

Curriculum Resource Guide

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for

***What the Eyes Don't See:
A Story of Crisis, Resistance, and Hope in an American City***
by
Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha

“These kids need to fix all our problems. Our kids need to know these histories to better serve and lead.” -Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha

Dear Teachers,

This unit was born in our 7th grade classes at Moses Brown School in Providence, Rhode Island. After teaching a racial justice unit connected to our reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in Maureen's English class and a water unit in Katie's science class, we Skyped with Dr. Mona to understand the connections to the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. Her passion for children inspired us and our students to want to learn even more. We read her book and knew we needed to bring her to Rhode Island. Here you will find a variety of articles and ideas for lessons, which we hope you would be able to adapt to your content area, age group, and amount of time you have available. We know you will find inspiration in the pages of her book and hope these resources can help bring her message into your classrooms too.

Happy Reading!

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English Content Support:

In a perfect world we would have weeks to fully bring this novel to life in our classrooms, but understanding time restrictions, we've selected key chapters as focus areas. For each of the three chosen themes (personal journey, community crisis, injustice/activism), you will find two related chapters, the first as an introduction to the theme, and the second to dig deeper into it. For each chapter, we've included guiding questions: activation questions to introduce the topic, text-dependent questions for building comprehension, followed by personal connection questions to help students bring relevance to the material.

Personal Journey: Theme Introduction

Prologue: How I Got My Name

Activation Questions:

1. What does your name mean to you? Do you have a story of where your name came from? Spend time researching your name online and share what you find out.
2. Dr. Mona tells us that “We have the power to fix things” (13). What is a problem you see in your neighborhood, school, or another community you belong to? Describe this problem and offer an idea of how you can open other people’s eyes to this problem.
3. What is resilience? Who do you know that’s shown resilience? Think of characters in books, on tv shows, or people you know in your life. When was a time where you showed resilience?

Text-Dependent Questions:

1. Dr. Mona writes that “Iraq is a land of enchantment and despair” (5). How is it a land of enchantment for her? How is it a land of despair?
2. Despite their deep love of their country, Dr. Mona’s family does not return to Iraq. Why not?
3. Why does Dr. Mona tell the story of the car accident on pages 11-12?

Personal Connections Questions:

1. For Dr. Mona, her family’s Iraqi culture means a lot to her. What is your family culture and where do you see this culture alive in your life?
2. Dr. Mona writes, “this is the story about the deeper crises we’re facing right now in our country: a breakdown in democracy; the disintegration of critical infrastructure due to inequality and austerity; environmental injustice that disproportionately affects the poor and black; the abandonment of civic responsibility and our deep obligations as human beings to care and provide for one another” (13). Do you agree? Support your answer with examples you see from your own life.
3. Dr. Mona tells us that the everyday heroes in her story are the people of Flint, Michigan. Who is an everyday hero of your life? What qualities do they possess that makes them a hero?

Extension Activity: Write a letter to your everyday hero. Explain why they are a hero to you and how they inspire you.

Personal Journey: Dig Deeper

Chapter 19: The Press Conference

Activation Questions:

1. When have you had to give a presentation or speech for an audience? What does it feel like before, during and after? Do you think these feelings are common? Why?
2. Imagine you were going to give a presentation about something you have been working on for a long time and care deeply about. What would your main message be and what prop would you use to drive home this message?
3. If you were going to give a presentation to an audience, who is one person you'd really want to have in your audience and why?

Text-Dependent Questions:

1. Explain how Dr. Mona's boss Melany supported her. Why was this support important?
2. Who is Dr. Mona seeing as the conference room fills? How is the crowd making her feel?
3. Why does Mona use the props of the baby bottle and formula? What do these symbolize?

