



Signature in the Schools: The Voices on Blackwell Island

Exercise: What is the Tree You Are Planting?

Subject(s): Social Studies, Theatre and English

Goals: Students will be able to:

- Recognize the fundamental worth and dignity of the individual.
- Compare and contrast historical, cultural, economic, and political perspectives in United States history.
- Describe, analyze, and evaluate artistic choices.
- Identify and apply digital citizenship as it relates to research, performance, and production of theatrical works.

Show Connection:

Mother and Daughter in *The Voices on Blackwell Island* develop causes to fight for over the course of the show. Students will better understand the causes that the characters possess and why they matter to them by sharing what causes or “trees” of their own they are planting and nurturing as they move forward in their own lives.

Description:

- **Note:** This exercise involves homework. There’s no effective way to do this in one setting—much of the exercise is students preparing presentations at home.
- At the end of *The Voices on Blackwell Island*, Mother states, “If ever someone says the work is futile, remind them that a society grows great when people plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in....You might be the only voice tomorrow. But maybe the next day there will be two voices. And then three. And then more and more and more....But, you know, maybe, if you plant the tree, eventually other people will be able to grow up knowing what it’s like to be free in the shade.”
- All of the characters in *The Voices on Blackwell Island* develop causes to fight for. What are they? What are the trees these women and men were planting?
- Now it is the students turn to think about what their cause is. What is the tree they’re planting for future generations to rest in the shade of?

» *Possible Exercise Extension: Have each student pull out a piece of paper and something to write with. Give them ten minutes to brainstorm a response to the prompt “What is a cause that matters to you? What is a tree that you are planting or hope to plant for the future?”*

- Every student is going to create a “booth” or “tree you are planting for the future” (interactive, presentational or otherwise) on a subject they would like to express to a portion of the class on what their cause is. (Some examples might include environmentalism, equal rights, being unabashedly oneself, voting registration, etc.) These expression booths can feature items from their lives, favorite things, an exploration of an aspect of their identity or personality but they should ultimately relate to a cause or subject matter that is important to them and that they fight and advocate for. Every student’s booth must feature at least two physical items that relate to their subject or cause in some manner. These booths will be presented when next we all meet together as a class. (If the instructor deems the students will need more time to prepare, shift presentation dates accordingly.)
- **Presenting:** One half of the class sets up and presents while the other half interact with the exhibits. The groups then swap positions. When presenting booths, highly encourage students to be as invested in their given moment or topic of expression as possible and to be equally invested in asking questions about other people’s booths. If you believe in it and care, so will your audience.

Discussion:

- What causes and booths stood out to you the most? What made them impactful?
- What causes that were not mentioned do you want to push for and take forward into the future? What causes do you hope to leave behind in the past?
- How do you think you could take the presentations you did here and share this information and passion with the wider community and world?
- What new questions are you thinking about, having seen the spectrum of our booths?
- Everyone has things they experience in life or read about in the news that hit their heart. Things that they know need to be changed. What is your “thing”? What is your cause? What’s the roadmap for you helping your cause? What’s the first step? The second? The third?