

Lesson Overview

Grade Level(s)	10
Subject(s)	English Language Arts
Lesson Summary	From Malawi to Memphis students bridge journalism, civic awareness and creative writing to show how systematic harm is not random but a product of targeting communities with the fewest political protections. It is a pattern of asthma clusters, industrial zoning, governmental negligence, air quality and a lack of empathy. Students will examine the ways these injustices harm women of color around the world and in our hometown of Memphis. Students will read reporting on disabled pregnant women in Malawi and explore how hospitals can dehumanize or protect patients in order to create advocacy pieces that call for dignified care for all mothers. By pairing data with storytelling, students will break down stereotypes and misinformation, humanizing the women in the news stories and building empathy. As an extension, students will curate a symposium to share out all that they have learned about how to disrupt the systematic racism and other health inequities impacting marginalized women of color.
Standards	State of Tennessee English Language Arts Standards RI.CS.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how rhetoric advances that point of view. RI.IKI.8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text. SL.CC.1: Participate effectively in collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. W.PDW.4: Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Focus Reporting	" Pregnant and Disabled in Malawi ," by Josephine Chinele and Ngulube Chisomo
Content Advisory (optional)	This lesson references racial health disparities, infant mortality and neglect in medical systems. We encouraged sensitivity and created opt-out alternatives if students became overwhelmed. Many Memphis scholars have firsthand or familial experience with medical neglect, poverty and food deserts. The lesson prioritizes trauma-informed discussion, affirming emotional safety while empowering activism. We will encourage respectful discourse and honor all experiences.
Notes on Context	Our school is located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Memphis. Memphis is the 2nd poorest metropolitan city in the nation. Our mortality rate of Black and brown babies far exceeds the national average due to environmental injustice, racism and poverty. Our school is primarily Black and Brown scholars who are directly affected by multiple traumas and factors.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Objective(s) and Essential Question(s)

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Analyze global investigative reporting on environmental racism.
- Evaluate journalistic choices: sourcing, narrative framing and use of evidence.
- Compare environmental health inequities in Malawi and Memphis.
- Use research and creative communication (op-eds, poems, infographics) to inform and advocate.
- Showcase learning in a youth-driven public symposium.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How does environmental racism operate globally and locally?
2. What journalistic techniques help expose underreported global health crises?
3. Do environmental conditions in Malawi mirror inequities in Memphis?
4. How can youth storytelling and data help drive awareness towards action?
5. How do global health policies and local inequities intersect for minority women?
6. What stories are missing from mainstream health narratives?
7. How can young people become ethical storytellers and advocates for health equity?

Focus Resources

MAIN ARTICLES OF STUDY

- [Disabled Women Struggle for Dignified Care During Pregnancy](#)
- [Dehumanizing Hospitals Fail Mothers With Impairments in Africa](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [The World's Most Toxic Town: The Terrible Legacy of Zambia's Lead Mines](#)
- [The Black Maternal Health Crisis Is Getting Worse. One Expert Details the Resources Available To Help Solve It.](#)
- [The Urgency of Intersectionality | Kimberlé Crenshaw | TED](#)
- [Linda Villarosa on Black Maternal Health Crisis & America's Hidden HIV Epidemic | Democracy Now](#)
- Classroom Live Chats with Subject Matter Experts
 - Theryn Bond
 - Dr. Ramona Moore

Introducing the Lesson

This lesson is a chance to connect journalism, empathy and civic voice. Students do more than “learn about”

Malawi; they compare the patterns they see there to experiences in Memphis and the United States. They practice reading complex nonfiction, asking ethical questions and then will turn what they learn into an advocacy product of a symposium. Art becomes advocacy!

The lesson embraces three key principles:

1. **Cultural Sustaining Education** -where students' own experiences and family stories are centered as valid sources of knowledge. By connecting global health reporting to Memphis neighborhoods, students will learn to value their experiences and voices in critical conversations.
2. **Creative Civic Expression**- Writing, art and research are tools for advocacy. Through a choice factor where students have choices of outcomes that they can use to transform research to share their emotions with their community.
3. **Constructive Critical Media Literacy**- Students will analyze how stories are reported and shared. We will study which stories are amplified and which ones are missing by neglect or design. We will use empathy mapping to inquire through the development of critical skills to ask ethical questions that center on humans first.

