

**Building Empathy by Becoming Aware of Personal Identity and Power  
to Understand the Social Justice Issues in *To Kill a Mockingbird*  
Dianna Morgan, Top of the Mitt Writing Project  
Designed for Students in Grades 9 and 10**

*“If white people are segregated, which we [often] are, from communities of color and we don’t have beautiful, in-depth rich contact with people of color, in our daily lives in meaningful ways, then we are going to need ways for schools to help facilitate those bridges by positioning English classrooms as places where deeper understandings of what’s really happening in our world can materialize by exposing that through and with the literature that we read.” -Sophia Sarigianides (2019)*

**My Contentions Are:**

- In order to interact with the world around us, true to our values, we must know who we are (our identity).
- It is important to know and value our own strengths and weaknesses.
- It is important to be able to recognize others’ identities, strengths, and weaknesses in an effort to be able to empathize with their point of view.
- It is important to provide students with opportunities to discover truths before judging.
- Critical thinking is a growth process that begins with thinking, writing, sharing, reflecting, thinking, writing, revising, and celebrating!
- Writing stimulates critical thinking.
- Writing is a process: pre-writing, researching, drafting, revising, editing, publishing.
- Reading should be an interactive experience between the reader and the text.
- Students are aware of what is fair and just and must be given structured and unstructured opportunities to share their feelings about it.
- Conversing out loud solidifies ideas and elicits growth in thinking (think of “aha” moments).

- Teachers and students need time to reflect and improve.
- No put downs should be allowed in the classroom (self or others, students or teachers)
- Depth verses breadth produces higher-level critical thinking and academic literacy skills.
- Choice is important for student engagement.
- Building reading and writing stamina is critical for strengthening personal perseverance.
- Exposing students to a variety of genres within a time period, helps students see the multifaceted, multiple perspectives within our world.
- The use of essential questions helps ground students while growing and learning.
- Planning with the end in mind produces better outcomes for students.
- Better teaching equals more learning.
- Metacognition (thinking about your thinking) helps grow the critical thinking process.
- It is important to acknowledge growth and celebrate success!

## **Systematic Lesson Development**

### **Deep dive into IDENTITY (30 minutes)**

**Preparation reflection for Teachers:** In *Cultivating Genius*, (page 52) Gholdy Muhammad notes questions for teachers to consider for learning students' identities:

- *What are the ways in which my students see and define their own lives?*
- *How are my students defined by others (both positive and negative representations)?*
- *How can we provide learning spaces to name, critique, and push back against any negative representations?*
- *How can we provide learning spaces to help students trust and believe in the positive ways other see them?*
- *Whom do my students desire to be in the future?*
- *How can my classroom instruction enable and cultivate these identities?*

- I. What is identity?
  - A. Think (30 seconds)
  - B. Write (1 minute)
  - C. Pair/Share (2 minutes)
  - D. Reflect & Write (2 minutes)
  - E. Large group share (2 minutes)
  
- II. How is Identity formed?
  - A. Think (30 seconds)
  - B. Write (2 minutes)
  - C. Pair/Share (2 minutes)
  - D. Reflect & Write (2 minutes)
  - E. Large group share (2 minutes)
  
- III. What is your identity?
  - A. Think (30 seconds)
  - B. Write (5 minutes)
    - 1. Physical identity
    - 2. Intellectual identity
    - 3. Social identity (what roles)
    - 4. Emotional identity
    - 5. Spiritual identity
    - 6. Gender identity
    - 7. Race/ethnic Cultural identity
    - 8. other
  
- IV. How do you think others see you?
  - A. Think (30 seconds)
  - B. Write (5 minutes)
    - 1. Physical identity
    - 2. Intellectual identity
    - 3. Social identity (what roles)
    - 4. Emotional identity
    - 5. Spiritual identity
    - 6. Gender identity
    - 7. Race/ethnic Cultural identity
    - 8. other

- V. Why is knowing your own identity important?
- A. Think (30 seconds)
  - B. Write (1 minute)
  - C. Pair/Share (2 minutes)
  - D. Reflect & Write (2 minutes)
  - E. Large group share (2 minutes)



### **Introduction to TRUE COLORS Personality Indicators (20 minutes)**

- I. Review *True Colors* founder Don Lawry's statement (also found in the online PDF appendix of materials at: <https://www.topofthemittwriting.org/demonstration-lessons.html>)

*The True Colors symbol represents the key to an individual's pathway to self-confidence and esteem. It is the metaphor for the True Colors person, one of excellence who demonstrates and positive state of mind, who recognizes and acknowledges the perspectives of others, and one who participates in a unique way in improving the quality of life for every individual.*

