

PERSONAL STATEMENT



CURRICULUM UNIT

Contents

OVERVIEW.....	2
RATIONALE	2
MATERIALS	2
LESSON ONE.....	4
LESSON TWO	7
LESSON THREE	8
#WeBelongInCollege Storyboard Outline Worksheet.....	12
Storyboard Outline Worksheet	13
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).....	14
Crafting your own #WeBelongInCollege story.....	15
LESSON FOUR.....	16
APPENDIX 1 - MORE INFORMATION ON THE RESEARCH.....	18
APPENDIX 2- STANDARDS FOR THIS UNIT	19
APPENDIX 3 - #WeBelongInCollege SIGN.....	20

OVERVIEW

Intended for: Students in high school and college

Number of Lessons in Unit: 4

RATIONALE

The #WeBelongInCollege campaign and this curriculum was inspired by research that proved that students can help other students get to and through college by sharing their stories and advice. By hearing stories from other students about a time when they struggled during the college process and as a result, questioned whether they belonged, students come to understand that all students struggle. By gaining this knowledge, they won't be plagued by doubts about whether they belong in college when they encounter the inevitable challenges that arise.

The research also found that messages are most powerfully absorbed when students share their own stories in order to help others. (In fact, in two studies, they cut the achievement gap in half!)

That's why, in addition to sharing the stories of the students in the PERSONAL STATEMENT film, the curriculum also engages students in creating and sharing their own stories that describe how they managed to persist and came to feel that they do belong in college.

Through the curriculum, students will learn strategies to overcome challenges and will gain an increased sense of belonging that will equip them to persist to and through college or whatever other post-secondary goals they set for themselves.

MATERIALS

In order to use this Curriculum Unit, you need:

- A copy of the PERSONAL STATEMENT film

If you want to use this Curriculum Unit, you can request a DVD or streaming link of the film [here](https://gooddocs.net/products/personal-statement?_pos=1&_sid=20984fd0c&_ss=r):
https://gooddocs.net/products/personal-statement?_pos=1&_sid=20984fd0c&_ss=r

If you don't have a copy of the film or you don't have enough time to show the film, you can still engage your students in creating their own #WeBelongInCollege stories using the #WeBelongInCollege Lesson Plan that you can find [here](#):

https://519bded1-0c9f-4948-8559-5e2dfa1d4715.filesusr.com/ugd/2372da_c62ab97d64f84984a2a112b839c27978.pdf

- A monitor or projector and sound system to screen the film
- Internet access so that you can access:
 - » the #WeBelongInCollege website, which can be found [here](https://www.personalstatementfilm.com/webelongincollege):
<https://www.personalstatementfilm.com/webelongincollege>

- Pen and paper for each participant
- Smart phones or other devices to create video posts
- Copies of the storyboard outline worksheet and handout sheet “Tips for Creating a #WeBelongInCollege Story” for each student (You can also project the tips from the curriculum deck on a Smart board.)
- The Curriculum Deck we have created includes links to the videos, documents and sites referred to and includes the questions and activities for the entire unit. The curriculum deck (slides), can be downloaded [here:](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1d7zoesVpg-GZfTiKXsodTud79DJzLuwZLs2C49Leo8Q/edit#slide=id.p37)
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1d7zoesVpg-GZfTiKXsodTud79DJzLuwZLs2C49Leo8Q/edit#slide=id.p37>
- A few copies of the #WeBelongInCollege sign, which is included in Appendix 3

LESSON ONE

Introducing the #WeBelongInCollege Campaign (10 minutes)

The process of applying to and getting through college and other post-secondary education and training programs can be overwhelming and scary for many students. That's why, for the next four periods, we're going to be working on a unit called #WeBelongInCollege.

The #WeBelongInCollege campaign was inspired by research that proved that students can help other students by sharing their stories and advice about how to overcome the challenges they encounter while applying to and getting through college.

Let's watch a short video about the #WeBelongInCollege campaign, called "Can sharing your story change the world?" (1 minute, 40 seconds).

Please note, a link to this video and all of the videos, tools, sites, questions and activities for the entire unit are included in the curriculum deck that you can download [here](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1d7zoesVpg-GZfTiKXsodTud79DjzLuwZls2C49Leo8Q/edit#slide=id.p1): <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1d7zoesVpg-GZfTiKXsodTud79DjzLuwZls2C49Leo8Q/edit#slide=id.p1>

The video features Enoch Jemmott, who is one of the main characters in the film, PERSONAL STATEMENT, that we will also watch as part of this unit.

