

# Navigating Tough Topics in the Classroom: Tips for ELL Educators

Educators are often faced with the dilemma of how to discuss challenging topics in the classroom. The stronger your classroom community is and the better you know your students, the more informed your decisions about these conversations will be. Caring educators can take many steps to ensure that English language learners (ELLs) and immigrant students are included and supported in these discussions in meaningful ways, especially when tough topics arise.

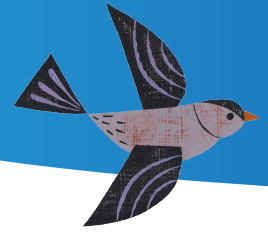


## What's in This Toolkit

This toolkit includes the following sections:

- [Building Community in the Classroom](#)
- [Creating Shared Expectations in the Classroom](#)
- [Developing Students' Discussion Skills](#)
- [Addressing Conflict in the Classroom](#)
- [Talking About Tough Topics](#)
- [Discussing Race and Racism with ELLs](#)
- [Discussing Political Violence with ELLs, Immigrants, and Refugees](#)
- [When Your Community Is Impacted by a Global Crisis](#)
- [Closing Thoughts](#)
- [References](#)

**Note:** This guide is also [available online](#).



## Contributors & Reviewers

This toolkit was produced by Colorín Colorado and the American Federation of Teachers. Project leads include Lydia Breiseth, Director of Colorín Colorado, and Giselle Lundy-Ponce, Director for Educational Rights and Social Justice Initiatives and Policy at the American Federation of Teachers.

### AFT English Language Learner Cadre

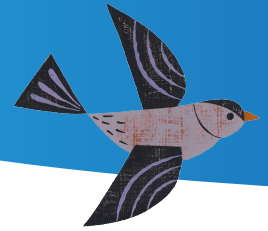
Joanne Anderson, Nelver Brooks, Becky Corr, Evelyn DeJesus, Ameena Elder, Loyola García, Maria Elena Guzman, Gabriela Ibarra, Susan Lafond, Cassandra Lawrence, Glenda Macal, Ingrid Miera, Neyda Mora, Patricia Nuñez, Jesús Puig, Juan Ramírez, Christine Rowland, Erica Schatzlein, Areli Schermerhorn, Servia Silva, Christine Vasilev

### Friends of Project

Dr. Ayanna Cooper, Valentina Gonzalez, Manuel Gomez Portillo, Kristina Robertson, Omar Salem, and Victor Tam

### Illustrations

Illustrations by Rafael López



# Building Community in the Classroom

In order to thrive, all students need a safe and nurturing classroom environment. Part of creating this environment involves fostering a culture of respect, acceptance, and inclusion for all students from day one, including ELLs and immigrant students. Not only does this build strong relationships, it provides a starting place when difficult situations arise.

## Before Reading: Reflection Questions

- What are some signs of a healthy classroom community?
- What does a safe classroom environment mean to you? To your students?

**Note:** To see related links, videos, and teacher reflections, see the [online version of this article](#).



## Strategies for Building Community

### Learn how to create a welcoming environment for ELLs

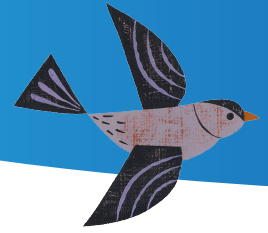
A [welcoming environment](#) can help ELLs succeed by building student confidence, which will make it more likely that students feel safe to be themselves, make mistakes, and take risks. It also lays a foundation for strong relationships with peers and educators that are based on respect.

### Communicate regularly that all students are valued members of the class

Affirm this message regularly. Remember that students may not have heard that message in school or felt their voices valued. In addition, remind the class that hurtful comments or actions based on race, religion, culture, language, sexual orientation, gender, ability, health, country of origin, accent, dress, immigration status, or other aspects of identity are not acceptable.

### Help students get to know each other

- Give students a chance to share their [interests and talents](#). This can help you design instruction based on students' interests and strengths.
- Use ice-breakers and team-building activities, such as the class meetings that [Valentina Gonzalez describes for Education Week](#), to build community.
- Help newcomer ELLs participate in activities by modeling and pairing them with a buddy.
- Provide different kinds of opportunities for students to [voluntarily share their stories](#).



## Consider how to discuss identity in a safe way

Having students [think about their own identity](#) can help create an "[identity-safe classroom](#)" and also lay important groundwork for later discussions. It can also [challenge the notion](#) of "color blindness," which [ignores important aspects of students' identity and experiences](#).

When discussing identity:

- Honor students' experiences and perspectives for what they are.
- Avoid assumptions and beware of what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls the "[danger of the single story](#)."
- Keep in mind that students may be masking some part of their identity.
- **Never** put students on the spot as a "representative" of their identity or experience.

For example, some [Indigenous students from Latin America](#) may not share their Indigenous culture or language or the fact that Spanish is not their first language. Consider how teachers can ensure that Indigenous students feel safe to share and celebrate their identities.

## Look for ways to tie learning to students' experiences

By connecting your instruction to students' own experiences and their [funds of knowledge](#), you can bolster engagement and increase students' sense of confidence in the classroom — and also make your instruction more [culturally responsive](#). You can learn more in [Culturally Responsive Teaching: Celebrating Diversity in Our Schools \(NYSUT\)](#).

## Teach empathy and appreciation

Look for activities that build [empathy](#) and [gratitude](#). When students express their appreciation for each other, they can identify positive traits of their peers that you might have missed. This can be especially powerful if ELLs' strengths and talents have been previously overlooked.

### Educator voices

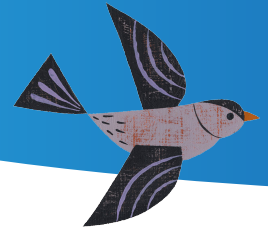


[Teacher Paul Barnwell](#) describes an activity in which students write three things about themselves that classmates do not know. As the teacher reads them aloud anonymously, the students begin to see the class's "range of intense experiences and perspectives."



## After Reading: Reflection Questions

- Why do you think it is important for ELLs not to be afraid to take risks or make mistakes?
- What are some ideas from this section that you can try with your class?



# Creating Shared Expectations in the Classroom

In order to build a healthy [classroom community](#), it is essential to create a set of shared expectations around how students interact with each other and behave. At the same time, there are many steps educators can take to ensure that ELLs are actively engaged in that process and that their cultures and languages are reflected in the classroom culture. These efforts can help in minimizing and navigating conflicts.

## Before Reading: Reflection Questions

- Have you been in a situation where you had to navigate a new culture?
- If so, what lessons did you learn from that experience?
- If not, what challenges can you imagine you might encounter?

**Note:** To see related links, videos, and teacher reflections, see the [online version of this article](#).



## Creating Classroom Guidelines

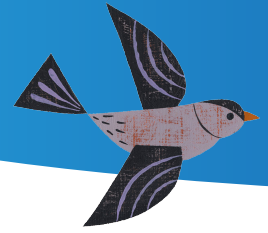
### Encourage students to take ownership of the classroom culture

Ask students to answer the following questions through drawings or written responses.

- How can I be a good classmate to others?
- What are examples of kind or respectful behavior in the classroom?
- What are examples of unkind or disrespectful behavior in the classroom?

To support ELLs in their discussions of these questions:

- Encourage students who speak the same language to discuss their ideas in groups.
- Provide scaffolded materials such as graphic organizers, sentence stems, and sentence frames.
- Use a picture book to talk about different kinds of behavior with students.



## Create a shared list of classroom guidelines together

- Brainstorm ideas on class guidelines based on your discussions about creating a community.
- Streamline the list of class guidelines. Add any that are missing.
- Post the final list in the classroom. Translate the guidelines into ELLs' languages.
- Use visuals and modeling to support ELLs' understandings of routines and expectations.

## Invite students to share their experiences

Invite students to privately share their thoughts on questions such as:

- What does a safe ([or brave](#)) space mean to me?
- A time I felt safe / unsafe in the classroom was...
- Talking about (topic) makes me feel...

