

Lesson for the Jelani Freeman Essay in *Reshuffled*

Creating an Action Plan (45 minutes to 1 hour)

Materials needed:

Pencil and paper (that's it!)

Optional:

Make a graphic organizer or use a premade handout in order to help students start responding to some of the prompts.

Introduction, discussion (5-10 minutes, 15 if the discussion is engaging for the students):

A few open-ended questions are helpful in laying the groundwork. Establish the commonality and get buy-in to hear the essay.

In his essay, Jelani encourages us to “keep an open mind.” What are some things that can discourage us from having open minds? (other possible phrasings: Tell me about something that frustrates you. What are some hurts that make us feel hopeless? What’s something that made you angry yesterday/today/etc.?)

Some hurts will make us want to lock up, close off, and assume everything is pointless. Sometimes, things might even *be* pointless! But what are some things that remind us we have value?

Transition (like 1 minute):

So, today we’ll be reading an essay by someone who had a lot of those same hurts (try to point to some specific ones, obviously, from the discussion). There’s nothing wrong with feeling discouraged, or even hopeless. Life is really difficult. Maybe it’ll always be difficult. But the question is: what can we *do* about it?

Follow-up discussions (30 minutes):

One big setback for Jelani is his expulsion. He’s lucky to have a mentor to help him navigate the appeals process, but her advice is good regardless of what resources you have: focus on the problem at hand, and find out the steps you need to take to get on track to your goal.

What’s a setback we might face, even a big setback?

Let’s come up with a set of steps to help us face that setback. Here are some examples of what to consider:

- A. Who might have expertise to help us? What resources or people **do** we have?
- B. How can we ask for that help, and what skills do **we** bring that might help?
- C. What are the things we can't control? What are the things that we can?
- D. What can we do in the next five minutes, five days, and five weeks to take control of the things we *can* control?

Final exit (15 minutes):

Before we leave, let's think of some obstacles we're facing. There may be lots. But choose one. It's easier when we narrow our focus, because it becomes more manageable, and helps quiet out the fear or anxiety we might feel about all the other problems. Let's make the following list:

1. Write down one obstacle you're dealing with.
2. Write down what is in or out of your control with that obstacle. What, especially, *is* in your control?
3. Make a list of people, places, institutions, etc. that might be able to help you deal with that obstacle. How can you reach out to them?
4. How do you see yourself on the other side of this obstacle?
5. What are some things you can do in the next five minutes, five days, and five weeks to handle and move past that difficulty?

Lesson for the Dijonia Hines Essay in *Reshuffled*

Solidarity, Healing, and Retooling
(35 to 45 minutes)

Materials:

Post-it Easel Pads (25x30)
Markers
Tables and seating

Prep:

Before you begin, post up three pads around the room. Label them as follows (or be creative, you're your own person; adjust the language for student age):

1. Who might share my experiences?
2. What knowledge have I gained from difficulty?
3. What advice might I give others who face difficulties similar to my own?

Introduction (15 minutes):

Who here has ever been through a tough time? It can be hard to know what to do with those experiences. So often, they do nothing for us. They simply stick with us, cling to us, find ways to hurt. Today's lesson is going to be about how we can try to take something from those experiences, even the worst ones, the ones no one truly has the strength to face, in order to rebuild and feel stronger than (or at least able to survive) the next difficulties we might face.

We'll begin by reading the words of someone who faced a lot of difficulties we might recognize, or fear, or feel speak to us and help us feel less alone.

Read Dijonia's essay.

Brainstorm (15 minutes):

Remind students that they only need to write what they feel comfortable sharing. Opening up about past traumas takes great courage and tremendous vulnerability. It's okay not to want to be so vulnerable right away. It's okay to share things *other* than the pain you privately focus on the most, as a way to become comfortable with an open therapeutic process.

Rotate students in small groups around the room, giving five minutes at each sheet of Post-it paper. Students can write down responses to each prompt. Multiple responses if they like.

Variations:

- You may want less time, in order to ensure that no one takes over the Post-it and makes others feel they have nothing to add.
- On the other hand, for more hesitant students, you may want to write down a few responses in advance on the Post-its, in order to provide examples, and get over the impediment of students facing a blank sheet of paper.

Gallery walk (5 minutes):

Give students five minutes to look over each completed Post-it at the end of the activity. Once all students have had time to read all responses, give each small group one of the post-its to take back to their table.

Small Group Discussion (5-10 minutes):

Have each group discuss their Post-it. Pick a few responses (two or three) to discuss with the larger group. Consider:

1. Why did we choose the responses we chose? What about them might be useful?
2. How can we utilize the people, experience, or advice on our Post-it to help ourselves and others in our situations?
3. What are some steps we could take to share our own experiences or advice with others?

Whole Group Discussion (5-10 minutes):

Allow each group to share their responses. Facilitate discussion by asking questions such as:

- How does sharing experience allow us to feel less alone?
- Do you think others can help you feel seen? Who?
- Do you think you can help other people feel seen?
- Do you think most advice comes from difficulty?
- Do you think bad days are what make people wise? Why?
- What about Dijonia's experiences will give her strength?
- Dijonia has some hurts that are simply not helpful. How does she try to use those? Do you think it's realistic to try to use the things that hurt us? Or are some things simply too painful to have a use?