The video can be found [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=XB4GMlgCE7s&feature=emb_logo): https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=XB4GMlgCE7s&feature=emb_logo

Questions: (Call on a few students to answer each question. When necessary, consider speaking from your personal experience to get your students started.)

In the video, Enoch says that in two studies, the achievement gap was cut in half for the students who participated. Do you know what the achievement gap refers to?

- The achievement gap refers to differences in academic performance between different groups of students. For example, in the United States, there is an achievement gap in the attainment of bachelor's degrees: only 9 percent of people in the lowest income quartile attain a bachelor's degree by the time they turn 24, compared to 77 percent from the highest income quartile.

What is your reaction to this statistic?

- In one of the studies Enoch is referring to, they cut the GPA achievement gap in half. In another, they cut in half the number of students who were at risk of dropping out of college.
- There are many systemic barriers that contribute to the higher education achievement gap. (Systemic barriers are patterns, policies, practices and systems that create or perpetuate disadvantages for certain groups.) Some of the systemic barriers that need to be addressed to close the higher ed achievement gap include the high cost of college, limited access to college guidance and an inequitable K-12 public education system. But this research indicates that we can also close the achievement gap by helping students increase their sense of belonging.

What is your reaction to this? How is it possible that a students' sense of belonging can make such a big difference?

- Has it ever been helpful for you to learn that someone else experienced something similar to you? Explain why it was helpful to hear someone else's story. This could be a story you read or saw in a movie or heard from someone you know personally.
- Have you ever helped someone else by sharing your story? How did it help the other person?

As part of this unit, you will create and share your own #WeBelongInCollege stories to help other students persist to and through college. Together, by sharing your stories, you can help close the achievement gap in higher education in our country. But first, we'll learn from three students who shared their stories in the documentary film, PERSONAL STATEMENT.

Introducing the PERSONAL STATEMENT film

Engage the class with a show-of-hands survey:

“Raise your hand if graduating from college or another kind of post-secondary training program is one of your goals in life.”

“Raise your hand if you’ve ever been overwhelmed by thinking about the college process and all of the things you need to do to get into and/or through college.”

“Raise your hand if you’d like to hear from other students who felt the same way and learn how they managed to persist.”

Activity:

Now we are going to start watching the film PERSONAL STATEMENT. In the film, three students share their stories of how they struggled to get themselves and their classmates to college. (Watch the first half of PERSONAL STATEMENT, or as much as time allows, depending on the length of your class period. Leave time for the reflection.)

Reflection:

(13 minutes)

Take 3 minutes to individually reflect on your reaction to the film and what has resonated with you so far, writing down your thoughts.

Now share your reflections in groups of three (5 minutes).

Who wants to share out with the entire class (5 minutes)?

LESSON TWO

Introduction:

Yesterday we watched the beginning of PERSONAL STATEMENT. Today we'll watch the rest and dive more into your thoughts regarding the film and your ability to persist to and through college.

Activity:

Show the rest of the film.

Reflection:

The film was really powerful and eye opening to me. Take out your paper with your reflections about the first half of the film. I'd like all of you to work individually and take about 5 minutes to think about the film and write down your answers to the following questions. (5 minutes)

Questions: (10 minutes)

1. What resonated with you? What were you able to identify with or relate to from the film?
2. Did seeing the students in the film struggling and overcoming challenges affect you in any way? If so, how?
3. Would you want to have a similar opportunity to help your peers reach for their college dreams?
4. In addition to answering these questions, write down one or more questions you have after seeing this film.

In groups of two or three, share your reflections and questions. You'll have about 5 minutes.

Would anyone like to share their thoughts with the class? (Call on a few students to answer each question, 5 minutes.)

LESSON THREE

Introduction: (5 minutes)

We've watched PERSONAL STATEMENT and talked about your feelings regarding the college process. The most important thing to remember is that even though the students in the film faced obstacles, they persisted, and you can too.

Today we'll start working on our own #WeBelongInCollege stories.

As we heard from Enoch Jemmott in the short video we watched on the first day of this unit, research has proven that by sharing your own story of persistence, you can help other students understand that even though we all struggle, we belong in college.

In fact, in one study, the disadvantaged students "cut the gap between themselves and the advantaged students in half."

Please note: you can read more about the research that inspired the #WeBelongInCollege campaign in Appendix 1 below or on the campaign website [here](https://www.personalstatementfilm.com/the-research-that-inspired-the-camp):
<https://www.personalstatementfilm.com/the-research-that-inspired-the-camp>

(While there may not be time for students to read further about the research in class, you might want to read it in advance of the lesson in case they have questions about it.)