This lesson is built to confront inequities; honor lived experience and use their craft to imagine more equitable systems. In this space, reading becomes witnessing and writing becomes a pathway toward healing and justice through communal awareness.

The lesson is implemented over the course of 5 class periods structured accordingly:

1. Day 1: Opening & Background Knowledge
2. Day 2: Understanding Intersectionality
3. Day 3: Outlining Presentations
4. Day 4: Refining Presentations
5. Day 5: School Symposium

Day 1: Opening & Background Knowledge

Objective

Students recognize how language shapes perception of health inequity.

Warm Up

1. Display these headlines on the board
 - a. "Black Mothers Are Dying at Alarming Rates in U.S. Hospitals"
 - b. "Lack of Funding Leaves Children At-risk for Lead Poisoning"
 - c. "Study Finds Bias in Pain Treatment for Women of Color"
 - d. "Dehumanizing Hospitals Fail Mothers With Impairments In Africa"
2. Ask students to respond in quick-writes that include the following thinking:

- a. Why might these headlines be considered urgent?
 - b. What emotions do these headlines create?
 - c. Which headlines feels most harmful?
3. After students complete their quick write, instruct them to turn and talk with their shoulder partner. Partners should read one another's responses and discuss whether. They have similar emotions in response to the headlines?
4. Facilitate a 3-minute discussion on word choice, tone and bias in framing the lesson to come. How do you think people in hospitals should be talked to and treated? Compare those two conversations.
5. During whole class share-out Chart student ideas under two headings: "Dehumanizing language and Humanizing language"

Building Background Knowledge

1. Show a simple map of Africa and locate Malawi. Ask students to consider where it is in comparison to Memphis, TN.
2. Share brief bullet point facts:
 - a. Malawi is a country in southern Africa.
 - b. Many people live in rural areas and travel long distances for medical care.
 - c. Disabled people often face extra barriers in schools, jobs and hospitals.
3. As a class, define the following key terms:
 - a. **disability** – *a physical, mental, or sensory condition that changes how someone moves, sees, hears, thinks, or learns.*
 - b. **stigma** – *negative beliefs or shame placed on a person or group.*
 - c. **discrimination** – *unfair treatment based on disability, gender, race, or other identity.*
 - d. **dignity** – *the basic respect every person deserves.*
 - e. **maternal health** – *health of women during pregnancy, birth, and after.*
 - f. **intersectionality**- *framework of understanding how various social identities overlap to create unique experiences*
 - g. **environmental racism**- *describes the disproportionate placement of environmental hazards that stem from systematic policies and historical discrimination*
4. Set and agree on classroom norms such as
 - a. We do not joke about disability, pregnancy loss, or death.
 - b. We listen to understand, not to debate other people's pain.
 - c. Anyone can step out for a break if needed by signaling for emotional support.
 - d. We will listen and hear for empathy and concern NOT judgement when we reach places of discourse.

Close Reading and Analysis

1. Students will read and analyze the Dehumanizing Hospitals or Black Maternal Health Crisis articles employing the following skills:

- a. **Media Literacy:** Students will review how to identify a credible source, detect bias and use lateral reading to cross-check facts.
 - b. **Analytical Reading:** Students will practice annotation strategies for identifying claim, evidence and human story within nonfiction journalism.
 - c. **Empathy Mapping:** In small groups, students will complete an empathy map (Feel / Think / Say / Do) for a sample subject of a health story to understand perspective-taking.
 - d. **Discussion Norms:** We will co-create class agreements for handling sensitive or emotional content respectfully: centering listening, consent and care.
2. Instruct students to create a two-column chart in their notebooks to record both “Facts and Feelings.” Explain that Facts are related to what happened in the story and Feelings are related to what the story makes them feel / imagine.
 3. As students read each section, they should:
 - a. Write down 5–7 facts from the article
 - b. Next to each fact, write a feeling word or phrase: “angry,” “scared,” “disrespected,” “this reminds me of how I was treated...”
 - c. Underline any sentence that shows disrespect, neglect or lack of communication.
 - d. Put a star (*) next to any sentence that shows care, listening or attempted solutions.
 - e. Track: Who in the article is interviewed (names, roles, location) and who is not (which voices are missing).
 - f. Mark unfamiliar terms and define them in the margin.
 4. After reading, give students time to complete the following comprehension and analysis questions:
 - a. What are the main reasons documented for the disparities in healthcare and the people most impacted?
 - b. How do the authors use personal stories alongside data to build empathy and urgency?
 - c. Identify at least two voices or perspectives the article presents. Whose perspectives are not included and why might that matter?
 - d. Find one statistic and one anecdote from the piece. How did each shape your understanding differently?
 - e. How might this global health story connect to or contrast with health inequities closer to home?