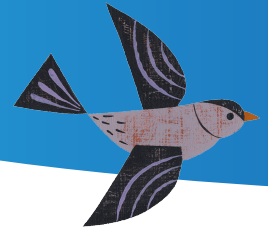
If you think the class would benefit from a shared discussion on these questions, consider how to do so in a way that respects and protects students' privacy around sensitive topic.

## Make sure students and families understand policies related to bullying

- Familiarize yourself with your district's bullying policy.
- Ensure that families have the bullying policy in their home language.
- Share examples of what bullying looks like in person and online.
- Explain that no one should be bullied for any reason, including language, accent, country of origin, cultural customs, food, dress, or immigration status.
- Share examples of being a bystander and an upstander.
- Take reports of bullying seriously and report incidents to administrators.
- Determine whether an incident reflects a broader school-wide trend that needs to be addressed.
- Learn how to prevent the bullying of ELLs.

### Related resources

- [Creating Classroom Guidelines: Related Resources](#)
- [8 Tips to Protect ELLs from Bullying in Your Classroom and School](#)
- [Tough Topics: Bullying and Teasing](#) (Books for Kids)
- [Bullies Be Gone!](#) (Books for Teens)
- [Video with Principal Victor Tam](#): In this interview, Principal Victor Tam talks about how school leaders can address anti-Asian/Pacific Islander bullying. He also shares his own experiences being bullied as a young Chinese immigrant.



## The Role of Culture

### Be mindful of the ways in which culture may impact student behavior

Students' behaviors are shaped by their culture, and ELLs may be learning new cultural norms here in the U.S. In addition, students bridging different cultures may need some guidance.

- Try to learn a little bit more about the cultural norms of your students, especially those related to schooling. You can learn how to develop culturally sustaining practices in [Culturally Responsive Teaching for Multilingual Learners](#) (Corwin, 2021).
- Keep in mind that cultural norms may differ around eye contact, physical proximity and contact, gestures, talking about appearance, using profanity, and physical punishment.
- If you have questions about a student's behavior, talk with a cultural liaison to learn more.

For example, in [this Colorín Colorado article](#), Ukrainian teachers share some of the questions Ukrainian families and students commonly have when they come to the U.S.

### Keep in mind the differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures

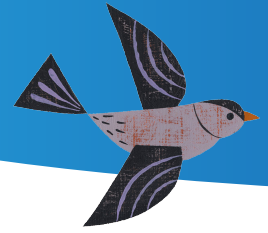
It can be helpful to understand how collectivist and individualistic cultures differ. Students and families from collectivist cultures may prefer working in groups and attending group events at the school, such as group teacher-parent conferences.



## Supporting Social and Emotional Learning

### Give students tools for expressing emotions and managing conflict

- Build students' emotional vocabulary through visuals, charts, mood meters, and check-ins.
- Create calm corners or spaces in the classroom where students can calm down as needed.
- Offer age-appropriate tools for conflict resolution, such as emojis or translated phrases.
- Talk about how conflict is handled in different cultures and what students have observed about conflict resolution in their culture (this could also be a topic for family interviews).
- Ask students what they do when they feel stress, anger, sadness, or other difficult emotions.
- Offer ideas for managing stress and difficult emotions and providing opportunities to practice these activities, like taking deep breaths, sitting in a quiet corner to cool down, drawing or writing, exercising, talking to a friend or trusted adult, or movement/brain breaks.
- Practice responses through role play.
- Invite a school counselor into the classroom to lead a class discussion and share strategies.



## Reflect on Your Role and Responses

Your role in the classroom community is shaped by your experiences, identity, and implicit biases. Even though you can't anticipate every conflict that will arise in your classroom, giving prior thought to possible responses will help you be more prepared to address whatever does occur.

- Take time to reflect on how your perspective may impact your interaction with students and whether there are specific areas you would like to explore further or improve.
- Think about how you might respond if students engage in disrespectful behavior or language.

Some phrases you might use in response to a hurtful comment are:

- "Let's pause and remember our class guidelines. We want everyone to feel safe in our classroom. I'm betting that not everyone feels safe right now."
- "Did you mean to say something hurtful when you said that?"
- "What did you mean by that?"
- "Using that word doesn't help others feel safe or accepted here."

In addition, consider some of the factors that might influence student behavior, such as culture, language, different emotions, factors at home, and level of challenge. When you know the reason for behavior, you can better address the root causes and provide support to reduce the undesired behavior.

For example, is a child:

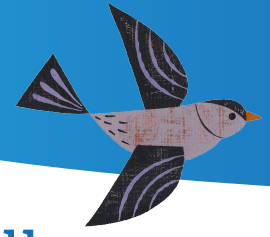
- Frustrated?
- Hungry?
- Acting in alignment with home culture?
- Being bullied?
- Needing more attention or challenge?



## After Reading: Reflection Questions

- How may culture be shaping the dynamics in your classroom?
- How will engaging ELLs in these actions empower them as members of the classroom community?
- What are some ideas you can use to support students' well-being and learning?





# Developing Students' Discussion Skills

Classroom discussions are an important part of learning across different content areas and help students develop skills that they can use in their personal, academic, and professional lives. For ELLs, it's particularly important to give students the language, tools, and confidence they need to develop these skills in another language. Ideas on how to do so are included below.

## Before Reading: Reflection Questions

- Think of successful classroom discussions you have seen. What worked well?
- Think of challenging classroom discussions you have seen. What didn't work?

**Note:** To see related links, videos, and teacher reflections, see the [online version of this article](#).



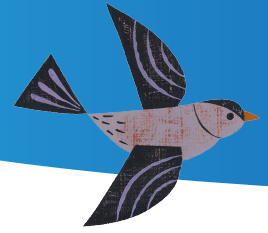
## Developing Shared Expectations and Guidelines

Creating a shared list of expectations for classroom discussions provides a protocol when difficult topics arise in the classroom. Here are some tips for developing those guidelines together.

### Brainstorm guidelines for class discussion as a class

- Start by asking students why it is important to have guidelines in place for discussion.
- Talk with students about how appropriate body language may vary in different cultures.
- Explain U.S. norms of body language, such as keeping a polite distance or making eye contact.
- Brainstorm examples of "do's and don'ts" for good discussion, such as the following:

In our class, we....	In our class, we don't....
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at the speaker</li> <li>• Listen attentively</li> <li>• Wait our turn</li> <li>• Ask questions</li> <li>• Give classmates a chance to talk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interrupt or talk over each other</li> <li>• Hold side conversations</li> <li>• Roll our eyes</li> <li>• Use other negative body language</li> <li>• Use offensive language, expletives, or insults</li> <li>• Cause distraction</li> </ul>



## Create guidelines based on your brainstorm

- Streamline students' brainstorm into a manageable list of guidelines that you can refer to easily during any class discussion.
- Add guidelines that might be missing. Have students create an infographic.
- Translate this list into ELLs' languages if possible.
- Act it out so the behavior is clearly understood by everyone.
- Remind students of these norms each time you start a new discussion activity, particularly if students are struggling with discussions.

## Be mindful of cultural differences that might impact discussions

Ask cultural liaisons or ESL teachers if there are any cultural considerations you should keep in mind during class discussions that include ELLs and immigrant students, especially around activities such as listening, debating, and asking questions. Also, be mindful of cultural differences in gender interactions (e.g., how boys interact with girls or vice versa). For example, ESOL specialist Manny Gomez writes, "I use this [continuum to frame conversations and find solutions](#) with all ELs in class."

## Remind students that there is no such thing as a stupid question

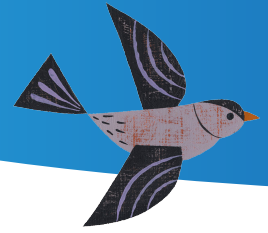
If a question indicates that someone has a different experience from their classmates, remind students to respect the questioner and think about how to respectfully answer the question. You may wish to ask a clarifying question first.

## Identify steps you can take if a question's intent or delivery is disrespectful

- Remind students of examples of respectful and disrespectful behavior.
- Offer responses that students can use to express their feelings about the question or what it implies.
- Talk about whether there is a learning opportunity in the question.

