Mini Lesson Plan 3: Patient Rights and Cultural Sensitivity in Healthcare

Objective:
Students will explore the themes of patient rights, cultural sensitivity, and ethical decision-making in healthcare. They will discuss how Michele Harper navigates a complex situation involving law enforcement, a patient's autonomy, and respect for personal rights.

Materials Needed:

- Excerpt from *The Beauty in Breaking* by Michele Harper (below)
- Whiteboard or Smartboard
- Discussion questions and reflection prompts handout

Lesson Outline:

1. Introduction to Patient Rights (5 Minutes)

- **Hook Question:** "Why is it important for patients to have control over their own medical decisions?"
- Briefly introduce Michele Harper's role as an emergency room physician who must navigate complex situations where patient rights, law enforcement, and ethical obligations intersect.

2. Reading the Excerpt (10 Minutes)

- **Read Aloud:** Provide students with copies of the excerpt or read it aloud. Ask them to pay close attention to the interactions between Dr. Harper, the patient (Mr. Thomas), and law enforcement officers.

3. Group Discussion (15 Minutes)

- **Discussion Questions:** Divide students into small groups to discuss the following:

    1. How does Dr. Harper's approach to Mr. Thomas differ from the other medical staff and law enforcement present?
    2. Why does Dr. Harper prioritize Mr. Thomas's autonomy, even when others pressure her to conduct the examination?
    3. What cultural or racial dynamics are at play in this situation? How might these influence Dr. Harper's approach?
    4. What ethical principles guide Dr. Harper's decision to respect Mr. Thomas's refusal of medical examination?

- **Share-Out:** Have each group share one key takeaway with the class.

4. Whole-Class Reflection on Cultural Sensitivity (10 Minutes)

- **Class Reflection Questions:**
    - Why is it important for healthcare providers to communicate respectfully and acknowledge a patient's background and rights?
    - How can doctors build trust with patients who may feel defensive or wary, especially in sensitive situations involving law enforcement?
- **Key Insight Discussion:** Emphasize Dr. Harper's approach to cultural sensitivity and patient autonomy, highlighting her respect for Mr. Thomas's rights even in a high-pressure scenario.

5. Personal Writing Reflection (5 Minutes)

- **Prompt:** Ask students to write a brief reflection on the following:
    - "Imagine you're in a situation where someone's rights are being ignored. How would you handle it? What challenges might you face in standing up for that person's rights?"

Excerpt, Chapter 5

As I approached, Lauren was looking directly at the patient and saying, "Sir, you are going to have to do what we say. You did something that is dangerous and life threatening. Now you are under arrest. You must get in this gown, and then we will examine you." No invitation, no question. Simply her interpretation of the events and a directive to comply.

No one moved.

Suited up, I approached the stalemate. I looked at the patient's face. He was turned away, looking at nothing in the far corner of the room. His chin was tilted upward, his jaw tight, his brow glistening with the first signs of perspiration. His breathing was rapid and shallow.

I clasped my hands in front of my chest. "Hello, sir," I said softly. He lowered his head to look at me. I was anywhere from twelve to four inches shorter than everyone else in the area. He and I were atleast ten shades darker than everyone else in the triage room. "Sir, what's your name?"

His jaw loosened just enough for him to say, "Dominic." "Yes. And your last name?" I asked. "Thomas. Dominic Thomas."
"Hello, Mr. Thomas. I'm Dr. Harper. I'm the doctor in chargehere, so I just have to ask you a

couple questions. I'm sure they're the same ones everyone else has asked you. Please just bear with me. Can I first ask you why you're in the emergency department today?"

"I don't know. I didn't do nuthin'," he said, his voice rising. I saw his neck and shoulders begin to tense and his arms extend behind him. Nearly shouting, he continued, "They arrested me and brought me here for nuthin'."

Officer Quigley, one of the four large white officers standing around the patient, spoke up. "Dominic here is under arrest for drugs. We raided the house and saw him swallow bags of drugs when he was trying to flee the scene. That's why he's here. We need you to examine him and get the bags out."

Turning back to Dominic, I asked, "Mr. Thomas, did you swallow bags of drugs?"

He sucked his teeth and then replied, "No! They don't know what they talkin' 'bout!"

I looked back at the officer who'd spoken. He rolled his eyes and looked away.

"Mr. Thomas, of course I have to make sure you understand that if you or anyone swallowed bags of drugs, it is really dangerous. The bags could cause a blockage in your bowels. Even worse, they could leak and cause all sorts of things like heart attack, an inability to breathe, pain, and even death."

"I got it, miss, but I didn't do it, so it's not an issue."
"Okay, can I just ask you a couple more questions? It'll be fast." "Yeah."
"Do you have any medical problems?"
"No."
"Do you take any medications?""No."
"Are you allergic to anything?"
"No."
"Any surgeries?"
"No."
"Any alcohol or drugs today?"
"No."
"And my last question. Mr. Thomas, would you like us to examine you today?"
"No. I wanna get outta here."
"Okay, then we will discharge you."
At this, the officers bristled. Officer Quigley exclaimed, "We brought him here for an examination. You have to examine him. That's the procedure."

"What procedure are you referring to?" I asked. I didn't accept what the cop was telling me, and I questioned why he felt comfortable instructing me to do anything at all.

"Ma'am, we do this all the time," he said, sighing. The sigh telegraphed to me that this man, this older, taller, heavier white cop, felt I was both missing a critical point and wasting his time.

“Oh, do you all have a court order for us to examine this man against his will?” I asked, implying that this must surely be the missing piece of information.

“No, but he’s under arrest for a crime.”

“I do understand what you’re saying, but it is against the law to force a medical examination on a competent adult human being. If you don’t have a court order, I would be breaking the law to do further medical evaluation on this man against his will. So, if Mr. Thomas does not want a medical examination, there will be no medical examination, because this is his right and this is the law in the entire United States of America.”

Officer Quigley, the charge nurse, and the resident all stared at me. Then they began to explain to me that other physicians had forced such exams on patients.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” I told them. “I’m sorry to hear that there are doctors who will break the law for this reason. I am not one of

those physicians.”
Lauren turned around and went back to her desk.
Carl, whose face communicated total disbelief, asked, “So we’re

just gonna let him go, with no triage or anything? Because he wouldn’t even let me triage him.”

I turned back to the patient. “Mr. Thomas, is it okay to just take some quick vital signs on you? Just a couple of things like your blood pressure and heart rate? I promise it won’t even take two minutes. As long as your vitals are okay, we’ll get you right out of here.”

“I’m not putting on that gown.” He scowled. “You don’t need to change for this at all.” “Okay, go ’head.”
“Thank you.”