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Subject: Fw: Navigating Sensitive Material
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To: DeLossa, Robert rdelossa@lowell.k12.ma.us



FYI

From: Keefe, Suzanne
Sent: Monday, November 25, 2019 2:22 PM
To: LHS English Mail
Subject: Navigating Sensitive Material

Hello Everyone-

There is a lot to be grateful for at this time of year. By now, we generally have a pretty good sense of who our students are and we have established relationships and routines that make our classrooms feel personal and productive.

One of the most wonderful things about working at LHS is our incredible diversity - and one of the most challenging aspects of working at LHS is that same diversity. We know that every student interacts and reacts to texts in ways that are unique to each. As you come to know your students and choose texts that respond to their needs and interests, please remember to preview sensitive topics and to discuss and set boundaries around any emotionally charged language that students may encounter.

The question of how we navigate culturally sensitive and emotionally challenging texts has come up a couple of times recently. I think this is something we do well as a department, but if you are looking for new ideas and strategies for working with difficult material, here are a few resources:

Ten Tips for Facilitating Classroom Discussions on Sensitive Topics

https://bento.cdn.pbs.org/hostedbento-prod/filer_public/SBAN/Images/Classrooms/Ten%20Tips%20for%20Facilitating%20Classroom%20Discussions%20on%20Sensitive%20Topics_Final.pdf

From Facing History and Ourselves

This trusted site provides links to resources that are specific to dealing with dehumanizing language.

<https://www.facinghistory.org/mockingbird/discussing-sensitive-topics-classroom>

Teaching the N-Word.

In this article, teacher Michelle Kenney recounts how she approached the language of August Wilson's *Fences*. She includes links to the lesson resources she relied on.

<https://www.rethinkingschools.org/articles/teaching-the-n-word>

The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching

These guidelines address how to facilitate both planned and spontaneous discussions about sensitive topics

...and I know many of you have your own

<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/generalguidelines>

There are a lot of other great resources out there --and I know many of you have your own lessons that you use to create respectful and safe classrooms that support your students to navigate sensitive topics and texts. Please share these with your grade level teams.

It is important to take the pulse of your class before you get started. Students may not always share their thinking or objections through class discussion -- which makes a case for finding and offering alternative ways for kids to share any reservations or discomfort they may have. If a student or family is uncomfortable with the text you have chosen, we will always offer an alternative. If you need help choosing a suitable second option, please reach out and I will assist you with that.

Thank you for all that you do every day to make your students feel supported, valued and respected. Our students are supremely lucky to have you in their lives.

Suzanne

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