

Ideas for Teaching the Exhibit
“Visualizing Translation:
Homeland and Heimat in Detroit and Dortmund”
at the High School Level

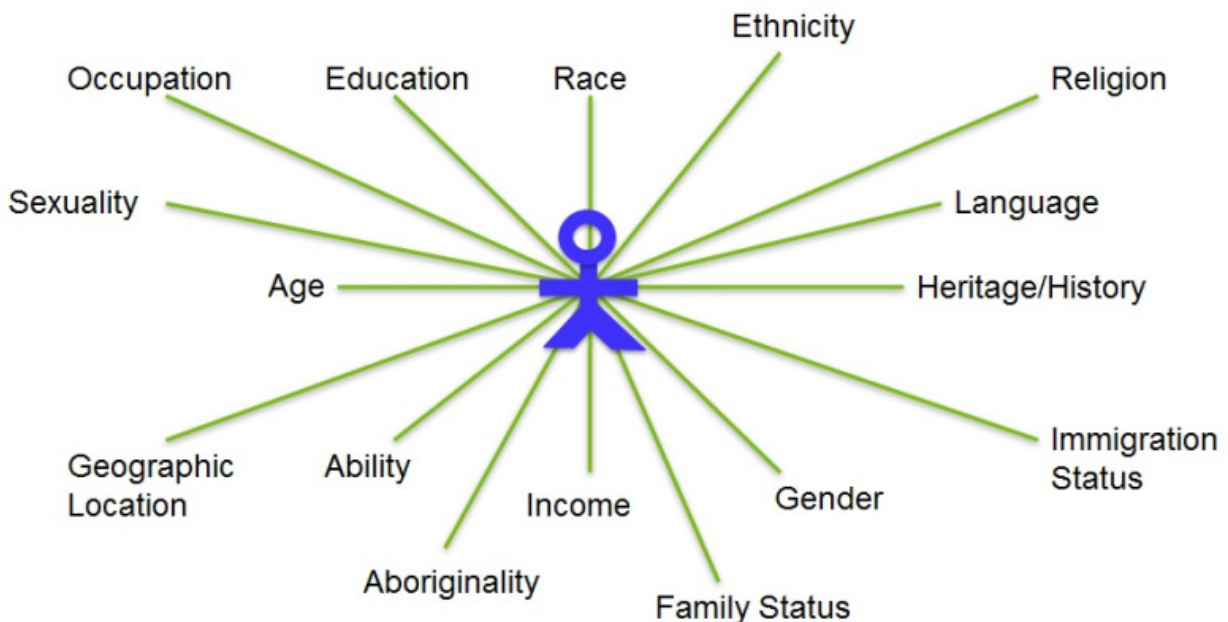
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Preparatory Exercise (30 minutes)

In the following I will describe an **optional exercise you can do with your students on questions of positionality**. Positionality is the social and political context that creates your identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability status. Positionality describes how your identity influences, and maybe even biases, your understanding of and outlook on the world. Introducing the concept of positionality to students can help them to speak from a position of “I” as opposed to an assumed “we.” It can help them to challenge universalisms and be more careful when speaking about or for others and to think in more complex terms about the many different factors that make up a person’s identity.

Step 1

Draw a map that looks something like this on the board (2 minutes). Feel free to edit, add, or change the categories for your specific classroom, such as level of education that students’ parents have obtained, languages spoken at home, etc. This map is nice because it visualizes how many different aspects of one’s identity work together to form the self:



Step 2

If you feel comfortable doing so, go ahead and fill out this map for yourself (3-5 minutes).

This kind of modeling is often helpful for students who have never done a similar exercise before. When I fill out this map in front of a class, I emphasize the aspects of my identity that tend to go unnoticed in the United States, like the facts that I am white, able-bodied, cisgender and heterosexual. These all count as “unmarked” categories, or categories that are accepted as “normal.” Pointing this out helps students to start thinking about aspects of their identity they have often taken for granted.

Step 3

Give students a piece of blank paper and ask them to create a map with themselves at the center (5 minutes).

Step 4

As a follow up exercise, put students into groups of 2-3, and ask them to **reflect on the process of creating this map (10 minutes)**. Students do not need to share any of the personal information they included in their positionality maps.

Step 5

As a final follow-up exercise, ask students to flip their maps over and briefly respond to the following questions (10 minutes):

- Who am I?
- Which privileges do I enjoy or not enjoy?
- How does my identity influence my perception of the world and the way that I interact with it?

Remind students that you will not be collecting these responses, but that they serve as a preparation for their visit to the Visualizing Translation exhibit.

Preparatory Exercise (1 class hour)

Homework:

Ask students to visit the website translatingmichigan.com and open the section on the exhibit Visualizing Translation. Students can learn more about the artists and the idea behind comparing neighborhoods in Detroit and Dortmund, Germany, as well as view select images from the exhibit.