Activity: (5 – 10 minutes)

Now we'll watch a [compilation video](#) that includes excerpts from a bunch of different #WeBelongInCollege stories as well as [one made by Karoline Jimenez](#) about applying to college and [one by Enoch Jemmott](#) about getting through college. Watch with a pen and paper so that you can jot down notes about one thing that resonates with you from each video.

(If you have enough time, you can show additional example #WeBelongInCollege videos. Take some time while preparing the lesson to watch the other example videos on the website, which you can find [here](#):
<https://www.personalstatementfilm.com/example-webelongincollege-stories-d>
Select additional videos to share that will resonate especially strongly with your students.)

Questions: (5 minutes)

1. Why do you think students question whether they belong in college?
2. Why do you think it is important that students feel that they belong? How does a sense of belonging affect a student's reaction when they encounter the inevitable struggles that arise during the college application process and/or while they are in college?

Tools and tips for creating your own #WeBelongInCollege story (10 minutes)

Now each of you is going to start to craft your own #WeBelongInCollege story.

(Distribute and review the handout sheet “Tips for Creating a #WeBelongInCollege Story” and the storyboard outline worksheet that are both included below.

Also below are the questions that are included in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the #WeBelongInCollege website. You may choose to review those questions and answers as well, or you may choose to simply let your students know how to find that section of the website.

You can project the Tips for Creating a #WeBelongInCollege Story and the storyboard outline worksheet from the [curriculum deck](#) while you review them with the class.)

Tips for Creating a #WeBelongInCollege Story

- *Tell a story about a time when you struggled and as a result, questioned whether you belonged, either while applying to college OR when you were in college.
- *Explain how you managed to persist and how you came to believe that you do belong in college. If you are still struggling and still questioning whether you belong in college, explain how you are dealing with it.
- *Try to share coping strategies that you think will be helpful to other students who are also struggling with similar issues.
- *Great stories have a beginning, middle and end. For this post:
 - the beginning is the struggle that made you question if you belong;
 - the middle is how you handled it (or are trying to handle it) and how you have come to believe that you do belong in college;
 - the end can be a direct message to other students who might encounter similar challenges, sharing advice so they can learn from your experience.
- *Use the [storyboard outline worksheet](#) that is included below and on the [#WeBelongInCollege website](#) to plan out your #WeBelongInCollege post.
- *Once you have written down your story on the storyboard worksheet, summarize the key points from the sentences for each section into very short bullet points on the back of the storyboard worksheet. The bullet points should be a word or phrase that will remind you of the key points in your story.
- *When recording your story, refer to the bullet points instead of reading the sentences. Referring to the bullet points (instead of the sentences) will help you tell your story in an engaging, conversational way, instead of simply reading out loud when you record your story.
- *As you create your post, remember that it's important for students to know that they are not alone: we all struggle, we all have doubts, but we all belong in college.
- *Try to speak in a conversational way, like you're telling a close friend your story.
- *Film with your phone placed horizontally on a flat surface in a well-lit, quiet place.
- *It helps to keep your post relatively short. Short posts are more likely to be viewed or read in full and are much easier to post on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Posts under two minutes or one page are recommended.
- *You can make as many posts as you'd like, but have each post be about one particular time when you questioned if you belonged or one type of challenge you faced.
- *You can share your story as a video or as a written post. If you choose to share a written post, it would be awesome if you would post it alongside a picture of yourself holding up a sign with the #WeBelongInCollege hashtag (you can print the sign that is included at the end of this document). But if you don't want to include your photo, that is absolutely fine!
- *For inspiration and ideas, go to the #WeBelongInCollege website to [watch additional #WeBelongInCollege story videos](#):
<https://www.personalstatementfilm.com/example-webelongincollege-stories-d>
- *Here is a question that might help you create your post:
Have any of the following ever gotten in the way of your college process?

- money problems?
- family obligations?
- how you feel about yourself?
- procrastination?
- your mental health?
- standardized, high stakes tests (SAT, Regents, ACT, AP, etc.)?
- language barriers?
- bias based on your personal identity (gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, abilities)?
- where you live?
- limited academic opportunities and resources at your high school or in your community?
- a disability that was not appropriately accommodated?
- friends and/or family?
- the culture at your high school, community or home/family?
- people's judgements?

