

**DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS:
LEARNING TO WRITE AND RESEARCH WITH CULTURAL HUMILITY**

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Introduction:

As the emphasis on global citizenship increases at community colleges, faculty members continue to develop curriculum that addresses international human rights issues. While much work has been done on teaching the content of human rights issues in various disciplines, students in writing and composition courses face an additional challenge of learning how to write about international human rights issues with confidence, awareness and respect.

This module presents two units designed for a transfer-level community college composition course. The units introduce specific human rights issues and probe the rhetorical construction of each text. This curriculum can be used in its entirety although individual units and/or lessons can be pulled out and integrated into other courses. Ultimately, this module focuses on *how* students in writing and composition courses can write about human rights issues with dignity.

Writing topics include: rhetorical appeals, cultural humility, and research methodology. Human rights topics include: dignity, slavery, poverty, and gender violence.

Procedure:

1. Assigned reading
2. Independent research
3. Writing (in-class essay exams and formal argumentative essays)
4. In-class presentations

Essential Questions:

1. How can students tell human rights stories with dignity?
2. How can students identify and critique media representations of people, cultures and/or regions?
3. How can students use the research process to investigate their own perspectives and challenge any unsubstantiated assumptions or generalizations about people, cultures and/or regions?

Assessment:

Assessment is completed in a variety of ways throughout the module and includes:

- In-class discussions and activities
- In-class essay exams
- Take-home essays

Unit 1: Dignity, Media and Privilege

Overview:

This unit will introduce the concept of human rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the concept of privilege. The reading assignments comprised of diverse personal essays will challenge students to consider how different forms of privilege operate on a daily basis—especially in media representations—while class discussions will ask students to discuss how they represent themselves with dignity. The unit will conclude with students comparing media representations of their identities to their dignified self-representations.

Assigned Texts:

- Harold Krents, “Darkness at Noon” (disability)
- Brent Staples, “Black Men and Public Spaces” (race)
- Jo Goodwin Parker, “What is Poverty?” (socioeconomic class)
- Amy Tan, “Mother Tongue” (language and culture)
- Judith Ortiz Cofer, “The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Met a Girl Named Maria” (ethnicity and culture)
- Definition of cultural humility: <http://www.deanza.edu/equityoffice/cultural-humility.html>
- Video on cultural humility: <http://youtu.be/SaSHLbS1V4w>
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- “History of Human Rights” video: <http://youtu.be/nCQWwkERit4>
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TED Talk “The Danger of a Single Story”:
http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html

Case Studies:

- Native American anti-redskin video “Proud to Be” <http://youtu.be/mR-tbOxlhvE>
- “We are a culture, not a costume” Ohio State student ads:
<http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/26/living/halloween-ethnic-costumes/>

Class Activities:

- Brainstorm media representations
- Privilege Walk
- Compare media and self-representations and share with classmates

Writing Activities:

Dignified Storytelling:
Multimedia Representations and Human Rights

Background: After reading the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and discussing why dignity is the foundation of the document and the modern concept of human rights, this assignment asks you to reflect on what dignity means to you and how you embody dignity in your everyday life.

Instructions:

Part I: The Dignified “Selfie”

1. Take a picture of yourself (or have a friend take a picture) using a camera phone or simple camera to represent yourself in a dignified way.
2. Consider your pose, posture, facial expression, clothing, accessories, gestures, background images, etc.
3. Write a short essay (1-2 pages) to your classmates that explains *why* you feel dignified in this picture.
 - a. Your essay should:
 - i. Explain what makes you feel dignified when you see this photograph.
 - ii. Explain what you hope and/or expect other people to think about you when they see this image.

Part II (In-Class Activity): Speed Sharing Our “Selfies”

1. See “Speed Sharing: Visualizing Dignity”

Part III: Dignity in the Fabric of the UDHR

1. Each student will be given the “Color-Charted UDHR.”
2. We will divide as a class into five teams; one color section will be given to each team.
3. Students will discuss as a group how the articles in their section relate to the concept of dignity.
4. Each group will then take a group “selfie” that shows dignity in its particular section.