## Identify some important parameters for yourself

- Model being open-minded.
- Answer only the questions that have been asked.
- Stay focused on the topic at hand.
- Set time limits for discussion.
- Be honest when you don't know the answer.
- Have some ways to start and conclude discussions.
- Get support if you need it.



## Gives students the language they need to express themselves

Give students sentence frames and sentence starters that illustrate how to express different kinds of responses, such as agreement, disagreement, or supporting a point with facts. Provide these on a sheet that students can keep handy and also post them on the wall or online. For ELLs, consider printing the sheet in English and their native language. This might include phrases such as:

- "I have a different point of view..."
- "Have you ever thought about ...?"
- "I care about you, but I disagree because..."
- "What if..."
- "What do you think..."
- "When you say \_\_\_\_\_, I feel..."
- "I would like..."
- "Have you considered....?"
- "At first I thought...but then I learned..."

In addition, when something said to a student upsets them, they can use a specific word, like "ouch." Practice using these phrases in 'low stakes' conversations so that students get used to them before using them for bigger topics. See more ideas from teacher [Meg Riordan](#).

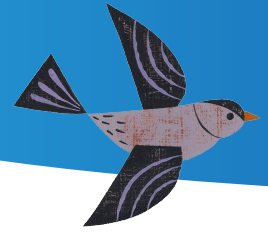
## Introduce different kinds of discussion activities in your lesson plans

Use a variety of activities that will help your students develop different discussion skills. Consider specific skills that will be useful and make discussion more meaningful, such as connecting a comment to the previous comment or disagreeing in a respectful manner. In addition, [using peer learning with ELLs](#) can give students lots of hands-on practice.

## Create a good questioning protocol for clarifying, getting more information, and including others

Use a questioning protocol that increases engagement of all students will generate more student "cross-talk" during the discussion. For example, cross questioning involves asking other students for their opinion after a student shares their thinking. "Gina, do you agree with what Marco said?" "Do you have something to add?" Start questions with "How" or "In what ways..."

- Assign students roles for monitoring the discussion process.
- Ask students to share highlights from their small groups.
- How did the class do inviting others into the discussion? Sharing new ideas with evidence?



## Give students a task while they are listening to discussions

In order to keep students engaged while other students are speaking (as well as to prevent confusion and misunderstanding), set an expectation that all students are listening and then collect evidence of their listening. Try the following:

- Write students' names on popsicle sticks and pull sticks out randomly from a can to ask questions.
- Ask students to summarize what a peer shared.
- Provide students with a note-taking page.
- Provide a sentence starter that students can use to ask questions with a peer.

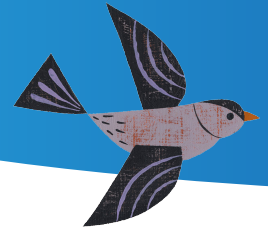
## Look for ways to engage quieter students

- Consider using an activity such as "[two cents](#)" or talking chips in which students are prompted to contribute to the conversation.
- Encourage more expressive students to elicit responses from quieter classmates by challenging them to say, "What do you think, \_\_\_?" or "What's your opinion, \_\_\_?"
- Have students talk to an "elbow partner" before asking them to share in a large group.
- Talk with students one-on-one and give them a chance to answer questions in personal conversations with you or partners to build confidence.
- Give students regular opportunities for discussions in their home language, brainstorming ideas with peers and then reporting back to the larger group.
- Offer regular opportunities for writing so that students who don't participate in the group discussions still have an opportunity to express their opinions.

## Keep in mind that newcomer ELLs may go through a 'silent period'

It is very common for students who are learning a new language to be 'silent' for a period of time, when they are listening to the language around them without speaking yet. This is considered the first stage of [language acquisition](#).

- Be patient.
- Give the ELLs practice speaking with you and small groups before speaking in larger groups.
- Give ELLs practice with the content and language that they will need to present.



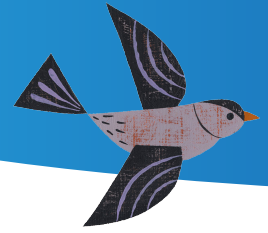
## Think about how the classroom is laid out

- Consider whether grouping desks might lead to more collaboration and conversation, or whether you want to move chairs into a circle when it's time for a group discussion, as well as where you wish to be during those discussions.
- If it's possible, set up a cozy corner where students could go have a "discussion" hangout. This is valuable when students may be talking about something challenging such as an emotional experience.



## After Reading: Reflection Questions

- What can you do to give your students more practice with discussion and disagreement?
- What are some areas you would like to work on with your class?



# Addressing Conflict in the Classroom

Sometimes, despite your best intentions and careful planning, classroom conversations move into difficult territory. Here are some strategies for managing those moments, along with some recommended resources.

## Before Reading: Reflection Questions

- What can I do to prepare for difficult moments or controversy?
- How do I respond to stress and how can I manage stress in the heat of the moment?

**Note:** To see related links, videos, and teacher reflections, see the [online version of this article](#).



## Tools for Navigating Disagreement and Conflict

### Remind students of your shared classroom values

Remind students that your classroom community maintains respect for all perspectives and that while students are entitled to express their opinions, they are expected to do so respectfully.

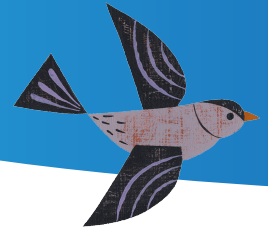
### Discuss the value of debate, different opinions, and disagreement

Ask students to talk about the benefits of the following guidelines:

- Think before you speak.
- Focus discussion on ideas, not on people.
- Keep an open mind.
- Listen to other points of view.
- Find common ground.

### Give students tools for conflict resolution and expressing disagreement

Give students examples of the language needed to express disagreement. For example, educator Sara Ahmed references an [anchor chart](#) entitled "Choices you have when you disagree," such as listening, pausing, being patient, and asking a question such as "Can you explain your thinking?" or "Do you have evidence?"



## Share real-life examples of debate and discussion

Share videos or audio of real debates. If your school has a debate team, you may wish to see if your students can attend some debates or join the team.

### Educator voices



Stephen Lazar [writes](#), "It's okay to disagree, but not to be disagreeable; critique ideas, not people; and seek to understand before you seek to be understood. I think it's important to make clear to students that there will be disagreement, but that what's important in our class isn't being right, but how we deal with difference."



## Addressing Conflict in the Moment

### Before stepping in, ask yourself if students can handle it

Consider whether you think the students in the room have the tools they need to work through the discussion. They may surprise you and speak up for the class's shared values.

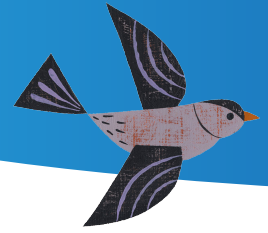
### Stop disrespectful or hurtful behavior and speech immediately

If the conversation is moving into the territory of insulting language, stereotypes, or hate speech, or if students in the room are personally troubled or offended, stop the conversation immediately. Your students will be watching your response. Some phrases [Learning for Justice recommends](#) in its *Speak Up at School* guide include:

- "Let's pause and remember our class guidelines."
- "We want everyone to feel safe in our classroom. I bet that not everyone feels safe right now."
- "Are you aware you said something hurtful when you said that?"
- "What did you mean by that?" Follow up with "Tell me more" or "Help me understand."
- "Using that word doesn't help others feel safe or accepted here."

### Be calm, consistent, and firm

- Keep students' well-being at the center of your attention.
- Stay open to points of view that differ from your own.
- Don't escalate the situation based on your own feelings and fears.
- Don't single students out, especially based on their identity.
- Remind students of shared guidelines and values and of the importance of respect.
- Don't be afraid of silence.



## Use your safety valves if needed

- Don't hesitate to shut the conversation down if needed. You have veto power.
- You may wish to take a break and have students turn to a journal writing activity where they can process what has been said privately.
- Reset if needed – stop, take a breath, reflect, and perhaps share personal reactions after some time has passed. These might include the use of graphic organizers or brief activities for addressing stress. If there is some tension, use these tools to pause and reset.
- Determine whether to continue the lesson or pause it until the next day and move onto something else.