Personal Connections Questions:

1. On page 199, Dr. Mona writes, "I was under the gun again." Describe a time when you felt "under the gun", when time and pressure combined to make completing a task extra challenging. How successful were you in completing your task? What helped, and if you weren't as successful, what do you think could have been helpful?
2. Dr. Mona writes, "The world shouldn't be comprised of people in boxes, minding their own business. It should be full of people raising their voices, using their power and presence, standing up for what's right. Minding one another's business." Do you agree? Why or why not? Give a specific example to support your answer.
3. After the press conference, Dr. Mona describes a feeling of euphoria, even if this feeling was all too fleeting. Have you ever felt a sense of euphoria after being successful with something you'd been working at for a long time?

Extension Activity: What's an issue that you care deeply about? Create a short presentation about the issue. What is it? What is causing the issue? What effects are resulting from it? What solution can you propose?

Community Crisis: Theme Introduction

Chapter 1: What the Eyes Don't See

Activation Questions:

1. Look at Dr. Mona's picture on page 16. What do you notice? About her? Her office? Specific objects? If you were going to write a memoir of your life right now, describe what your photo would look like. What would you wear? Where would it be? What objects would you include?
2. Brainstorm all the ways you use and consume water in your life.
3. Do you think access to clean, safe water is a human right? Do you think all Rhode Islanders have access to clean, safe water? Do you know where your water comes from and where the nearest water treatment facilities are to your home and school?

Text-Dependent Questions:

1. "It's easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." Why does Dr. Mona quote Frederick Douglass on page 20?
2. Dr. Mona tells us that ACEs are "the most important concept in pediatrics and public health today" (25). Define ACEs, give two examples, and explain why they are so important for doctors.
3. Why did the state of Michigan decide to switch the source of water for Flint residents? What did residents experience after the water switch?

Personal Connections Questions:

1. Have you ever experienced a lack of access to clean, safe water? If not, can you imagine how your life would change if you lost access to clean, safe water?
2. Dr. Mona quotes the poet D.H. Lawrence who wrote, "The eyes don't see what the mind doesn't know." What does this quotation mean to you? Have you ever had such an experience, when having knowledge about a topic helped you "see" something important?
3. Dr. Mona explains how crucial it is that all of her residents tour the city of Flint in order to understand their patients. If a doctor was moving to your city or town and you volunteered to give them a tour, what stops would you make, why? Who would you want them to meet, why?

Extension Activity: Research Henrietta Lacks and/or the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. Who was involved? What happened to them? Why? What injustice did they face? Why are their stories crucial to understanding issues of medical ethics today?

Community Crisis: Dig Deeper

Chapter 9: Sit Down

Activation Questions:

1. As an individual, how much and in what ways are you and your family dependent on automobiles? As a society, how much and in what ways are we dependent on automobiles? Could you imagine a world without automobiles?
2. How important is it to you that we live in a country where the people elect its officials? Do you plan on voting? Why? Why not? If you're over 18, have you voted and what has your voting experience been like?
3. A "strike" happens when workers are deeply dissatisfied and concerned about how their employers are treating them. Do you know of any current or historic strikes? Brainstorm a list of grievances workers may hold against an employer.

Text-Dependent Questions:

1. Why was housing segregated in Flint?
2. What is a sit-down strike? List all the causes of the Flint Sit-Down Strike of 1936.
3. How was Genora Johnson Dollinger "fundamental" to the success of the strike?

Personal Connections Questions:

1. Because Flint was bankrupt, the governor installed an Emergency Manager whose main responsibility was "extreme austerity." The EM is not an elected official, but one chosen by the governor. What effect do you think it would have on a city population to have an appointed mayor instead of an elected official?
2. Dr. Mona writes, "It was in Flint that the middle class, and some would say the American Dream, was truly born" (124). What is the American Dream today?
3. Dr. Mona wrote of Governor Frank Murphy, "The more I learned about [him] the more I loved him" (125). Who is someone like this for you? They may be a historic figure or someone in your own life.

Extension Activity: Research a current or historic strike. What caused it? What methods did workers use to strike? Was the strike successful? Why or why not?