Name: _____

Speed Sharing: Visualizing Dignity

Instructions:

1. Arrange the desks in two rows that face each other.
2. After finding a seat that faces someone, silently exchange “selfies” with your partner.
3. Take notes on what YOU think makes your PARTNER’S “selfie” dignified.
4. Then discuss what makes YOUR “selfie” dignified to your partner.
5. Write down the similarities and differences in your perceptions.

Partner:

Why do YOU think the “selfie” is dignified?

Why does YOUR PARTNER think his or her “selfie” is dignified?

Partner:

Why do YOU think the “selfie” is dignified?

Why does YOUR PARTNER think his or her “selfie” is dignified?

Partner:

Why do YOU think the “selfie” is dignified?

Why does YOUR PARTNER think his or her “selfie” is dignified?

Essay #1: Teaching Dignity

Background Texts:

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story"
http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html
- National Congress of American Indians' "Proud to Be" video
<http://youtu.be/mR-tbOxlhvE>
- Ohio University student ads, "We are a culture, not a costume"
<http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/26/living/halloween-ethnic-costumes/>

Prompt:

After reading the informative personal essays about the writers' diverse experiences in unit 1 and considering Adichie's warning about the danger of a single story, this prompt asks you to think about an aspect of your identity that is often misrepresented in an inaccurate or undignified way in pop culture or the media. **Write a short essay (minimum 500 words) that explains why the specific media image represents an aspect of your identity in an inaccurate way and educate your readers about the reality of your experience.**

Instructions:

- Select an ad, TV show, character, movie or other popular image that you feel doesn't reflect an aspect of your identity in a dignified way and explain why.
- Address your essay to a specific audience: either the creators of that image OR your classmates.

Goals:

Educate readers about how limited media representations can create and support stereotypes that can dehumanize or make it more difficult to see the inherent dignity and humanity of individuals.

Some things to consider as you brainstorm and write:

- What do you wish that people really knew about your identity?
- What are some of the misconceptions that people have?
- Why is important for readers to get a different perspective on this issue?
- Why do you feel that this representation is undignified? Why does this matter to you?

Tasks: (1) write a clear thesis, (2) use detailed examples to make a point, (3) write to inform, and (4) reflect on personal experience.

Length: MINIMUM 500 words

Unit 2: The Rhetoric of American Human Rights

Overview:

The first part of this unit will use Frederick Douglass' 1845 slave narrative, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, a historical case study of someone who used rhetoric and writing to create social change. We will examine the differences in style, content, voice and argument between Douglass, a prominent black abolitionist and former slave and William Lloyd Garrison, a prominent white abolitionist.

The second part of this unit will use the increasing tension between Douglass and Garrison--that was never mended during their lifetimes--as a springboard to consider what it means to be an "ally" for a particular cause. That is, as we shift from writing about *our own* lives, experiences, and communities, how does and should our writing change as we begin to explore and write about issues that affect *other* people and communities? As part of this conversation, we will revisit the concepts of power, privilege and voice and more directly tie them to our analysis and writing.

Reading Assignments:

- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845 slave narrative)
- William Lloyd Garrison, Preface from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
- US *Declaration of Independence*
- US *Bill of Rights*

Key Discussion Questions:

- What did it mean to be human in early America?
 - After reading the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Bill of Rights*, review the rights guaranteed to US citizens (also discuss who was and was not a citizen at the time).
- Who had privilege and power in the US in the mid-nineteenth century?
 - Consider race, gender, class, and citizenship.
- What made the *Narrative* so effective? That is, how did Douglass use rhetoric to accomplish his goal of getting readers to:
 - Care about slavery?
 - Do something by joining the abolitionist cause?
- What are some of the key differences in how Garrison and Douglass talk about slavery?
 - Consider the use of first person versus third person voice.
 - Consider emphasis and focus

Unit 3: International Human Rights

Overview:

In this unit, students will revisit the Privilege Walk and add additional statements that they think will address the privilege that citizens in the US may have when confronting international human rights issues (e.g. citizenship, language, type of government, religion, geographic location, etc.).