## Educator voices



Kristina Robertson writes, "Try not to underestimate the value of [listening and accepting silence](#). I find many teachers are afraid of silence or challenging moments because they don't want to lose control or feel the need to rescue students."

[Jen Schwanke](#) writes, "As a teacher, I always retained the right to push the eject button — the one that said, 'We're done here.' I did this only if I felt misinformation was being shared or the topic was taking an unfair slant. I'd say, 'This sounds interesting, but we've got a lot of other things to cover today. I encourage you to continue your thinking at home or after class; for now, we're moving on.'"

## Reflect on the incident

Return the next day to debrief after you have prepared a protocol to respectfully discuss what happened and how it made people feel. Consider a [restorative circle approach](#). It's important that students understand how to protect their community, support each other, and return from a negative experience.

- Consider whether you have created a safe space.
- Use this as an opportunity to revisit or establish a classroom community based on respect.
- Take a step back and remind yourself of the objectives of the lesson — what did you want to accomplish with this lesson? How can you get back on that track?
- Discuss your concerns with a trusted colleague who can give you constructive feedback.

## Don't minimize students' fears or feelings

When students share their concerns, fears, or feelings, don't dismiss them or assure them that "everything will be fine." You may wish to follow up with them privately after class and express your support or offer ways for students to express themselves anonymously, such as posting sticky notes on a board.





## If students are withdrawing or acting out, take a step back and ask why

Ask yourself if this conversation may be making students uncomfortable or angry. Follow up with them individually after class to check in. Remember that behavior is a form of communication.

## Following a difficult conversation, keep your eyes and ears open

Students are likely to repeat what has happened if things got heated or tense. Keep an eye out to make sure that this is not creating an uncomfortable situation for other students or leading to any bullying. You may wish to give your administrators a heads up about the situation.

## Determine whether you need to...

### ...meet privately with students

If students indicate that they are upset by difficult discussions, check in with the students privately after class. Reassure them that they can speak to you or a guidance counselor and ask if there is something that you or the class can do to help provide some support. You may also need to meet with students who engaged in hurtful comments or behavior.

### ...alert social workers or counselors about the incident

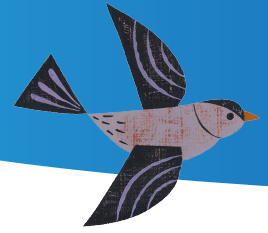
You may need to alert a social worker/counselor about what has happened and ask them to meet with the student(s) when you realize that the situation requires someone with more expertise or the situation has been escalated and requires mediation or intervention.

### ...address the incident the following day

Would it be helpful for students to discuss and process the events of the previous day, or is it more productive to continue with the lesson? If students are likely to bring it up themselves, it may be worthwhile to spend some time on it as a class before moving on.

### ...alert administrators or families of what occurred

You may need to notify administrators of what has happened. Ask your administrators for guidance on next steps as needed and whether families need to be notified or follow-up communication should come after students have shared what has happened with their families. You can also talk to your building union representative if you have additional questions.



## Defusing a Power Struggle

Despite your best efforts, you still might find yourself in a power struggle with a student. ELL educator Susan Lafond notes that when students attempt to engage others in a power struggle, they extend “hooks” meant to lure the person into a negative cycle of behavior, such as:

- Verbal (words or language the student knows will upset the person)
- Non-verbal (a “look” or a gesture)
- An action (e.g., “playing” to an audience to gain allies)

To avoid being pulled into the student’s intended cycle of hostility, try the following:

1. Recognize and ignore hooks.

2. Respond to students calmly and confidently:

- Maintain eye contact.
- Maintain privacy and proximity, keeping the situation between you and the student.
- Use any preferred strategy to remain calm, e.g., counting to 10, taking slow, deep breaths, etc.

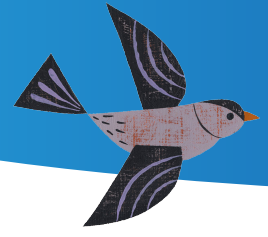
3. Actively listen to the student.

- Try and see the student’s point of view.
- Look for positive aspects of the student’s behavior.
- Use defusing statements, such as ‘Let’s take a five-minute break’, ‘Let’s table this discussion for tomorrow’ or ‘Let’s all take a deep breath.’

4. Recognize the situation and what is happening. Let the student know when the situation is escalating and what the risks are if this should continue, including the impact on other students, the classroom community, and other consequences resulting from classroom or school rules.

5. Select an acceptable alternative to the escalating behavior.

- Walk away.
- Take a cooling-off period — for student and/or adult — with the discussion to be continued.
- Give student a “choice”: behavior change or ending the activity, or if the situation escalates, removal from the classroom.
- Seek help and support, if needed.
- Offer the student the opportunity to reflect on the interaction privately in a journal or in a follow-up conversation with you or another colleague. While the student may not wish to engage with you or anyone else, some extra time and attention may provide an opportunity for further discussion or explanation about an issue that is troubling the student.



## What To Say When You're Confronted

### Use defusing statements

What we say when confronted with outbursts of hostility or aggression from students can determine the resolution of the situation — whether it is resolved quickly and calmly, or whether the conflict is escalated. Look for opportunities to say, “Yes, and…” to demonstrate that you can accept some of what the student is saying and you want to move in a different direction.

The statements below are examples of adult responses that do not “buy into” disruptive behaviors:

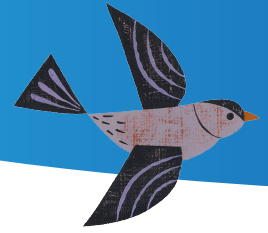
- “What you’re saying may be true. I care about what you have to say, though it’s hard for me to hear you when you use disrespectful words.”
- “I understand what you’re saying. I see things differently. Let’s talk about our differences with a teacher or counselor.”
- “I’m disappointed you’re choosing to use such hostile words. It makes me feel I have to defend myself. We can find a solution if we use respectful words.”

Give kids a situation and let them role play. The idea is to practice using the language so when the time comes, they can return to this experience and use what they practiced. So often we have a visceral response and always do what we have always done (which is ineffective). By creating a “new memory” through practice, when the situation occurs, the students have a better chance of using the diffusing statements in the heat of the moment.



## After Reading: Reflection Questions

- What is a situation you have been in where you might have applied an idea from this section?
- What are some areas of growth for your students and yourself when it comes to handling conflict?
- Are there any ideas in this section that increase your confidence in handling difficult situations?



# Talking About Tough Topics in the Classroom

It is very likely that complex, controversial topics will come up in the classroom, either in response to current events or as part of planned instruction. Here are some tips for navigating these conversations, particularly with your ELLs.

## Before Reading: Reflection Questions

- What are some topics you may be concerned about discussing in the classroom?
- What skills do I want students to have in dealing with difficult discussions?
- What kind of support or guidance do I need to prepare for difficult discussions?

**Note:** To see related links, videos, and teacher reflections, see the [online version of this article](#).



## Being Prepared

### Find out what your resources are

Ask a trusted colleague, administrator, and your local teacher's union what kind of resources are available to help you navigate difficult conversations in the classroom, both from a content perspective and a personnel perspective. Talk with your administrator about successes or problems in the past. Starting the conversation early will help you when a tough topic arises.

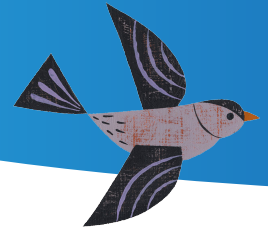
### Brainstorm possible responses

Consider how you might respond when a tough topic comes. What are some options you have? What can you do to give students more practice in discussion?

### Educator voices



Educator Aubrie Rojee [writes](#), "Reach out to your administrators, instructional coaches, and colleagues for what I like to call a 'temperature check.' Ask their opinions about how to approach or handle a subject or if you should even introduce it. It will not only help you have a better understanding of your school's culture and avoid something that could become an issue later, but you may also find new ways to enhance the lesson."