Homework OR In-Class Activity:

Step 1

Ask students to open the section “A Glimpse Inside the Exhibit,” and select 1 image to *describe* in detail. Explain to students that this exercise does not require them to *interpret* the image, but rather to detail everything that they see. This exercise helps students to slow down and take in aspects of an image they might otherwise skip over. You could ask students to do this exercise as homework, in which case they may write a short paragraph describing their image. You could also give students time (10-15 minutes) to examine an image and take notes in class, after which they could present their description to their classmates (2-3 minutes per presentation).

Some questions you might provide to students are:

- What is the setting of the image?
- Is the image a portrait or a streetscape?
- If there are people in the image, what is their body language?
- What is in the foreground and the background of the image?
- Are there any visible words in the image? If so, what languages do you think are present? Can you read them?
- What colors are in the image? How would you describe these colors (warm, cool, bright intense rich, dull etc.)?
- Does the image contain any recognizable cultural markers, such as food, clothing, style of dress, artwork etc.)? If so, what are they and how are they incorporated into the exhibit?

Step 2

Once students have either written up or presented on their descriptions, select images to analyze together as a class (20-25 minutes). Some questions you might consider for a full-class conversation are:

- What is the mood or emotional quality of the image and what does this tell you about its subject matter?
- Can an image convey a sense of belonging? If so, how?
- We usually think about the terms home and homeland in the singular. How can images convey the possibility of having multiple homelands?

Follow up discussion questions after visiting the exhibit.

- Ask students to reflect on any images that were particularly striking to them and explain why.
- What was the effect of listening to residents' narratives of migration while viewing their portrait?
- Did this exhibit help you to think about belonging differently? If so, how?

Ideas for a final class discussion about the title of the exhibit: "Visualizing Translation: Homeland and Heimat in Dortmund and Detroit":

Start by brainstorming with students about the multiple meanings of the word "translation":

- Is translation primarily a linguistic practice?
- If so, does translation have to be about finding equivalent expressions across languages? Or is this even possible?
- Can anyone "translate" a word, a phrase, or a sentence without also interpreting, changing, transforming it?
- Can we think about translation in relation to culture?
- When people migrate, they bring their language(s), cultural practices and traditions with them to a new place. These practices may very well change in a new setting. They may also change the community they enter into. Is this process of change also a form of translation?

End with a discussion about what it might mean to "visualize" translation:

- Can we "see" translation?
- How might images "show us" translation?

Some points of discussion for these questions include:

- Some images have words written in multiple languages. They are a visual reminder of different languages that are spoken in the community.
- Some images show people from different cultural backgrounds coming together.
- Some images show people on the move, or people literally crossing paths.
- Some images show people *creating* murals or street art, and other images show people in relation to this art. These are both ways that we actively engage with, and change the places that we live in.

Follow Up Activity: Writing Personal Stories of Multilingualism and Migration

The portraits in the exhibit “Visualizing Translation” are all accompanied by a personal story. These stories of home and migration are all quite different. Some tell how residents first arrived in Germany, others describe residents’ connection to their community in Southwest Detroit. Some residents migrated recently or several years ago. Others were born in their community but still feel a connection to another culture and language.

All of the stories in Visualizing Translation lead us to think about “home” from a new perspective. What happens when we are forced to leave a place we have called home? Can we build a new home somewhere else? What do we keep and what do we leave behind in this process?

Using the following prompts, start to brainstorm ideas about your own or your family’s experience(s) with migration. Remember, you do not have to address all of these questions! Use them as a springboard to develop your memories and thoughts and to write a short personal essay of 500-1000 words (1-2 pages single spaced).

If you are experiencing writer’s block, take a look at the stories of multilingualism and migration on translatingmichigan.com for inspiration!

Questions to consider when writing your own story:

- When did you migrate, and where did you come from?
- Why did your family choose to come here as opposed to somewhere else?
- What were your own, and/or your family’s hopes for your life in a new place?
- Who did you migrate with? Which friends or family members do you miss the most?
- What were you able to bring with you? Did you have to leave anything behind?
- What were the most difficult, but also the most surprising aspects of your journey and your arrival?
- What was it like when you first arrived? Did you know anyone in your new destination? Was it easy or difficult for you to make new friends?
- Did you or your family speak English before you arrived? Was it easy for you and your parents to communicate once you were here?
- Do you still speak another language at home? Are there specific words or phrases in this language that hold special meaning for you, or that are difficult to express in English?
- Have you experienced any stereotypes or discrimination here? Or have you made any dear new friends?
- What do you miss the most?
- How has your own, or your family’s experience with migration changed you?
- Do you ever find yourself “translating” between languages and cultures? For example, do you interpret for your parents or others in your community? Do you explain cultural practices to friends? Or do you yourself move between languages and cultural norms depending on the situation?
- Where do you consider “home”? Can a person have more than one home? If so, how?

Students who do not have personal experiences with migration or multilingualism can use the following prompts:

- Has learning a second language (for example, in high school language classes), ever led you to think about English differently? How does it feel to speak a foreign language (in class or elsewhere). Are you more self-aware of your language choices? Does it change the way you express yourself in any way?
- Have you ever travelled to a different community, city, region, or country where a language other than English was spoken? What was your experience being in a setting where you did not necessarily understand everything that was happening around you?