They will then discuss the rights guaranteed to women in the UDHR and compare them to the treatment that women currently receive in the US and abroad. Finally, they will examine the issue of violence against women in the US and abroad, and analyze how we talk about these issues in different contexts.

Key Discussion Questions:

- What are the rights that the UDHR guarantees?
- Which rights are guaranteed by the UDHR, but not the *Bill of Rights*?
- Which rights are guaranteed by the UDHR for women, but women in the US do not *currently* experience?
- Which rights are guaranteed by the UDHR for women, but the women in *Half the Sky* do not currently experience?
- Which groups of women are represented in media coverage?
- Which groups of women are underrepresented in media coverage?
- How do we talk about violence against women in the US?
- What are some of the key assumptions that seem to appear when violence against women gets discussed?
- How do academic scholars and bloggers use rhetoric to educate people about these issues?
- What are some of the key differences, if any, in how men and women discuss this issue?
- What were the similarities and differences in the articles about gang rape in the US and gang rape in India?
- Which writers, if any, practiced cultural humility when writing about sexual assault?
- Does Kristof practice cultural humility in his book?

Unit 4: Research and Cultural Humility

Overview:

In this unit, students will synthesize previous lessons and apply them to a final research paper in which they will educate the campus about an international human rights issue. As part of the research process, students will use the concept of cultural humility as a way to think critically about what they currently know about the topic, what they will need to learn about it, and ultimately how they should talk about the countries, cultures, and/or people affected by the specific human rights issue.

Definition of Cultural Humility:

“Cultural humility is a lifelong process of self-reflection, self-critique and commitment to understanding and respecting different points of view, and engaging with others humbly, authentically and from a place of learning (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998)”.

<http://www.deanza.edu/equityoffice/humility.html>

Key Discussion Questions:

- How can we write with cultural humility?
- Are there any “single stories” or incomplete stories about the countries, cultures and/or people affected by the human rights issue?
- What types of information do we need to find before we write about an international human rights issue?
- Are there any limitations or possible controversies that may arise from using certain words or phrases?
 - If so, when and if should writers use those terms? Under what conditions?
- Is there any US involvement to acknowledge or address?

Class Activities:

- In class create a “cultural humility research checklist” for students to use at the beginning of the research process.
- Short “elevator pitches” that inform the rest of the class about the final project topic and basic information about the selected international human rights issue.
- In class create a cultural humility rubric to use for the evaluation of the final essay.
- *Final class discussion:* How did you write with cultural humility?

A Recipe for Telling International Human Rights Stories: Research + Cultural Humility - (A Single Story) = Dignified Storytelling

Background: Now that you have had a chance to reflect on what dignity means to you and you have examined what dignity means to the assigned writers in unit 1, this assignment asks you to determine what information you will need to tell a dignified human rights story about a community with which you do NOT identify.

Background Text:

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story"
http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html

Instructions:

Part I Brainstorm:

1. Select the international human rights issue that you want to research for your final paper.
2. Identify the group(s) whose rights are being violated as well as the group(s) responsible for violating those rights (In other words, who is doing what to whom?).
3. Create a list of research questions that you will need to answer to feel thoroughly informed about the topic so that you can educate other readers about it.
4. In addition, determine whether there is a "single story" that exists about any of the groups you'll be discussing.

If so, answer the following questions:

1. What is the "single story" about the group(s) you will write about?
2. What does dignity mean to this group? (Consider nationality, beliefs, religion, culture, etc.)
3. Are there any known terms or depictions that are considered offensive or undignified to this group? Explain.
4. Does your selected topic support or reinforce the "single story" in any way? If so, how? Explain.
5. What are some alternative ways to discuss this human rights issue without relying on or inadvertently reinforcing the "single story?"

Part II: Reflect, Write and Plan

Assignment: Write a short essay (minimum 1 ½ pages) that explains what you plan to research to prepare for your essay as well as how you plan to avoid a "single story" in your essay.

Goals: Create and explain a plan for gathering accurate information and discussing human rights with dignity.