## Responding to Current Events

### Consider the impact on students

Students may vary in their desire or interest in discussing current events. All students, including ELLs and immigrant students, bring different histories and perspectives; students might also have experienced trauma. In addition, students may be strongly impacted by events in their home countries, such as a natural disaster or political changes.

### Prepare for discussions carefully

- First, consider whether the topic is appropriate for discussion in the classroom.
- Don't hesitate to create some space. For example, after a major news event, you could give students a chance to write in journals privately and tell them that the class will be returning to this topic after you've had time to read their journals and create a plan.
- Do some research to see what resources are available from trusted organizations.
- Check in with administrators and your local teacher's union for guidance.

### Remind the class of your community and discussion guidelines as needed

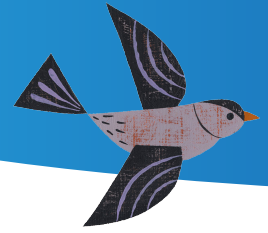
- Remind all students to show respect for each other.
- Refer back to your guidelines for classroom guidelines and discussion guidelines.
- Do not put any students on the spot to share their experience.
- Keep in mind that students will bring multiple perspectives about these events.
- Ask colleagues for advice and support where needed.

### Ensure ELLs can fully participate in any lesson or discussion

- Consider how the topic might connect to students' experiences (without making those connections explicit).
- Teach important background knowledge, vocabulary, and academic language.
- [Scaffold the lesson](#) for various levels of proficiency.

For additional suggestions related to teaching current events, see the following:

- [Educator Voice: Tips for teaching history in today's political environment](#) (*PBS NewsHour*)
- [Current Events in the Classroom](#) (Facing History)
- [Culturally Responsive Instruction in Social Studies](#) (3-part series from *Education Week*)



## Topics in the News

### Global crises

If you teach students who are impacted by a global crisis:

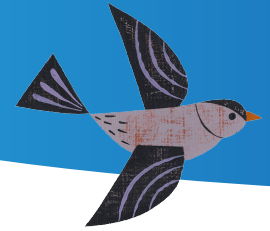
- Do not put them on the spot to comment on current events.
- Let them know that you are available to talk if needed.
- Talk with family liaisons or others who know their community well to find out how they are responding to current events and what kind of support the school might offer.
- Consider pulling a team together of family liaisons, parents, and mental health professionals to discuss culturally appropriate forms of support.

You can find more tips in [When Your School Community Is Impacted by a Global Crisis](#).

### Immigration

Talking about immigration may cause extreme anxiety for students. At the same time, immigrant students may welcome the chance to discuss a topic that affects them so directly.

- If you are planning a lesson plan related to immigration (even if in a historic context), proceed with care and extensive preparation.
- Recognize that you are not an immigration expert.
- Tell students you are open to their experiences, but any information that students share about immigration policies must be informed by research.
- Consider talking privately with your immigrant students beforehand on whether they feel comfortable with the topic.
- Do not put students on the spot or ask them to share their experience directly.
- Never refer to a student's immigration status publicly or privately.
- Remember that all students have a [right to a public K-12 education](#) regardless of immigration status.
- Include immigration as a characteristic that is protected against discrimination and bias.
- Be mindful of your language and consider developing a shared list of helpful terms and vocabulary: refugee, asylum, "undocumented" (instead of "illegal"), etc.
- Remind the class that students can discuss the merits of immigration policy while maintaining a respectful tone about the people involved.



## The COVID-19 pandemic

It is important to proceed with sensitivity in discussions of the pandemic. Students may have experienced [illness, loss, hardship, or other challenging/traumatic experiences](#).

- Keep in mind that your students' experiences will have varied greatly.
- If you are addressing the pandemic in class, consider a student-led inquiry- or project-based approach, such as this [activity from teacher Keisha Davidson](#).
- For guidance on discussing topics related to the pandemic, see these resources from the [National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement](#).

## Incidents related to violence, hate, bias, or racism

There are so many kinds of distressing events in the news for young people to process. It can be difficult to know how and when to discuss current events that students may be learning about in the news, on social media, or from peers. For specific ideas and resources, please see the following resource pages, which are curated and updated by Colorín Colorado.

- [15 Tips for Talking with Children About Violence](#)
- [How to Address Bias and Bullying: Resources for Schools](#)
- [Responding to COVID Bullying, Bias, and Violence Against Asian Americans](#)
- [Addressing Anti-Semitism and Incidents of Hate](#)
- [How Schools Can Create a Safe Environment for Muslims](#)

## Educator voices



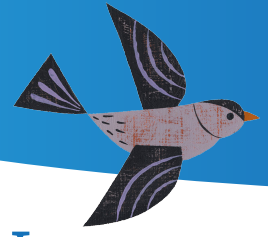
"Our families have no obligation to speak on behalf of an entire population. We can't expect them to inform us about things that as Americans we should probably already know about. The most important thing is ensuring they feel welcome and have a safe space to share their story if and when they choose to."

— David Kauffman, Executive Director for Multilingual Education in Austin Independent School District



## After Reading: Reflection Questions

- What's a step you can take in the near future to prepare for difficult conversations?
- What's an issue this article raises that you would like to further explore?



# Discussing Race and Racism with ELLs

Racism, bias, and racially-charged violence can impact individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds. Your students may have encountered racism in different forms; they may also have strong opinions about public events or incidents they hear about on the news. If you are discussing racism with your ELLs, whether because of the news, an incident in the school or community, or a planned lesson, you may find the following tips useful.

**Note:** Some of the following tips and quotes include responses from a survey we did with a diverse group of ELL educators about this topic. To see related links, videos, and teacher reflections, see the [online version of this article](#).

## Related resources

You can find additional resources in [Talking with Students About Racism and Violence: Resources for Educators](#).

## Before Reading: Reflection Questions

- Have you ever participated in a group discussion or training about race and racism that was handled skillfully? If so, what made a difference in the outcomes?



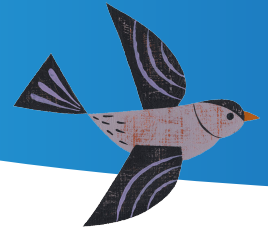
## Creating a Safe Space

It is important to proceed with care and sensitivity in discussions related to race while also acknowledging the realities of racism's impact.

Keep in mind that:

- Racism and related bullying/violence impacts students from diverse backgrounds.
- Students may have experienced bias and discrimination related to other aspects of their identity such as religion, gender identity, or immigration status.
- ELLs and immigrant students may also have witnessed racism or bullying in various settings.
- ELLs may have encountered, or adopted, biases they see in their own family or culture.
- Students may find discussion of current events highly traumatic and may need space, time, or additional support to process events.
- Students should **never** be put on the spot to share a personal experience, especially if they have a connection to an event being discussed in the class.





## Why Relationships Matter

It's critical to take a step back and ask yourself what you know about your students, their experiences, and their perspectives. This process of discovery and getting to know your students takes time, but the [better you know your students](#), the more effective your decisions about instruction will be, particularly around challenging topics such as race and racism.

This process of discovery will also highlight the rich diversity within your Black students' experiences and perspectives, some of whom may be African American and others of whom may be Black immigrants hailing from around the world. You can find more ideas on developing these relationships in [Building Community in the Classroom](#).

### Build relationships early on

Get to know your ELLs [in informal and relaxed ways](#) at the beginning of the year. Building trust through informal conversations about topics such as students' interests also can create a foundation for more difficult topics in the future.

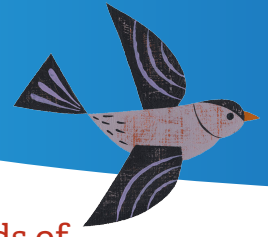
In addition, these relationships ensure that you have accurate information about students' backgrounds, the languages they speak, and their prior educational experience. Not only can this information inform your instruction, it prevents erroneous assumptions. For example, Dr. Cooper, a co-editor of [Black Immigrants in the United States: Essays on the Politics of Race, Language, and Voice](#), shares examples in which educators assumed that Haitian Creole students were African Americans. Encountering mistakes such as these can be confusing and painful for students. Encourage your colleagues to check their assumptions as well and to build meaningful relationships so they can prevent these situations from occurring.

