

Leveraging Talents and Gifts



30 Minutes



Transversal Skills

OVERVIEW

Too often, students feel like they have to leave a part of themselves behind in order to fit in with their school's culture. In this lesson, students use a song, poem, or short story to explore how the “hidden curriculum” creates a pressure to conform to standards that reflect the values and interests of privileged groups. Students then work through a set of questions guiding them to identify their gifts (passions, skills, cultural knowledge, languages, etc.) and explore how they might their gifts while working on the [Pitch for Equity](#) or other final project.

Useful for

- Learning about the hidden curriculum and how it creates pressure on students to conform
- Helping students identify their gifts (passions, skills, cultural knowledge, languages, etc.)
- Building trust
- Creating space for diverse ways of knowing and doing within the school system

Materials

- [Leveraging My Gifts](#) worksheet

PREPARATION

- Teachers should review the [Leveraging My Gifts](#) worksheet so they are prepared to model the activity for students

PROCEDURE

1. **Share a song, poem, or short story that speaks to how students are pressured to conform at school.** Here are some options:
 - [Somewhere in America](#) (video) by Beissa Escolledo, Zariya Allen & Rhiannon McGavin
 - [How to Pronounce Knife](#) (book excerpt) by Souvankham Thammavongsa
2. **Invite students to discuss the work with their teammates:** How does the song or poem connect to something they witnessed or experienced at school? What does the protagonist do to resist the attacks on their identity?
3. **Debrief by explaining that schools can be a place for students to grow and develop their gifts, but they can also be a place where students feel pressure to abandon a part of themselves in order to conform.** The formal curriculum may emphasize respect for diversity, but these lessons can be undone if they conflict with the “hidden curriculum” – the lessons that are learned, but not openly intended to be taught in schools. Which lesson is most

likely to tell students what really matters? The multiculturalism poster on the classroom wall, or reading lists full of texts by white authors? Slogans about diversity, or being teased by peers who say your lunch is “smelly” and “gross?” The lecture about world religions, or the school’s failure to celebrate non-Christian holidays?

4. **Share the purpose of the activity.** Explain that your goal is to create space for students to use and explore their gifts while working on the final project but emphasize that you don’t expect students to share anything they are not comfortable sharing.
5. **Model how to complete the [Leveraging My Gifts](#) worksheet.** This is a good opportunity to build trust with students by sharing something about who you are as a person. When modeling the activity, teachers are encouraged to share a mix of gifts that are fairly unique (e.g. “I make beautiful Ukrainian Easter eggs”) and gifts that are more common (e.g. “My friends tell me that I am a great listener.”)
6. **Invite students to complete the [Leveraging My Gifts](#) worksheet.**
7. **If students are working on a team project, have students gather with their teammates and discuss:**
 - How did it feel to make a list of the gifts that you have that are not generally valued at school?
 - What is one gift from your list that you could use when working on the final project?
 - Why do you think this gift is devalued within the school system?
 - What barriers might prevent you from using this gift when working on the final project and how could you overcome them?
8. **Wrap up the lesson by summarizing the key takeaways from the activity.** Here are a few points you may wish to emphasize:
 - If you have been taught (implicitly or explicitly) that your gifts don’t matter or don’t belong at school, the idea of using your gifts when working on the final project might feel scary.
 - If you have gifts that are devalued within the school system, using them when working on the final project is an act of resistance against an education system that tends to reflect the interests and values of privileged groups in society.
 - Finding a way to use your gifts is also a way of making the project more enjoyable and meaningful for you. The more fun and meaning you find in the project, the easier it will be to put in the time and effort needed to succeed.

EVALUATION

Teachers can invite students to submit a one-page explanation of how they plan on using their gifts when working on their final projects. This assignment is intended as a formative evaluation: teachers may grade it based on completion or choose not to grade it at all.

EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

It is likely that many students will struggle to identify their gifts. They may have been taught not to brag, they may have learned not to do anything that makes them stand out at school, or they may not see or believe that they have gifts. Here are two ways teachers can help students overcome these barriers:

1. You can invite them to reflect on what barriers might be at play. For example, are they worried about sounding like they are bragging? Are they unsure of what their strengths are? Emphasise that everyone has

special qualities and strengths, even people experiencing problems and challenges. It's important to recognize the strengths we have, so we can use them to help ourselves and others.

2. You can share stories from their own experiences. Maybe there was a time you used one of your gifts as a student. Perhaps there was a time when one of your teachers encouraged you to "be creative" with an assignment. By sharing your experiences, you're showing students that you trust them with your stories, and this is a powerful way of inviting students to trust you in return.

USEFUL RESOURCES

['Your Name Is Too Difficult.' What a School's Hidden Curriculum Is Telling Students](#) by Shree Paradkar