

Paideia Seminar Lesson Plan

Text: “Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation” by John Lewis

Grade/Subject: Adult / Faculty

Ideas, Values: Class, History, Justice, Nonviolence, Race

Date of Origin: 8/9/2020

Pre-Seminar Content

Launch Activity:

Ask participants to take part in the following “Opinion Corners” activity:

1. Post signs in the four corners of the classroom: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.

2. Write on the board the following quote: **“I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality.”**

3. Have participants move to the corner that reflects their response to this statement.

4. Give participants three to five minutes to discuss in their corners why they chose that response. Have each group select a spokesperson to share their ideas.

5. Each spokesperson in turn summarizes that group’s thinking.

6. (Optional depending on time…) Have participants spend about 5 minutes expressing the counter argument in writing.

Inspectional Read:

Ask participants to scan the document and discuss what they anticipate in the reading. Briefly discuss the title. Label the paragraphs in the text (1-9) for easy reference. Read the whole text aloud and slowly. Have participants underline any vocabulary that is unknown, unfamiliar, or confusing.

Background Information:

Share as appropriate: **John Robert Lewis** (February 21, 1940 – July 17, 2020) was an American politician and [civil-rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_rights_movement) leader who served in the [United States House of Representatives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_House_of_Representatives) for [Georgia's 5th congressional district](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia%27s_5th_congressional_district) from 1987 until his death in 2020. Lewis served as the chairman of the [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student_Nonviolent_Coordinating_Committee) ([SNCC](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student_Nonviolent_Coordinating_Committee)) from 1963 to 1966.  Lewis received many honorary degrees and awards, including the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_Medal_of_Freedom). He wrote this essay shortly before his death, and it was published posthumously in the New York Times on July 30, 2020.

Vocabulary:

Have participants identify any unfamiliar vocabulary and discuss as an entire group before proceeding to the seminar discussion.

Analytical Read:

Have participants reread the entire text again slowly and choose one paragraph that they think is the most significant. Then have them write a brief explanation in the margin of the text that summarizes the significance of that particular paragraph. Turn and share with a partner and discuss together the importance of the two paragraphs chosen.

Pre-Seminar Process:

* Define and State the purpose for the seminar.

*“A Paideia seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open-ended questions.”*

*“The main purpose of seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the textual ideas and values, of ourselves, and of each other.”*

* Describe the responsibilities of facilitator and participants.

“*I am primarily responsible for asking challenging, open-ended questions, and I will take a variety of notes to keep up with the talk turns and flow of ideas. I will help move the discussion along in a productive direction by asking follow-up questions based on my notes.”*

*“I am asking you to think, listen and speak candidly about your thoughts, reactions and ideas. You can help each other do this by using each other’s names.”*

*“You do not need to raise your hands in order to speak, rather, the discussion is collaborative in that you try to stay focused on the main speaker and wait your turn to talk.”*

*“You should try to both agree and disagree in a courteous, thoughtful manner. For example, you might say, ‘I disagree with Joanna because…,’ focusing on the ideas involved not the individuals.”*

* Have participants set a Personal Goal.

*“Now, please reflect on how you normally participate in a discussion as a group. What goal can you set for yourself that will help the flow and meaning of the seminar?”*

*“Please consider the list of personal participation goals –* either on the Speaking and Listening Checklist or on the board*.”*

* To speak at least three times
* To refer to the text
* To ask a question
* To speak out of uncertainty
* To build on others’ comments

*“Is there one that is relevant for you? Please choose one goal from the list or that you feel is best and commit to achieving it during the discussion we are about to have… write down (or circle) your personal goal.”*

* Agree on a Group Goal.

*For this seminar, I will suggest our group goal (select and display for all to see).*

Seminar Questions:

* Opening (Identify main ideas from the text):

What one word from the title of this essay tells us the most about its message? (round-robin response)

What does the word you chose reveal? (spontaneous discussion)

* Core (Analyze textual details):

In paragraph three, Lewis writes, “in those days [when he was 15], fear constrained us like an imaginary prison.” What are the implications of that imaginary prison?

Why do you think that Lewis stress (in paragraph six) the importance of “ordinary people with extraordinary vision”?

What is the significance of history for Lewis? Refer to the text.

*Based on the text*, why do you think Lewis believed that “the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the most excellent way”?

Why do you think Lewis chose for this text to be published shortly after his death?

Do you agree with Lewis that a nation has a soul? If so, can that soul be redeemed?

* Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas):

What one sentence from this essay would you like to have displayed over your desk in your home, school, or office? What will that sentence continue to teach you?

Post-Seminar Process:

*“Thank you for your focused and thoughtful participation in our seminar.”*

* Have participants do a written self-assessment of their personal goal.

*“As part of the post-seminar process, I would first like to ask you to take a few minutes to reflect on your relative success in meeting the personal process goal you set prior to beginning the discussion. Please review the goal you set for yourself and reflect in writing to what extent you met the goal. In addition, note why you think you performed as you did”. (Pause for reflection.)*

* Do a group assessment of the social and intellectual goals of the seminar.

*“Now I would like us to talk together about how we did in relation to the group goal we set for ourselves (insert your group goal). On a scale of one to five, five being perfect, how would you say we did? Why?” (Pause for discussion.)*

*“Now, would someone be willing to volunteer to share your personal self-assessment and reflection?”*

* Note reminders for the next seminar.

Post Seminar Content:

* Transition to Writing:

Have participants spend ten minutes brainstorming in writing everything they said, heard, and thought during the seminar about the power of truth to overcome hatred and violence.

* Writing Task:

After reading and discussing John Lewis’ “Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation,” write a “Letter to the Editor” for the local newspaper (or blog, social media post, etc.) proposing a needed social change in your community. Publish it via the appropriate media and invite response and collaboration.

* Brainstorm:

Invite participants to talk in pairs for two minutes to share thoughts about what the writing task is asking and how they might respond. Then have each participant take time to list the elements they want to include in their proposals.

* Structure the Writing:

Discuss with participants possible designs (or outlines) for their proposals. Allow a few minutes for all to create designs for the proposals. Have participants draft their designs on paper and use them to refine their thinking.

* First Draft:

Challenge all to draft their proposals by writing the paragraphs defined by their outlines. Refer to the original text by John Lewis as a model.

* Collaborative Revision:

Have participants work in pairs to read their first drafts aloud to each other with emphasis on reader as creator and editor. Listener says back one point heard clearly and asks one question for clarification. Switch roles. Give time for full revisions resulting in a second draft.

* Edit:

Once the second draft is complete, have participants work in groups of three-four and this time take turns reading each other’s second drafts slowly and silently, marking any spelling or grammar errors they find. Give time for full revisions resulting in a third and final draft that will be sent to the intended audience.

* Publish:

Have participants publish their proposals to those they were originally intended for and request a candid, thoughtful response, including the possibility for collaboration.

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\*Text is attached if open sourced.

\*Text is cited if it needs to be procured.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-civil-rights-america.html>