### Give students the opportunity to privately share their own experiences with racism, bias, and discrimination

It is helpful to know where your students are coming from around these issues. If you are discussing events related to racism and bias, you may wish to give students the option to share personal experiences privately through an optional journal question, such as, "What was one time you were treated like an outsider?" Some students may not wish to answer these questions, particularly if they have experienced trauma in connection with these events.

And if you are providing writing prompts, provide multiple topics for students who may not wish to share personal experiences. On the other hand, keep in mind that some students may wish to share their experiences and you may find some common ground in their responses that can build empathy and community.

**Note:** Do not share any students' responses publicly without their permission.



## Talk with cultural liaisons or other colleagues to find out what kinds of racism and discrimination families in your communities have faced

It is helpful to know whether students might have experienced prejudice or persecution in their own home countries, as well as in the U.S. For example, one reason that many Indigenous families from Latin American operate in Spanish (their second language) and keep their Indigenous language and identity hidden is that they have experienced brutal violence and suppression in their home country.

At the same time, students who were part of a majority racial or ethnic group in their home country may not have experienced racism the same way that they may experience it in the U.S. This may be a new and confusing reality for them. As one Somali educator commented to a colleague, "I didn't know I was Black until I came to the U.S." Educators who work with these communities regularly may be able to share some important context around these issues.

## If you feel comfortable doing so, consider sharing your own experiences

Personal stories can help build empathy and lets students know they aren't alone.

### Educator voices



Nelver Brooks, a Black ELL educator and advisor to Colorín Colorado, writes, "I share my personal experiences and tell my students their stories are important, too. I've learned that we are more alike than different...and that sometimes their experiences with racism and racialized violence have happened far earlier in some of their lives than my experiences did."



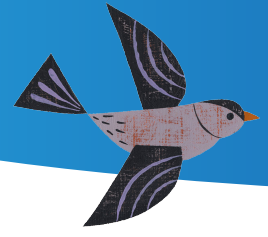
## Creating a Tone and Culture of Respect

### Remind the class to treat each other with respect

Before starting any kind of activity or discussion, remind the class not only of your norms for classroom and discussion behavior but that everyone brings different kinds of background knowledge and experience to the conversation. You can find additional ideas for creating these norms in [Creating Shared Expectations in the Classroom](#).

### Look for ways to provide social-emotional support

As you get to know your students, look for ways to support their social and emotional well-being with check-ins, private time for journal writing, small group discussion, or the choice of how to participate. The better you know your students, the better you will be able to take their temperature in these moments. See more ideas in [Social and Emotional Learning for ELLs](#).



## Prepare for uncomfortable conversations

Conversations about race can get uncomfortable. While you can't always predict when these moments will occur, preparing beforehand may give you some tools that can help. You can start with the ideas laid out in [Developing Students' Discussion Skills](#).

In addition, Learning for Justice has published two in-depth resources that offer ideas for navigating and responding to challenging comments and conversations:

- [Let's Talk: Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students](#)
- [Speak Up at School: How to Respond to Everyday Prejudice, Bias, and Stereotypes](#)

Another resource is the book [Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts](#), which offers lots of practical guidance and examples. There are [training and extension activities](#) related to the book available as well. And after uncomfortable conversations have taken place, take some time to reflect on whether you might have handled anything differently or whether you need to check in with students following the discussion.

## Consider using restorative circles

Look for training in how to [use a restorative circle approach](#) in which you can ask questions such as, "What are you hearing in the news? How does it make you feel? What are you wondering?"



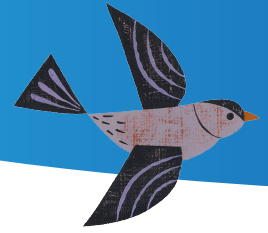
## The Role of Background Knowledge

### Identify students' background knowledge on topics you will be discussing

Just as for any other topic, it's important to [identify the background knowledge that students bring to a topic](#), and the background knowledge they need. First, identify what they know. Then identify what questions they have and [the areas of background they need](#). Identify the most salient points that will help students understand the events you are discussing. One ESOL educator who responded to our survey writes, "We do activators, polls, online discussions, shared documents, and low-stakes collaborative tasks to establish what they already know."

### Look for opportunities to collaborate around background knowledge

Background knowledge can be a particularly complex topic to tackle in subjects such as social studies, history, and civics. When educators of ELLs work with content-area specialists, they can often identify key points together that can help students master the content successfully, as well as ways to tap into students' existing knowledge.



## Thinking About Language

### Teach the language students will need to understand the lesson

Identify the language students will need to be successful with material, such as key vocabulary words or phrases, words with multiple meanings, and examples of academic language. You can see some examples in [this scaffolded lesson](#) focused on Nelson Mandela's speech, "An Ideal for Which I Am Prepared to Die," as well as in this [collection of lessons on persuasive speeches](#) from Stanford University's Understanding Language initiative.

### Be intentional about the language you use and teach

Consider your word choices (and assumptions that may be hidden in those choices). Review your materials carefully for any terms that may need additional context or explanation.



## Extending the Learning

### Look for other connections to the curriculum

There are numerous connections to make across the curriculum, whether through the choice of literature students are reading or lessons about the experiences of minority professionals in specific professions. These connections can deepen students' learning and engagement.

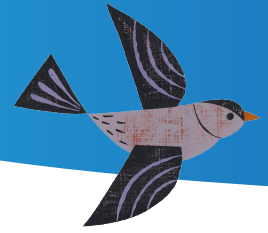
### Look for extension resources

There are also many different kinds of resources available to students of all ages, educators, and the public about race and racism. These include multimedia resources and videos, books, articles, and much more on a range of topics. We have compiled many of these resources here: [Talking with Students About Racism and Violence: Resources for Educators](#).

### Educator voices



"I find great read-aloud books to be extremely helpful with emotionally charged topics. It is something about the narrative being a very accessible format to help students to empathize with others and coming to understand themselves. I keep lists of every book I read aloud and make note of how they compare using an Anti-bias checklist....I fill my books with post-it notes where I plan to stop and ask questions along the way. Students share their answers with each other and then with the group, if they like. It is a simple thing — but if you have the right book, it works very well." — Survey respondent



## Embracing Reflection, Growth, and Change

### Continue your learning and reflection

Conversations about topics such as race, culture, and language involve many points of intersectionality, where multiple identities connect and intersect. Taking time to reflect on the perspectives and experiences you bring to these conversations can inform not only how you manage the discussions but how you are able to grow through them. Related resources include:

- [Addressing Racism and Bias in Schools](#)
- [Continuum of Cultural Competency/Proficiency](#) (Region 4 Education Service Center)
- [Supporting Immigrant Students: Scenarios for Reflection](#)
- [Culturally Responsive Practice: Resources for Professional Development and Reflection](#)

### Look for growth opportunities such as training and collaboration

In order to build your own capacity to address race, racism, and other complex topics, you can try the following:

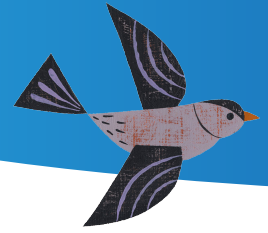
- Request staff training from professional experts in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
- Request a mentor who has experience navigating these issues.
- Engage in professional development opportunities, webinars, and conferences from organizations like the [Roots ConnectED](#), [Learning for Justice](#), [American Federation of Teachers](#), [Facing History](#), the [Anti-Defamation League](#) and others that specialize in equity.

In addition, you can encourage your colleagues to engage in these conversations by saying things like, "These conversations are hard, but our students need us not to be afraid of that discomfort." To take it a step further, share an article or resource that had an impact on you. These needles can be hard to move, but acknowledging and naming the discomfort is an important first step to the growth that is possible when we lean into it.