#WeBelongInCollege Storyboard Outline Worksheet

Choose and outline the story you want to tell:

The beginning - Tell a story about a time when you struggled and as a result, questioned whether you belonged either while applying to college OR when you were in college:

The middle - Explain how you managed to persist and came to believe that you DO belong in college:

The end - What do you hope other students will learn from your story? What advice do you want to give others so they too can persist when they encounter similar challenges? You can also talk about how important it is for students to know that they are not alone. We need to remember that we ALL struggle, so when we do, we won't question whether we belong because we ALL belong in college!

In case you are having trouble figuring out what story to tell, here is a list of some of the kinds of challenges that people face during the college process:

money problems, housing insecurity, food scarcity

- family obligations
- lack of support and resources
- health, mental health, disability
- standardized, high stakes tests (SAT, Regents, ACT, AP, etc.)
- fear
- bias based on your personal identity (gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, abilities)
- the culture of your school and/or community
- limited academic preparation, opportunities, support and/or resources
- navigating financial aid and other bureaucratic systems
- personal and/or family problems
- cultural barriers

Storyboard Outline Worksheet

Page 2

Summarize the key points from the sentences on page 1 of this worksheet into very short bullet points. The bullet points should be a word or phrase that will remind you of the key points in your story. When you record your story, refer to the bullet points instead of the sentences.

Beginning - a time when I struggled and questioned if I belong:

-
-
-

Middle – how I managed to persist:

-
-
-

End – what I hope you will take away from my story:

-
-
-

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

You can find answers to frequently asked questions about creating your own #WeBelongInCollege stories in the [FAQ section of #WeBelongInCollege website](#):

<https://www.personalstatementfilm.com/create-a-webelongincollege-story>

These questions include:

- [Does my #WeBelongInCollege story have to be a video?](#)
- [How long should my #WeBelongInCollege post be?](#)
- [Do you have any technical tips for making a video post?](#)
- [How many #WeBelongInCollege stories can I share?](#)
- [Can I make a #WeBelongInCollege story if I have not yet started the college application process?](#)
- [Can I make a #WeBelongInCollege story if I am not even sure if I want to go to college?](#)
- [Can I make a #WeBelongInCollege story about a challenge I am currently dealing with, even if I haven't yet figured out how to handle it?](#)
- [Can I make a #WeBelongInCollege story if I am attending or planning on attending a vocational training program after high school?](#)
- [What if I can't come up with an idea for a #WeBelongInCollege story?](#)

Crafting your own #WeBelongInCollege story

Ask students if they have any questions about creating their own #WeBelongInCollege stories.

- Take 5 – 10 minutes to work by yourself and think about a time, either when you were going through the college process or (for college students) when you were in college, when you struggled and as a result, questioned whether you belonged in college. Think about how you managed to (or are trying to) overcome that doubt and to believe that you do belong in college. Outline the story you want to share using the storyboard outline worksheet. (5 – 10 minutes)
- Once you have written down your story on the storyboard worksheet, translate your sentences into bullet points on the back of the storyboard worksheet. (5 minutes)
- If you are stuck and need additional inspiration, and if time allows, check out some of the other [#WeBelongInCollege story videos](#) on the website:

<https://www.personalstatementfilm.com/example-webelongincollege-stories-d>

Sharing: (15 minutes)

- Have a few students share their story ideas.
- Now turn to a partner and share what you plan to post, and learn about your partner's planned post. You'll have about 10 minutes to give each other feedback. You can refer to the tips for creating a #WeBelongInCollege post. Remember, your post should be about a time when you struggled and questioned if you belong and how you overcame that and came to believe that you do belong in college.
- After receiving feedback from your partner, you can revise your story and the bullet points you will use to guide you when you record it.

Assignment: (3 minutes)

Now we are ready to actually create our own #WeBelongInCollege stories. If you have a smartphone you can use, create your video post between now and our next class. It is best to hold or place the phone down (so the image is stable) horizontally and to record your story in a quiet location. If you have decided to create a written post instead, write your post before our next class. Remember, you can go to the #WeBelongInCollege campaign website to check out additional sample posts for inspiration.

Remember that it might take you more than one try to get your thoughts across clearly in the video, and that's okay! Watching yourself and then re-filming based on what you learned from your previous attempts will help you make sure that you are sharing a concise story that still covers the beginning, middle, and end, including takeaways for other students.

(If you don't want to ask students to create their posts as homework, you can instead have them create their posts at the beginning of the next class. However, if you go that route, you will need to find a quiet place for each student to create their posts, since the video posts will only be effective if the audio is clear and that requires recording them in a place with no background noise.)

LESSON FOUR

Introduction:

In our last class we spoke about how hearing people's stories of persistence helps everyone to succeed, and you prepared a story that you want to share. Today you'll get feedback from a partner on your #WeBelongInCollege post. Then you will complete and share your own #WeBelongInCollege stories.

