

READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

Comparing the Language of Multiple Sources Video Transcript

Manny Martinez:

When it comes to citizenship, when it comes to race, when it comes to all that stuff, you need a safe environment for your kids to feel comfortable enough to express their thoughts and feelings around this subject, because I don't think they... a lot of our kids have another forum.

What is an American and who gets to define this? This is what we're going to be exploring today.

It's the first day of the new semester. Yay!

Today was the first day of our new semester, and so it was the first day of our new unit. The name of the unit is called "American Us," and the essential questions are: What is an American and who gets to define this? The majority of our students are African-American and Latino kids and other kids of color who have a concept of being American that is not what you and I might have. So the two essential questions will be there for them to see daily. And what I wanted to do is scaffold a little with some vocabulary.

Today we're going to learn some new vocabulary words. In front of you, you should have the handout that you picked up on the way in. Let's go around.

We worked on some vocabulary words from "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus.

First word, Maria.

Maria:

Colossus: a huge statue.

Martinez:

Can you give me an example of a huge statue, Maria?

Maria:

The Statue of Liberty.

Martinez:

Excellent, very good.

The poem is about the Statue of Liberty, and I wanted to juxtapose the language in that poem with what they had learned reading the preamble of the Constitution, which we worked on a couple of units ago.

Juanito, I would like you to read the directions.

Juanito:

"Write a sentence for each new vocabulary word. Please notice if the word is a noun, adjective, or verb and use the word appropriately."

Martinez:

So look at these words. I'm going to give you ten minutes to write sentences, or I'll give you extra credit if you can come up with either a poem or a short story using these words, okay?

Moises:

They gave us a definition so we can like understand what the poem is saying more. And then with like those words we could put like our own explanation into it because we knew what the word meant.

Martinez:

Every vocabulary word that we use is used in a mid-semester project where they have to use at least 100 of the vocabulary words that we use in a creative form. Whether it be a graphic novel, whether it be a short story, whether it be a poem or whether it be an essay, they have to use those words and they have to use them effectively in order for them to get a grade.

Oh, I know what you're trying to do, yeah, yeah. So remember that this is a noun, right? When you put "very," you can't put... It's an adjective. Exactly.

I connect everything that we do in the learning process to their lives. I explain to them how important it is to communicate your ideas, thoughts, and feelings in an effective way so that people can understand them and people can take them seriously. This exercise of writing sentences using these vocabulary words and connecting it to their own lives proves to me that they understand these words, that they're able to use these words in context because a lot of my kids are still struggling with that.

So let's start with some sentences first, and if anybody wants to share a poem or a short story we'll get to that. All right? Maria.

Maria:

"I am from beaches and a hot sun. I am from stories of war and from stories of heroes. I am from Salvadorian main dishes, the ones that left you full. I am from traditional Salvadorian dances, from the skirts that would move in such a beautiful way. I am from the stories that my mom would tell me, from the memories of such a country. And trust me, having to exile for medical reasons and poverty was such a punch in the heart for me."

Martinez:

That's beautiful. (applause) Nice!

At the end of the day, it's about how do my students prove they know what they're supposed to know? And if they can do it in a creative way like that, God bless them.

"The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus. Everybody follow along, please.

Student:

"Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame with concrete limbs astride from land to land. Here at our sea-washed sunset gate shall stand a mighty woman with a torch whose flame is imprisoned lightning and her name, Mother of Exiles."

Martinez:

Why is the Statue of Liberty called the Mother of Exiles? Rigo.

Rigo:

Like they're going to like new land, so like just... it's like a reminder. So like just so you know, you're in the United States now. Like this is the landmark, I guess. It's like the... it's like... like it says like um... it's like the...

Martinez:

The definition?

Rigo:

Yeah, it's like that.

Martinez:

What's the definition of exile, Rigo?

Rigo:

"Enforced removal from one's country, self-imposed, absence from one's country, who lives in exile, whether forced or voluntary."

Martinez:

Excellent, so... right, people coming from other countries come here, right? So now somebody read the preamble of the United States, which is on there. Edgar, go ahead.

Edgar:

"We the people of the United States in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice..."

Martinez:

I gave them the preamble of the Constitution, along with "The New Colossus" on one sheet of paper to see how they are connected, whether thematically, whether the same use of words.

How can you make a connection? I want you to think about it, talk to somebody next to you.

(indistinct chatter)

Student:

I agree with you because in this poem it talks about the Statue of Liberty, and in the preamble it says it's a...

Martinez:

I'm using both of those things as scaffolding so they're like the foundation that we're going to build on. We're building on the concepts. We're building on the concepts of freedom and justice.

Manny, what is the connection between "The New Colossus" and the preamble of the United States?

Manny:

I think they're both asking for, you know, freedom. Because in "The New Colossus" it says, "Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door." And the Statue of Liberty was originally, like you know, a statue for freedom. And so the golden door is just basically freedom, and in the preamble it says, "Do ordain and establish this Constitution," which means just freeing you from British.

Martinez:

Okay, I like that.

In asking them to find the connection in the two, almost all of them referred to freedom and liberty for both. And so those are concepts that they're all familiar with.

Talk to me, how do you connect those two?

Student:

I connect it because when it says to ensure domestic tranquility, there's a definition here: beacon.

Martinez:

Beacon, yeah.

Moises:

It's kind of like the same because it's like tranquil, and then a beacon's like a guidance and stuff like that.

Martinez:

Nice, I like that.

Moises:

And the Statue of Liberty's like a beacon because like fire and light, it's like showing people like liberty.

Martinez:

Beautiful.

Moises:

When the preamble says to create more domestic tranquility, and then I connected that with the Statue of Liberty because the Statue of Liberty is like a beacon for like liberty and like peace and freedom. And then beacon, the definition was like a guidance and it stands out like to show people like the way.

Martinez:

What I'm hoping to do is delving into this concept and talking about it on the daily until my kids have a clearer concept. Ultimately, it's not even about being American. It's about being an individual.

Student:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

Martinez:

What I like my kids to come away with is that they have the power to define themselves and that no one else has that power unless you give someone else that power. So if at the end of this unit my kids feel that they are American, then they are American. And no one can tell them otherwise.

Excellent, nice.