To bring this point home, [Dr. Christopher Emdin](#) shares the following reflection in an interview with Larry Ferlazzo; while he is talking about educators working in urban schools, the lessons can be extended more broadly:



"The most valuable thing any urban educator can do before working in urban communities is to engage in deep reflective work about who they are, what biases they hold, and why they have chosen to work in these communities. This self-work is more important and rigorous than any academic work one may engage in on the path towards becoming an effective teacher...The teacher who knows who they are is more critical of how these biases are played out in their interactions with students and inevitably interacts with students more positively."



## Create a community

Creating a community that is willing to listen, learn, and grow together can benefit the entire school (and larger community) by building relationships and laying a strong foundation for response should any incident occur. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the intersection of different issues or topics can be particularly complex.

For example, in her work studying Black immigrants, Dr. Ayanna Cooper shared with us that in some settings, individuals felt comfortable speaking about race, but not immigration. In others, they felt comfortable speaking about immigration, but not race. It takes time to build trust and create safe spaces where individuals feel heard and seen; the more people are engaged, however, the stronger those communities will be and the more prepared they will be to dig into the points of intersection on complex topics.

## How do we address adults' discomfort or resistance?

As noted above, these conversations can get uncomfortable — for adults as well as students, and teachers may wish to avoid conversations related to race in order to avoid that discomfort. Yet students, many of whom may be experiencing the impacts of racism in a very personal way on a regular basis, are looking to adults for guidance and support.

### Educator voices



"We check in with students...about how they're doing with issues that are impacted by race (e.g., pandemic, anti-racist protesting, and police response in Minneapolis) while supporting anti-racist messaging. We did a mental health unit with students that covered the impact of race on the incidence of mental illness in the U.S. and the importance of mental health care when people are active in protesting, since this is a big topic in our city and we felt it was important to talk about how our students can impact systemic change around race but also deserve good mental health care as they do." — Survey respondent



## After Reading: Reflection Questions

- What are some topics or areas of growth where you would like to learn more?
- What are some of the questions and topics related to racism that have come up in your classroom in the past? How did those discussions play out?
- What are some resources in this section that you would like to explore?



# Discussing Political Violence with ELLs, Immigrants, and Refugees

If you are discussing political violence or unrest with ELLs and immigrant students, it is essential to proceed with care and sensitivity so that students feel safe and supported within the classroom. Here are some tips to help navigate these discussions.

## Before Reading: Reflection Questions

- Are you aware of any of your students who have been impacted by political violence?
- Have you heard of any instances of students being bullied in relation to a political conflict?

**Note:** To see related links, videos, and teacher reflections, see the [online version of this article](#).



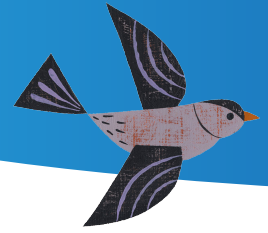
## Tips for Educators

### Keep in mind that political violence may be a source of trauma for students

Political violence and unrest may be particularly traumatic for students who have endured armed conflict, civil war, unrest, and violence in their home country.

For example:

- If you are discussing events related to a situation that impacted your students, this may be a source of trauma for them. If possible, check in with students before these discussions to see if they wish to participate, and if not, consider postponing the discussion or providing your student with other options. In addition, **never** put students on the spot to speak about their own perspective or as a "representative" of a particular country, race, or other identifying characteristic.
- If you are discussing global events that don't seem to have direct ties to your students, keep in mind that those ties may in fact exist, or there may be parallels to students' experiences. Follow the guidelines above.
- If you are discussing political violence and unrest happening in the United States (such as the events of January 6, 2021), keep in mind that uncertainty and unrest can provoke trauma for immigrant and refugee families, particularly those who came to America due to political violence in other regions of the world.



You can support students through the following ways:

- Consider providing students a private space to share their thoughts, such as a digital journal.
- Prepare for these discussions in collaboration with counselors and other mental health professionals.
- Connect student and families with mental health professionals (and culturally responsive mental health support) if needed.
- Learn more about [trauma-informed instruction for immigrant students](#).

See more in the following:

- [Partnering with Ukrainian Families: Tips for Schools](#)
- [How Schools Can Partner with Afghan Refugee Families](#)
- [For Some New Americans, Capitol Attack Was an Echo of Turmoil They Hoped to Escape](#) (NPR)

## Give students and families a chance to ask questions

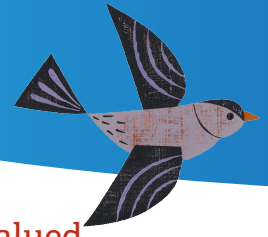
Students may have many opinions and questions about current events. Students may also have personal questions and considerations about their own safety or that of their families for a variety of reasons. You can support students in the following ways:

- Speak with students and families directly to find out their concerns.
- Acknowledge the difficulty that uncertainty brings.
- Find out which local organizations have ties to your community and can offer support.
- Look for ways to provide ongoing updates of information in families' home languages. [Building school-community partnerships](#) has proven to be critical in addressing families' questions and concerns about the pandemic, immigration issues, and other key topics.
- Don't lose sight of the strengths that ELL/immigrant students and families bring to their schools and our communities every day. The better you know your families, the more deeply you can tap into those strengths.

## Give students need time, space, and privacy to process what is unfolding

- Remember that some students may not wish to discuss these events right away. Finding positive things to focus on and letting students know that you are there to listen when they are ready is an important first step.
- Look for ways to embed [social-emotional support and learning](#) across the curriculum. While some students may wish to engage in group discussion, others may feel uncomfortable drawing any attention to themselves or their family's situation.
- Consider reaching out to administrators and mental health colleagues or partners to establish some more robust support for students who are under tremendous strain and feeling anxious.
- Avoid making assumptions about any student's experience or political leanings.





## Remind ELL/immigrant students and their families that they are valued members of your class, school, and community

- Continue efforts to make them feel welcome.
- Share those ideas with colleagues and administrators as you hear them. Encourage the whole school community to look for ways to welcome all families.

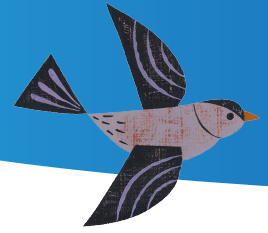
## Prevent bullying or harassment of ELLs and immigrant students related to current events

- Communicate to your class that all students are valued members of the classroom and bullying or disrespectful speech, including against ELLs and immigrant students, will not be tolerated.
- Share the importance of these messages with other colleagues.
- Keep in mind that students may have already experienced bullying or harassment due to a number of factors, including their ethnicity, language, or religion.
- See helpful ideas in [8 Tips to Protect ELLs from Bullying in Your Classroom and School](#).



## After Reading: Reflection Questions

- What are some examples of current global situations that could impact students and families in U.S. schools and communities?
- Imagine that you have students who are connected to both sides of a conflict in their home country or region, which is resulting in some bullying and threats of violence. How would you address the situation?



# When Your School Community Is Impacted by a Global Crisis

When your school community includes families and staff from other countries, you may find that events in other parts of the world suddenly seem closer to home. These may include traumatic events such as natural disasters, political unrest, acts of violence, or other kinds of tragedies. Support for individuals affected by the news can make an important difference in how they manage stress.

## Before Reading: Reflection Questions

- What are some global events that have impacted families in your school or community?
- Have the families mobilized any kind of response? Has the community responded in support?

**Note:** To see related links, videos, and teacher reflections, see the [online version of this article](#).



## Tips for Schools

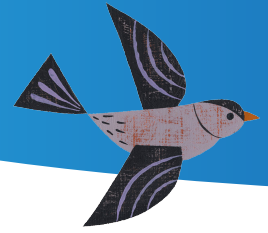
### Identify culturally responsive support systems

An important first step is identifying culturally responsive ways to provide support.

- Consider pulling a team together of family liaisons, parents, and mental health professionals to discuss culturally appropriate forms of support before starting your outreach.
- Talk with family liaisons or others who know their community well to find out how families (and staff) are responding to current events and what kind of support the school might offer.

