

“The Danger of Silence” Sample Middle School Video Lesson

Resources Needed

Video: “The Danger of Silence” TED Talk with Clint Smith: <https://youtu.be/NiKtZglmdlY>

Module/Grade Level

Anti Bias Education Foundations - 7th/8th grade

Summary to Share With Students

In this spoken word, slam poet and teacher, Clint Smith, shares his experiences with silence and the importance of paying attention to the things people don't say. In this powerful piece, he encourages listeners to find the courage to speak up against injustice rather than staying silent.

Reflection Questions for Teachers

- When was silence a source of shame in your life? If you could have another chance to speak up at that moment, what would you want to say?
- What expectations (either explicit or implicit) exist in your classroom or school that might inhibit students from speaking up when they see bias or injustice?
- How can you encourage students to use their voices and lean into uncomfortable conversations? How can you show them your support?

Notes for Teachers

Your students may need some context for the following references in Clint Smith's poem:

Rwanda genocide - In 1994, 800,000 people were brutally killed in Rwanda by ethnic Hutu extremists. They targeted members of the ethnic minority Tutsi community, along with political opponents, regardless of their ethnic origin. For more information, see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26875506>. (Warning - Site contains graphic images)

Katrina - A devastating hurricane that made landfall off the coast of New Orleans, Louisiana on August 29, 2005. Numerous levee failures led to catastrophic flooding, killing almost 2,000 people and displacing hundreds of thousands more people, many of them Black and living in or near poverty. The U.S. government's slow response highlighted the country's long-standing race/class inequities, leaving victims without food, water, shelter, or access to medical help.

Thoreau - A 19th century American poet, philosopher, abolitionist, and environmental scientist. Well-known works include *Walden*, and “Civil Disobedience”.

Giving something up for Lent - Some Christians practice giving something up for Lent (the 40 days before Easter) as a sign of sacrifice. Christians who practice this sacrifice believe it represents Jesus Christ's sacrifices and ability to refuse temptation.

Connection to Social-Emotional Learning and Anti-Bias Education

SEL

Self-Awareness

Self-Management

Social Awareness

Relationship Skills

Responsible Decision-Making

ABE

Empathy and Understanding

Healthy Complex Identities

Respect Across Differences

Notice, Name, and Reject Bias

Responsiveness and Action

Journal Questions/Activities

- Clint Smith quotes Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1968 speech and says, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends." How does this quote relate to your life?
- Have you ever wished you or someone else had spoken up in response to meanness, teasing, or bias-based mistreatment? If so, when? If you could have another chance to speak up at that moment, what would you want to say?
- Invite students to free write as many sentences as they can starting with "Silence is...." for ten minutes. To take it further, these can be turned into poems.

Discussion Questions

- Share a response to one of your journal questions.
- In the video, Clint Smith says, "We spend so much time listening to the things people are saying that we rarely pay attention to the things they don't." What does he mean by this? Give an example of a time in history or your own life where this applied.
- How can silence be a form of privilege?
- What do you think about Clint Smith's four core principles posted in his classroom? Which of those principles is most difficult for you? Why?
 - Read critically
 - Write consciously
 - Speak clearly
 - Tell your truth
- How do you think it would feel to give up speaking for a period of time?
- What are some strategies you can use to be brave next time you are faced with a situation in which you know you should not remain silent?