- A. Interact with the text engaging in a partner think aloud.
1. One person reads the text and states what is going through his/her mind as they are reading.
  2. Listener, paraphrases what he/she heard.
  3. Partners discuss why it could be important to know yours and others' personality traits.
  4. Large group share

- B. Take the True Colors personal inventory:

<https://liveboldandbloom.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Personality-Test-2-1.png>

1. Follow the instructions.
2. Calculate your results.  
A sample worksheet can also be found in the online PDF appendix of materials at: <https://www.topofthemittwriting.org/demonstration-lessons.html>

### C. Review the Color Traits

(A sample worksheet can also be found in the online PDF appendix of materials at:

<https://www.topofthemittwriting.org/demonstration-lessons.html>

1. Review the TEACHER Color Traits.
2. Review the STUDENT Color Traits.
  - Orange:** Playful, Energetic, Adventurous. Resourceful, Spontaneous, Generous, Eager, and Action Oriented.
  - Blue:** Authentic, Empathetic, Passionate, Communicative, Harmonious, Enthusiastic, Sincere, and Relationship Oriented.
  - Green:** Analytical, Calm, Cool, Investigative, Logical, Inventive, Self-sufficient, and a Persistent Intellectual.
  - Gold:** Dependable, Organized, Stable, Concerned, Punctual, Helpful, Faithful, and Helpful.

## II. Practice Identifying True Color traits in others through literature

A. Re-read Chapter 1 of *To Kill A Mocking Bird*

B. Highlight the following: (15 minutes)

1. Characters and evidence of BLUE using a blue highlighter
2. Characters and evidence of GREEN using a green highlighter
3. Characters and evidence of GOLD using a gold highlighter
4. Characters and evidence of ORANGE using an orange highlighter

C. Debrief results using a JIGSAW method (students choose)

1. Blue group experts discuss and find their best two examples to share
2. Green group experts discuss and find their best two examples to share
3. Gold group experts discuss and find their best two examples to share
4. Orange group experts discuss and find their best two examples to share

D. Large group share (choose the order)

1. 1st group shares
2. 2nd group shares
3. 3rd group shares
4. 4th group shares

**Invitations to write include:**

Several Reflective journal writings (remaining time)

We conclude with Further Reflection on Identity and Empathy

Review the True Colors video: <https://youtu.be/XsM1wZ5WT8Q>

1. What did you learn about how you perceive your own identity from exploring your True Colors?
2. What new insights did you gain about how others might see you from this exploration?
3. What did you learn about the identity of other classmates in your group?
4. What is the relationship between identity and empathy?
5. How can knowing other's True Colors be helpful in regard to empathy?

**Outside Influences**

**Social Justice Standards:**

- SJ.DI.8: Respectfully express curiosity about the lived experience of others and exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way.
- SS Dimension 1/ The Arc of Inquiry 9-12: Central to a rich Social Studies experience is the capability for developing questions that can frame and advance Inquiry.
- SJ:ID.9-12.4: I express pride and confidence in my identity without perceiving or treating anyone else as inferior.
- JU.9-12.11- I relate to all people as individuals rather than representative of groups and can identify stereotypes when I see or hear them.
- SJ:DI. 9-12.8: I respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way.
- SJID.9-12.3: I know that all my group identities and the intersection of those identities create unique aspects of who I am and that is true for other people too.

## **Common Core Standards**

- CCSS.SL.9-10-Work with peers and present and assign individual roles as needed
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- CCRW7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focus questions.
- CCRSL4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning.
- RI.2-Summarize complex concepts.
- RI.6-Analyze author's purpose.
- RI.7-Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media.

## **Adaptations/Extensions:**

- Analyze characterization and determine the True Colors of various characters within a given work.
- Reflect on the contrasting family identities of the Finches and the Cunninghams.
- Create two different charts to reflect on "What I See / How Others See Me"
- Research to determine what True Color ranking would best represent a specific author or reputable person.
- Explore how characters' True Colors might change from the beginning of the text to the end.
- Remind students that identity is evolving and that the True Colors assessment is a living document.
- Model "teacher talk" about changing/shifting identities.
- Extend this analysis to other novels/books.
- Incorporate this knowledge into students' writing about character.
- Conduct independent research into how identity shapes decision-making.
- Revisit throughout the year to identify changes/consistencies.

- Incorporate into staff practices.
- Analyze Cindy Lauper song lyrics “True Colors.”
- Create anchor charts explaining color descriptions.

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