



Teaching Strategies for Navigating Difficult Conversations in the Classroom

Let your students know that your classroom is a safe space. Begin with acknowledgement. This is not a moment to go straight to the “head” or to cognitive work. Give your students a few moments to reflect, to [write some of their feelings and questions](#). They could then share these with a peer.

If you have not created [a classroom contract](#), this is a good time to do so. It is your social contract, the rules you decide together that keep your classroom safe so that all students can freely participate with respect.

Do an activity that is focused on acknowledgment and commemoration. Have students think about the ways that people and events are remembered and memorialized. Give them art supplies--clay or markers and crayons and paper. Allow them to create something from their imaginations. For some students, they might choose to create a poem or a song. You know them by now, give them the opportunity to express themselves.

After they have had some opportunity to process these events affectively, you might help them to begin to wrestle with what happened. Perhaps [begin with a K-W-L chart](#). Help students distinguish myth and misinformation.

This activity will help you to think of other lessons that you need. You might, for example, explore stereotyping and the way that the actions of a group of extremists can be conflated with those of others who have nothing to do with these horrific crimes. We urge you to focus on discussion over debate, or potentially pitting students against each other. Activities such as [save the last word for me](#) and [learn to listen, listen to learn](#) are particularly useful. It is important that multiple points of view can be heard and respected.