students to think about the notions of race, culture, gender, and identity in relation to existentialism. Existentialism deals with questions of the individual as a free and responsible agent. In this lesson, students will be exposed to some of the struggles of African identity in the work of Chimamanda Adichie in comparison to other Western canonical existentialism texts. Students will determine how, if at all, they can relate to the material. They will self-reflect and attempt to define who they are. This lesson will allow students to start thinking about whom they are and who they are not. They will also determine if and how they can relate to others.

Learning Context: How does this lesson/unit fit within the context of the the larger unit or other units?

85% of El Paso community college students are Mexican American. El Paso is located in the border region between the U.S. and Mexico. Many border students encounter challenges of identity and belonging. This lesson will allow for introspective analysis of the self in a multicultural pedagogical setting for students in general regardless of their geographical location. This lesson plan is designed for philosophy courses but may be implemented in other disciplines successfully.

Compelling Question(s): What question(s) will guide student inquiry during the lesson/unit?

Who are you?
Who are you not?
Who or what defines you?
Are you free?
What does it mean to be you?
Are you the same as when you were a baby?
What role does gender play in your identity?
What role does culture play in your identity?

How are you similar to others?
How are you different to others?

Lesson Objectives/Learning Intentions:

The learning objectives of this lesson will be the following: 1. The student will be exposed to challenging questions of identity through the lens of existentialism. 2. The student will analyze Chimamanda Adichie's work: *We Should All Be Feminists* in which she addresses race, gender, and identity. 3. The student will develop a philosophical account of personal identity in the form of a visual representation. 4. The student will provide his or her response in the form of a short oral presentation.

Lesson Vocabulary:

Content Vocabulary	Skill/Process Vocabulary
Philosophy, identity, metaphysics, gender, existentialism, essence, existence, third space, race, culture, border, freedom, essentialism, and feminism.	Examine, analyze, develop, explore, understand, critique, relate, and create.

Materials needed:

- Handouts with existentialist quotes that refer to identity by Beauvoir, Camus, Nietzsche, and Sartre.
- Have access to internet smart classroom in order to watch Chimamanda's TED Talk about feminism and identity.

Lesson Activities:

Lesson 1: Engagement with existential philosophy

Before the day of the lecture, students will have read existentialist quotes by:

Beauvoir: “Man's passion is useless; he has no means for becoming the being that he is not” (p. 3).

Camus: “Man is the only creature who refuses to be what he is” (p. 11).

Nietzsche: “Become who you are” (p. 270).

Sartre: “Man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does” (p. 29).

- Teacher will begin the lesson by reviewing some of the fundamental questions of existentialism in relation to identity. Some of these questions will be:
 - Who am I?
 - What is it to be me?
 - What is my purpose?
 - Am I free?
 - What are the common themes in the readings?
- Teacher and students will discuss these questions in a Socratic environment.

HOMEWORK:

- Students will read: Adichie, C. N. (2015). We should all be feminists. New York: Anchor Books.
- Students will prepare to discuss reading in class.

Lesson 2: Analysis of Adichie in relation to existentialism:

- Teacher and students will discuss the content of the book. Teacher will address any questions from students.
- In class, students will watch: Chimamanda Adichie TED Talk: *We Should All be Feminists*
- Students will discuss if they relate to the material? If so, how? How does this talk relate to the existential notions of being? In what ways am I similar to others? Do their impressions differ after watching Adichie as opposed to reading her work?

HOMEWORK:

- Students will visually represent who they are. They can do this through a drawing, a collage, a photograph, a video, a collection of objects etc.
- Students will prepare a one-minute presentation explaining their visual project.

Lesson 3: Presentations

- Students will share their project with the class. They will have one minute to present and explain the answer to the question: who are you? Students will consider the existential quotes and Adichie's work for their presentation.
- Teacher will not provide numeric grade for assignment, allowing for the diversity and creativity of interpretations.
- Students will receive full credit for visual representation and one minute oral presentation.
- Teacher and students will reflect on the experience of defining who they are.

References

- Beauvoir, S. D. (2015). *The ethics of ambiguity*(B. Frechtman, Trans.). New York, NY: Philosophical Library.
- Camus, A. (2008). *The rebel: an essay on man in revolt*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sartre, J. (2007). *Existentialism is humanism* (J. Kulka, Ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (2001). *Nietzsche: the Gay Science* (B. A. Williams & J. Nauckhoff, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.