Injustice/Activism: Theme Introduction

Chapter 3: The Valedictorian

Activation Questions:

1. "You can do this" is one way a friend can be supportive. When was a time you saw someone like a character in book, on a show, or in real life hear an affirmation like this that helped them work through self-doubt or low self-confidence?
2. If you could start a new club at your school, what would it be for, and why do you and your peers need this club?
3. Research the history of lead. How have humans used it? Do we still use it today?

Text-Dependent Questions:

1. What exactly is problematic about a lack of "corrosion control" in Flint's drinking water?
2. What happens to children exposed to lead?
3. Describe Dr. Mona's activism work during high school. What happened as a result of her club's efforts?

Personal Connections Questions:

1. Elin Betanzo and Dr. Mona share a deep bond of environmental activism. Make a list of things you and your friends bond over, then circle the ones that are most important to your friendship.
2. Dr. Mona wrote, "*Lead in the water*. Now that I knew the truth, I couldn't un-know it. I could only go forward." Have you ever experienced a time when you learned a "truth" that compelled you to take action?
3. What environmental issues do we face in Rhode Island? What groups are working to find solutions to these issues? Do you belong to any, or are there any that you care about that you would want to join?

Extension Activity: Write a proposal for a new club at your school. Include why you and your peers need this club, what you will do during club meetings, what events you will plan, and be sure to explain your role as the club leader.

Injustice/Activism: Dig Deeper

Chapter 14: Environmental Injustice

Activation Questions:

1. How can we help Rhode Island children avoid lead poisoning? Visit the Childhood Lead Action Project website (<http://www.lead safekids.org>) to learn more about their efforts.
2. Visit the Rhode Island Department of Health website about Lead Poisoning (<http://www.health.ri.gov/healthrisks/poisoning/lead/for/parents/>). What helpful advice can you find here?
3. With large-scale issues, it can be difficult for one individual to work alone. When was a time when a group of people came together to solve a problem at your school, in your neighborhood community, or that you've seen nationally or internationally?

Text-Dependent Questions:

1. On page 187, Dr. Mona writes, "I was getting really mad. At times I could feel myself physically shaking." What exactly is making Dr. Mona this mad?
2. Explain why Dr. Mona describes the public health approach to lead as "wrongheaded" on page 191.
3. What is environmental injustice? How is the water crisis an example of environmental injustice?

Personal Connections Questions:

1. Dr. Mona describes herself, "I was never inflammatory or impulsive. But I am passionate and expressive" (188). Make a list of qualities you see in yourself. Circle the qualities that you most value in yourself.
2. Professor Bunyan Bryant was an early mentor of Dr. Mona's. What do you think makes someone a good mentor? Are you a mentor to anyone? Or is anyone a mentor to you?
3. Dr. Mona knew that any hope of convincing officials of the lead exposure rested on her research being flawless. When was a time that you had to pay meticulous attention to detail? Was it worth the effort? Why or why not?

Extension Activity: Think about all you've learned about lead poisoning and the crisis in Flint to address a large-scale public health disaster. Make an informational pamphlet for the general public that explains the causes of lead poisoning, lists the effects of lead exposure in young children, and offers advice for avoiding exposure. Include a quote from Dr. Mona's book!

Science Content Support:

Mona's Journal Publication:

<https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdf/10.2105/AJPH.2015.303003>

What could you do with this?

Water to Drink (Chem Matters):

<https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/education/resources/highschool/chemmatters/past-issues/2016-2017/december-2016/flint-water-crisis.html>

Chem Matters Curriculum Guide (ACS)

Teacher's Guide - American Chemical

Society<https://www.acs.org/content/dam/acsorg/.../chemmatters-tg-dec2016-flint-water.docx>

This Old House (PBS) Flint

<https://www.thisoldhouse.com/watch/detroit-fixing-fascia>

Watch from 10:47-17:50

References

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<https://www.acs.org/content/dam/acsorg/education/resources/highschool/chemmatters/teacherguide/chemmatters-tg-dec2016-flint-water.docx>

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Dingle, A. (2016, December). The Flint Water Crisis: What's Really Going On?

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American Journal of Public Health, 106(2), 283-290.

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