



Signature in the Schools: The Voices on Blackwell Island

Exercise: Personal and Social Mental Health

Subject(s): Social Studies, English and Theatre

Goals: Students will be able to:

- Develop ideas individually and collaboratively.
- Propose and select alternatives to solve problems while building an ensemble.
- Use verbal and nonverbal techniques for presentation.
- Produce, analyze, and evaluate auditory, visual, and written media messages.

Show Connection:

Characters in *The Voices on Blackwell Island* struggle with their wellness; physical, mental or otherwise. The physical restrictions and abusive environment at Blackwell's Island greatly reduce the agency of the women living there. In this exercise, students will gain a better understanding of their relationship with mental health work as they unpack their sense of self and relationship to society.

Materials:

- Large Pieces of Paper
- Arts and Craft Supplies

Set Up:

Divide the students into two-person partnerships. Give each partnership two large pieces of paper and a marker.

Description:

- Invite the students to reflect on where anxiety, fear, nerves, trauma, stress, neurosis live on their body. Where do the memories of the past live within them? Where in their body do they feel negative feelings? Is it a lump in their throat, a grab in their chest, welling up in their eyes, etc?
- After a moment of reflection, partners take turns tracing their partner's body, making sure to trace the region of the body their partner says they hold onto those feelings. If it's their whole body, that's fine. If it's just one or two body parts that is also fine as well. Once the tracing is done, invite each person to take the traced sheet of paper of themselves to do more

work on.

- Assuming they have some negative space surrounding the actual tracing, invite them to divide the negative space into three areas. The student will be asked three questions. Each question should be answered visually (no words allowed!) within one of the subdivided areas (one area for each question), using the provided arts and craft supplies.
 - » How does society serve you? How does society help you?
 - » How does society harm you?
 - » What is something in the potential for society (or the potential for how society could serve you) that excites you?
- Then, within the tracing of their body, students subdivide that area into three sections. Students then visually represent and respond to the following questions with provided arts and crafts supplies. (No words allowed). As before, one question and answer for each subdivision:
 - » What is something you like about yourself?
 - » What is something that you dislike about yourself or something that you struggle with?
 - » How do you seek help and relief for the thing you struggle with?
- Between the two rounds of visual questioning and subdividing, you're looking at about 20 minutes of art response time. Encourage vocal discussion amongst the students as they find the answers to the questions.
- As a class, lay out or post the students' pieces around the classroom, creating a "Museum of Mental Health." Have the students wander around their classmates' work, observing it and responding to some of the following questions as they browse the work.
 - » If you had to make a noise to represent how this whole class felt about themselves, what would it sound like?
 - » If you had to make a face to represent how this class felt about how society treats them, what would it look like?
 - » What is a message of support you would say to another member of this class, after looking at and interpreting their piece?
 - » What is one word you would use to describe how this class feels about themselves and what they are capable of?
- Be sure to hear and see some of their responses to the work.

Discussion:

- What is a challenge that you feel is uniquely put upon your gender and or generation when it comes to your mental well being? (Maybe it is an expectation, a preconceived notion, etc.)
- What sort of solutions might there be, short term or long term, in bridging the divides between society, ourselves, and the expectations and realities we hold up towards one another?