Group Discussion

1. Instruct students to answer the following questions in pairs or small groups
 - a. Who are the main women or families we meet in the article? What disabilities do they have?
 - b. How do hospital workers talk to or treat these women? Give two specific examples.
 - c. What problems do disabled mothers face when they try to get care during pregnancy or birth?
 - d. What does the word “dehumanizing” mean in the context of these hospitals?
 - e. What solutions or changes does the article suggest, either directly or indirectly?

Day 2: Understanding Intersectionality

Anchor Quote (A famous quote to think about that connects the text to real life)

Allow students 5 minutes to reflect on the Anchor Quote: “The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman.” — Malcolm X

Do Now

Students share answers to the following question: “What happens when a health care system ignores part of a person’s identity, such as race or gender?”

Framing:

Yesterday, we saw how environmental racism impacts Malawi. Today, we turn to our own nation, where Black mothers and babies face life-or-death health outcomes. Intersectionality helps us see why. You will examine how journalism exposes the crisis and reflect on what these stories mean for Memphis.

Remember your job today is to read like investigators. Look for:

- Who is harmed?
- Who benefits?
- Who gets to speak?
- Who (What voices) is missing from the article or coverage?”

Key Question: How do national systems reproduce inequities similar to global patterns?

Independent Writing

1. Students reread the Black Maternal Health article and complete a [Speaker Lens Chart](#)

Classroom Jigsaw

1. Students will rotate in groups as they investigate the following supporting materials:
 - a. **Station 1: View Linda Villarosa – “Stunning Investigation Confirms Black Mothers and Babies in the U.S. Are in a Life-or-Death Crisis” (Video)**
 - i. Use a “Speaker Lens” chart: Columns for Claim, Evidence, Emotion, Call to Action.
 - ii. Note any unfamiliar medical/social terms (e.g., “maternal mortality rate,” “implicit bias,” “allostatic load”) and look them up after viewing.
 - iii. Pause at key moments to write down: “What question does this raise in my mind?”
 - iv. Comprehension & analysis questions:
 1. What central claim does Villarosa (or the piece) make about the health crisis facing Black mothers and babies in the U.S.?
 2. What evidence (data, research, personal story) is used to support that claim?
 3. How does the speaker use personal stories (or images) to make the audience feel the issue and not just to know it?
 4. Where did you spot bias, assumption or gap in the coverage? What might be missing or under-explored?
 - v. Thinking locally: How could the issues raised apply in a city like Memphis? What would you want to investigate further?
 - b. **Station 2: View. Kimberlé Crenshaw – “The Urgency of Intersectionality” (TED Talk)**

- i. As students watch, they complete a “Key Concepts & Examples” chart: Column 1 = Concept (e.g., intersectionality, structural oppression), Column 2 = Example Crenshaw uses, Column 3 = How it applies to health inequities.
- ii. Write down one question: “If this concept is true, what would change in healthcare for minority women?”
- c. **Station 3: “[Disabled Women Struggle for Dignified Care During Pregnancy](#)”**
 - i. Students read and discuss
 1. Who? (Which woman or group is the focus?)
 2. Problem? (What barrier or mistreatment do they face?)
 3. Impact? (What happens to them or their baby because of this?)

Exit Ticket

Students respond in writing to the following questions:

- Explain intersectionality with accuracy.
- How does environmental racism operate globally and locally?
- How do environmental conditions in Malawi mirror inequities in Memphis?
- How can youth storytelling and data help drive awareness towards action?
- How do global health policies and local inequities intersect for minority women?