Activity:

- Now turn to a partner and share your post and watch or read theirs. (If there are students who did not have a chance to create their posts yet, have them find a quiet place to create their posts. These students can then work in pairs to share feedback.) You'll have about 10 minutes to give each other feedback. You can give each other feedback on both form (if it is a video: is there enough light on your face, is the audio loud enough, are you speaking too fast, is it easy to hear and understand?) and content (Is there a clear beginning, middle and end, is more or less detail needed?) Feel free to ask other peers for additional feedback. Take detailed notes on the feedback you receive. (10 minutes)
- Now that you have received feedback on your post, you might want to create a new version of your post that you will actually share on social media to help other students. Review the notes you took with the feedback you received. If you want to create a new post, first revise the bullet points that you will use to guide you when you re-record your story. (10 minutes)
- Find a quiet place to re-record your story or to revise your written post. (10 minutes)
- Now turn to a partner and share your new post and watch or read theirs. Decide whether you are satisfied with your post or whether you want to try again to create an even better post. (10 minutes)
- Once your post is ready, share your #WeBelongInCollege post on social media using the hashtag #WeBelongInCollege so that other students can find it and benefit from it.
- If you've decided to create a written post, consider posting it with a photo of you. If you can, take a photo of you holding a sign with the hashtag #WeBelongInCollege that we have included below in Appendix 3.

Remember that everyone will make one post, but you can make multiple posts if you have several stories to share.

Reflection & Sharing: (5 minutes)

- Who will share how it made you feel to create your post?
- How do you think your story might inspire other students?
- How will this experience help you to persist when you face your next challenge?
- What else can you and your classmates do to help other students realize that they DO belong in college?

Remember to spread the word about the #WeBelongInCollege campaign! Feel free to make and post more videos if you have additional stories you'd like to share in order to inspire other students and remind yourself that you can overcome any obstacle! Tag everyone you know who might benefit from participating in the #WeBelongInCollege campaign!

APPENDIX 1– MORE INFORMATION ON THE RESEARCH

Information on the research that inspired this campaign:

The article, [Who Gets To Graduate](#), by Paul Tough describes the research that inspired this campaign.

The lead researchers are David Yeager & Greg Walton at the University of Austin.

Here are some excerpts from the article:

The researchers found that, “students were often blocked from living up to their potential by the presence of certain fears and anxieties and doubts about their ability...It is only students facing the particular fears and anxieties and experiences of exclusion that come with being a minority — whether by race or by class — who are susceptible to this problem. Those students often misinterpret temporary setbacks as a permanent indication that they can’t succeed or don’t belong... And when, six months or two years later, the germs of self-doubt try to infect them, the lingering effect of the intervention allows them to shrug off those doubts exactly the way the advantaged students do.”

“...Doubts about belonging and doubts about ability often fed on each other, and together they created a sense of helplessness.”

“... In a series of experiments, they found that certain targeted messages, delivered to students in the right way at the right time, seemed to overcome the doubts about belonging and ability that were undermining the students’ academic potential.”

“And positive messages are more effectively absorbed when they are experienced through what Walton called “self-persuasion”: if students watch a video or read an essay with a particular message and then write their own essay or make their own video to persuade future students, they internalize the message more deeply.”

“... In one experiment ...The upperclassmen conveyed in their own words a simple message about belonging: “When I got here, I thought I was the only one who felt left out. But then I found out that everyone feels that way at first, and everyone gets over it. I got over it, too.” After reading the essays, the students in the experiment then wrote their own essays and made videos for future students, echoing the same message. The whole intervention took no more than an hour... it had a transformative effect on the college careers of the African-American students in the study: Compared with a control group, the experiment tripled the percentage of black students who earned G.P.A.s in the top quarter of their class, and it cut in half the black-white achievement gap in G.P.A. It even had an impact on the students’ health — the black students who received the belonging message had significantly fewer doctor visits three years after the intervention.”

In another study, the disadvantaged students “cut the gap between themselves and the advantaged students in half ..all from a one-time intervention that took 45 minutes to complete.”

[Here is more information](#) on the research.

APPENDIX 2 - STANDARDS FOR THIS UNIT

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6	Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3	Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.
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Production and Distribution of Writing:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Range of Writing:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.10	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
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College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2	Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5	Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

**# WE BELONG
IN COLLEGE**

WE BELONG IN COLLEGE

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PERSONAL STATEMENT
An Emmy nominated feature-length documentary film