

Guidelines for Teaching the Lessons in the Classroom

- Develop a rationale for the lesson that aligns with your school goals and school curricula
 - Examine existing 9/11 anniversary projects or school wide commemorations
 - Unify a school approach – make it an inclusive school event
- Identify the background information needed by the students and/or teachers to accomplish the goals of the lesson.
 - Develop a basic historical overview to meet the needs of your students. Do not assume they have the historical knowledge.
- Identify students in the class who were affected by 9/11, terrorism or violence to assist in building a lesson that will appropriately respond to their needs.
 - Be mindful of trauma and how it has played a role in the lives of your students.
- Be sensitive to the visual materials - photos, videos, audio – and their emotional nature and potential impact upon students. Choose materials that clearly meet the goals and objectives of the lesson.
- In researching the subject matter of 9/11 and terrorism, provide a list of acceptable websites or print materials for the research.
- Be sensitive to the religious diversity in your classroom and choose your language carefully when referring to the perpetrators. Educators should be mindful of stereotyping the Muslim community in particular and how this could have an impact upon students.
- Avoid articulating your personal political beliefs in reference to 9/11 and terrorism by choosing your language carefully.
- Be sensitive to the vulnerability of students who have a history of trauma in their own lives and how they may connect this event to their personal experiences.
- Avoid having students engage in educational activities that simulate the roles of terrorists, perpetrators, bystanders, upstanders, etc. The most acceptable pedagogical principle on this matter deals with the issue that simulating an event of this magnitude and asking students to respond to the simulation is unrealistic and pedagogically flawed.

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Guidelines for Creating a Safe Space in the Classroom

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As you prepare to teach the lessons in this curriculum, recognize that some of the topics (September 11, terrorism) may affect students in a variety of ways. Even if your students are too young to remember September 11, 2001 or weren't born yet, they may hear about the events of that day from their families or classmates.

Remember that for those students who were 3, 4 or 5 years old in 2011, ten years is a long time. A child who was barely five years old will be at a completely different cognitive and emotional developmental stage than a 15-year old teenager. As children cognitively mature they are able to comprehend much more information. Adolescents are able to perform abstract reasoning. However, a teen may experience feelings of their younger selves on that day; the high school senior may remember the exact feelings he had as a seven year old on September 11 2001.

While some of the topics can frighten, it is our goal to help students understand a complex world by having open discussions and, more importantly, to understand how people in our communities take action to make the world a better and safer place. Whether children are exposed to a single traumatic event in their classroom such as the loss of a peer or teacher or if the entire school is witness to a national tragedy, schools and teachers are ideally positioned to partner with families and communities to support children during these difficult times.

We do not recommend using graphic images of terrorist attacks or destruction at any grade level. However, high school students may be better equipped to handle such photographs. Remember that today's high school students were young children in 2001 and may recall emotional responses and behaviors to images in 2011 as they experienced in 2001. We should be mindful of how certain words and images affect students, especially those students who have experienced any kind of trauma and loss. We strongly urge teachers to preview the images and decide which photographs are appropriate for their students. Before the lesson begins, teachers should tell the class about the images they will be viewing:

“Like many images of disaster and tragic events, the photographs you will be seeing are graphic in nature. Although you may have seen them in newspapers or on the television, they can still be unsettling. Many people experience strong reactions. Be aware of how you are reacting and don't feel you need to look at every photo or any photos.”

Images of destruction should not be posted on bulletin boards or shown on a big screen in a darkened classroom. Smaller photographs allow students to pace themselves and be selective as to how much they want to look at, depending on their personal experience and responses.

Finally, teachers should consider alternate assignments or adapt this assignment for those students who may be more vulnerable to such images.

Below are some suggestions for keeping your classroom a safe space and recognizing the needs of your students. An important first step is to appreciate how the topics in this curriculum affect you.

1. Be aware of how your experiences, reactions and thoughts may influence how you present and react to the material in the classroom.

- Enlist a support system, talk about the lessons and your reactions to them.
- If you are comfortable, tell your story to the students. You are their connection with this profound time in our history.

2. Remember that students K through 3rd grade are too young to comprehend the concepts of terrorism and the terrorist attacks of 9/11/01.

- Focus on lessons about helping others and building positive relationships.

3. Create a physical classroom environment that is safe and comfortable

- Avoid using traumatic images of destruction; focus on rebuilding and resilience.
- Post opportunities to take positive action, school or community projects.

4. Recognize that a wide range of reactions (physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral or spiritual) to a disaster or traumatic event is expected and natural in most of us.

- Emphasize that these responses are common.
- Tell your students that talking about difficult topics may cause people to experience different kinds of emotions. This is not unusual.

5. Before a lesson, ask if any students or their family members know people who were directly or indirectly affected by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

- Ask students if they've heard their friends talking about 9/11.
- Be sensitive to the needs of students who may have stronger ties to these topics, give them the option of observing or not participating at all, if they wish.
- Encourage students to talk to their families about the lessons.

6. Be aware of how your students react and cope with potentially difficult subjects.

- Keep the lines of communication open through your availability and accessibility, be honest and supportive.
- Recognize children who may be in the greatest need and if you have concerns about a student, speak to someone about him or her.

For more information or additional resources, contact Dr. Gaffney at donnaagaffney@gmail.com.