Day 3: Outlining Presentations

Anchor Quote & Reflection

“Art is not what you see, but what you make others see.” — Edgar Degas

- Students Respond: What truth about health inequity do you want your audience to “see”?

Do Now

1. Students respond to the prompt: “What matters more in advocacy: evidence or emotion? Why?”

Framing

You have explored Malawi, Zambia, the U.S., and Memphis. Today, you turn evidence into advocacy. Your writing and art will educate the community, spark empathy and push for solutions. You are the journalist, poet, storyteller and activist in one today. What story will you tell for the symposium and your community?

Key Question: How can youth storytelling shift public understanding of health inequities?

Independent Writing

- Students review the [Project Instructions](#) and pick their project for assessment:
 - Option 1: Op-Ed (500–700 words)
 - Required structure:
 - Hook
 - Claim
 - Evidence

- Human Story
 - Call to Action
- An op-ed is an opinion based educational essay that blends facts and emotion to persuade an audience to action or to care. You may write it on Malawi or Connect Malawi to Memphis environmental issues that affect maternity and children mortality rates.
- Option 2 – Spoken Word/Audio Poem/Song (60–90 sec)
 - Required elements:
 - Data integrated into rhythm
 - Repetition as emphasis
 - Concrete image with an emotional plea
 - Students can use music to articulate a message. Music is used worldwide to increase awareness and create calls to action.
- Option 3 – Infographic
 - Required elements:
 - Memphis-specific data
 - Visual clarity
 - QR link to source
 - 1-sentence claim
 - Students can create an infographic. A strong infographic will have specific data, a clear visual with multiple verified and cited sources!

Work Time

Students work on their projects, checking in with peers and the teacher for support as needed.

Exit Ticket

Students respond in writing to the following questions:

- Which part of your project most strongly communicates your claim?
- What evidence are you using and why?
- How do you want your audience to feel or do after viewing your piece?

Day 4: Refining Presentations

Peer Presentations

Students take turns presenting their projects to classmates during the period. After presentations they incorporate feedback from their peers as they prepare for the larger symposium.

Performance Task(s)

Students finalize and present their op-ed, poem or infographic as part of “Bodies We Forget: A Youth Report on Health Equity Symposium”

Deliverables marry factual evidence with personal storytelling, echoing the Possible Project’s “evidence meeting emotion” ethos

Assessment

Students were assessed by an authentic assessment by creating an art advocacy campaign using an (op-Ed, poem/music, and/or infographic) articulated their learning by:

1. Connect global injustice to questions about local health systems.
2. Use facts and stories to move an audience's heart and mind.
3. Offer a realistic, respectful call to action.
4. Show they understand what is happening to disabled mothers in Malawi.

1. Understanding of Content

- **4 – Exceeds:** Shows deep understanding of disabled mothers' experiences and health inequities in Malawi; facts are accurate and well-chosen.
- **3 – Meets:** Shows clear understanding with mostly accurate facts and examples.
- **2 – Developing:** Shows partial or surface understanding; some confusion or missing details.
- **1 – Beginning:** Limited understanding; information is vague or inaccurate.

2. Global-Local Connection

- **4:** Clearly connects Malawi reporting to local or U.S. health experiences with specific examples.
- **3:** Makes at least one clear connection.
- **2:** Mentions a connection but does not explain it well.
- **1:** No clear connection.

3. Communication & Creativity

- **4:** Message is powerful, well-organized, and engaging (strong voice, visuals, or structure).
- **3:** Message is clear and organized.
- **2:** Message is uneven or hard to follow in places.
- **1:** Message is unclear or incomplete.

4. Use of Evidence

- **4:** Uses multiple accurate facts or quotes from the Malawi project; sources are acknowledged.
- **3:** Uses at least one accurate fact or quote.
- **2:** Uses limited or unclear evidence.
- **1:** Uses little to no evidence.

5. Call to Action / Impact

- **4:** Includes a clear, realistic, and inspiring call to action for improving dignity in health care.
- **3:** Includes a clear call to action.
- **2:** Call to action is vague or overly general.
- **1:** No call to action.

Students presented their projects in their class periods. During the symposium the highest projects in each class period had the opportunity to present school wide as a representative for their class period. The class period then supported their “learning champion” to present the best possible learning.