### Help students cope

- Identify students who are affected by the disaster and plan appropriate interventions on their behalf. Interventions may include classroom discussions, individual counseling, or small group counseling. (NASP)
- Ensure that a school-wide referral service is in place that is easy for families to use. (NASP)
- Encourage teachers to check in privately with students without putting them on the spot.
- Encourage students to take a news break, continue routines, and get sleep and exercise.



## Watch for signs of grief and trauma

- Look for signs of student grief and post-traumatic stress. These may include confusion, problems concentrating, anxiety, and depression. When a loved one has died in a way that has been traumatic, a child or teen is at risk for developing childhood traumatic grief. Learn to recognize the signs of this kind of grief, as well as the ways it may affect learning and behavior. (NCTSN)
- Be sensitive to the unique challenges posed by the disaster. Keep in mind that when there is no physical confirmation of the death, as may happen in an earthquake, the above reactions can be much more intense and long-lasting, and students may need counseling for extended periods of time. (NCTSN)

## Partner with families

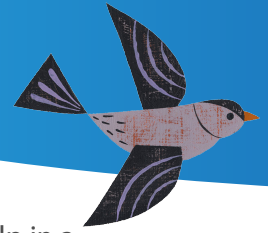
- Provide time for families to meet together. Families are a key source of support for children in difficult times, but they may need support in order to help their children. Consider having family liaisons, interpreters, or representatives from their community present at family discussions. (FEMA)
- Encourage families to tap into their own networks or connect to their support systems. These may include family, friends, community organizations and agencies, faith-based institutions, or other resources. (FEMA)
- Ask families for their help and ideas. Families familiar with the situation and students may have some of the best ideas on how the school can further help students and families affected by the disaster. They also may be familiar with relief efforts that are in progress.

## Provide staff support

- Provide crisis support for staff. Members of your crisis team should have the opportunity to receive support from a trained mental health professional. Providing crisis intervention is emotionally draining and caregivers will need an opportunity to process their crisis response. (NASP)
- Offer counseling support to school personnel affected by the disaster. Teachers and staff should not be expected to conduct group discussions if they themselves are distressed and severely impacted by the disaster. (NASP)

## Look for ways to build community

- Build a community network. As your school begins to build a support network for families affected by the disaster, connect with other local organizations and businesses (particularly those affiliated with the impacted community), such as social services, university faculty and students, and local businesses.



- Ask local community members for help. Community members may be able to help in a number of ways, from providing translation and counseling services to pitching in for school-wide relief projects. For example, following the 2010 Haitian earthquake, the phones at [Evans High in Orlando](#), FL began ringing off the hook and the office was filled with visitors as concerned neighbors asked how they could help the school's more than 600+ Haitian students and families.

## Classroom resources

- [Meet the Helpers: A Public Media Initiative](#) (WUCF)

## Endnotes

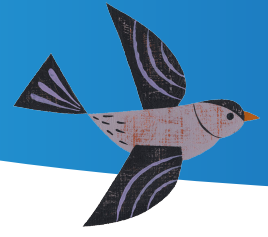
Many of these tips for educators have been adapted from the following sources:

- National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)
- American Psychological Association (APA)



## After Reading: Reflection Questions

- Imagine that a natural disaster has hit one of your students' home countries. How might you respond?



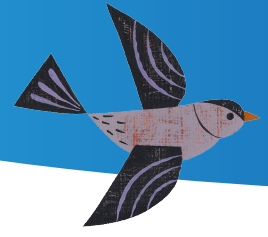
# Booklists: Talking About Tough Topics

These books cover difficult topics in a way that is accessible and age-appropriate.

- [Bullying and Teasing](#)
- [Family Separation](#)
- [When Things Change](#)
- [Books About Grief and Death for Children](#)
- [Books About Death and Grief for Middle Grades/Teens](#)
- [Social and Emotional Learning: Books for Kids](#)
- [Digging Deeper: Books About Social Issues for Middle Grades](#)

These booklists from our sister site AdLit.org also delve into tough topics:

- [Mental Health: Empathy and Understanding](#)
- [Bullies Be Gone!](#)
- [School Shootings: Trying to Understand the Unthinkable](#)



## Closing Thoughts

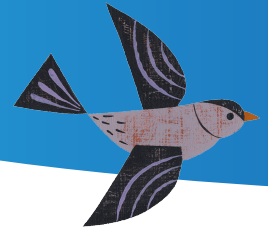
You won't be able to anticipate all of the challenges, events, or topics that you and your class will face. However, the more prepared you are, and the stronger your class community is, the more successfully you will navigate these difficult moments and discussions when they arise.

By tuning into your students' own experiences and perspectives, you are also more likely to create powerful moments of connection and meaning — moments that can serve to empower as well as educate and build empathy.



## After Reading: Reflection Questions

- What are your major takeaways from this guide?
- What is a priority area for you to focus on with your class?
- What is a priority area for your own exploration?
- What is a skill that you think your students would benefit from learning?
- What is a resource you will go back to explore?



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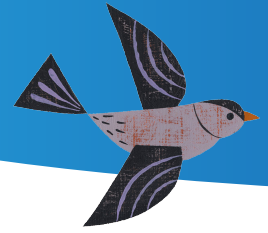
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**Series: What are good strategies teachers can use when exploring "controversial" topics? Fall 2016. Compiled by Larry Ferlazzo for Education Week.**

Response: Teachers Lose 'Credibility' if we Don't Address 'Controversial' Topics. Contributors: Lorena Germán, Adeyemi Stemberge, Stephen Lazar, Jen Schwanke and Aubrie Rojee. Oct. 28, 2016.  
[http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom\\_qa\\_with\\_larry\\_ferlazzo/2016/10/response\\_teachers\\_lose\\_credibility\\_if\\_we\\_dont\\_address\\_controversial\\_topics.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_qa_with_larry_ferlazzo/2016/10/response_teachers_lose_credibility_if_we_dont_address_controversial_topics.html)

Response: 'Fear' Should Not Stop Us From Exploring 'Controversial' Topics in School. Contributors: Gabriella Corales, Tom Rademacher, Martha Caldwell, Oman Frame, Danny Woo, Paul Barnwell, and Kathleen Neagle Sokolowski. Oct. 30, 2016.  
[http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom\\_qa\\_with\\_larry\\_ferlazzo/2016/10/response\\_fear\\_should\\_not\\_stop\\_us\\_from\\_exploring\\_controversial\\_topics\\_in\\_school.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_qa_with_larry_ferlazzo/2016/10/response_fear_should_not_stop_us_from_exploring_controversial_topics_in_school.html)



Response: Teachers Should Examine 'Biases' When Discussing 'Sensitive' Topics. Contributors: Dominique Williams, Matthew Homrich-Knieling, Meg White, Kristina J. Doubet, Jessica A. Hockett, Vance Austin, Stephanie Smith. Nov. 1, 2016.

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Response: 'Don't Avoid Controversial Topics' in School. Contributors: Sara Ahmed, Jennifer Borgioli, Kevin Scott, Erik M. Francis, Phil Hunsberger, Jackie Walsh, Beth Sattes, Dave Stuart Jr. Nov. 5, 2016.

[http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom\\_qa\\_with\\_larry\\_ferlazzo/2016/11/response\\_controversial\\_topics\\_should\\_not\\_be\\_avoided\\_in\\_school.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_qa_with_larry_ferlazzo/2016/11/response_controversial_topics_should_not_be_avoided_in_school.html)

Response: It's 'Vital' for Teachers to 'Integrate Controversial Topics Into Lessons'.

Contributors: Meg Riordan, Lymaris Santana, Sarah Thomas, and Thomas Armstrong. Nov. 7, 2016.

[http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom\\_qa\\_with\\_larry\\_ferlazzo/2016/11/response\\_its\\_vital\\_for\\_teachers\\_to\\_integrate\\_controversial\\_topics\\_into\\_lessons.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_qa_with_larry_ferlazzo/2016/11/response_its_vital_for_teachers_to_integrate_controversial_topics_into_lessons.html)