



# LESSON FIVE - TRUTH TELLING, RECONCILIATION, REPAIR POWER OF MEMORY

## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does the concept of truth telling, reconciliation, and repair pertain to the history of racial terror and injustice in the United States?

## OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will examine the role of truth-telling in bringing about reconciliation and repair, particularly in response to America's history of racial injustice. To deepen their understanding of this lesson's essential question, students will engage with multiple source materials including documentary film clips from *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality* and first-person interviews collected during the making of the documentary and excerpted from the Interview Archive. Students will synthesize their learning by creating a narrative map that expresses their understanding of truth-telling, reconciliation, and repair.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- View different forms of media, including segments of *True Justice*, that illuminate the concepts of truth telling, reconciliation and repair in the US
- Use information and ideas from the Interview Archive to deepen understanding about how truth telling is necessary for reconciliation and repair
- Use the source materials from the lesson to summarize their understanding of truth and reconciliation in their narrative maps

## MATERIALS

Equipment for viewing film clips and interview threads, and copies of all handouts

## LENGTH

Two or more 50-minute class periods plus homework

“

We're all more than the worst thing we've ever done.

— BRYAN STEVENSON

”

# ACTIVITIES



## 1. OPENING

What does truth telling, reconciliation, and repair look and feel like? Brainstorm students' initial thoughts on this question before sharing one or more of these stories with the class.

- **Video:** [Uprooted](#), a documentary about a descendent of a lynching victim
- **Video:** [Abbeville](#), a documentary about a community coming together to memorialize a racial terror lynching
- **Transmedia Project:** Journalist Karin Berry researches the racial terror lynching of her maternal great-great grandfather in the project, [The Undefeated](#). Read about, listen to, and view photographs of her family's journey.

### Debrief as a class:

- What words or images were most compelling?
- How would they answer the opening question to this lesson after viewing one of these stories?

## 2. ANALYZING FILM AS TEXT

**Teacher Note:** Before showing the film clips from True Justice, clarify the terms of truth telling, reconciliation, and repair and discuss their meaning in the context of the work of the Equal Justice Initiative. For your reference, these definitions are from Merriam-Webster.com:

**Truth:** the body of real things, events, and facts Telling: (as in to tell) to relate in detail, narrate

**Reconciliation:** the state of restoring to friendship, harmony

**Repair:** to restore by replacing a part or putting together what is torn or broken, to fix

Distribute **Handout One - Note Catcher: Truth Telling, Reconciliation and Repair**.

*Teacher Note:* Ask students to review the questions outlined on the Note Catcher before watching the clips. Invite students to take notes on the handout during the film and allow for a few minutes after each clip to complete their notes.

**> Clip One: The Sound of Suffering (runtime: 7 min)**

This clip explains the genesis of EJI's Community Remembrance Project and the work of individuals and groups to collect soil samples from racial terror lynching as an act of memory and as a visual representation of the story of this brutal period of American history.

**> Clip Two: Truth and Reconciliation are Sequential (runtime: 6 min)**

In this clip Bryan Stevenson explains EJI's legal advocacy and narrative work, and explains the need for truth and reconciliation work in this country if racial justice is to be achieved.

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### 3. A CLOSE VIEW - INTERVIEW THREADS

*Teacher Note:* The film-makers conducted numerous interviews to produce True Justice and nine of these interviews are free and accessible in the [Interview Archive](#) on the [Kunhardt Film Foundation](#) website. A selection of these interviews, edited together here to create interview threads, are available for your students' learning.

#### For Lesson Five:

- Two interview threads were created for this lesson that teachers and students can choose from, or use together, to deepen their understanding of the lesson topic.
- Print and distribute **Handouts Three and Four** in the "Resources" section in the lesson so students can follow along with the interview transcripts.
  - **Handout Two: Reconciliation and Repair Thread, Interview Archive**
  - **Handout Three: Power of Memory Thread, Interview Archive**
- Watch the Interview Threads and have students follow along on the transcripts, under-lining details that catch their attention, and jotting down questions and insights that come to mind after viewing each thread.

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## 4. A HISTORICAL VIEW OF MUSEUMS AND MEMORIALS

*Teacher Note: The narrative, educational, and memorial work of the Equal Justice Initiative has been inspired and informed by nations and sites from around the world.*

In True Justice Bryan Stevenson speaks of these efforts, and in the “Power of Memory” Interview Thread he expands on this point explaining how the [Apartheid Museum](#) in Johannesburg is a narrative museum, the [Kigali Genocide Memorial](#) in Rwanda commemorates the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, and the [Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe](#) in Berlin, Germany as well as the [Stolpersteine Project](#) of “stumbling stones” around Berlin all influenced his thinking about how to acknowledge, memorialize, and commemorate the history of slavery and of the genocide of native people.

### Directions:

1. Ask students to share any memorials or monuments they have visited or heard about.
2. Explain to students that they will be exploring many of the places that informed EJI’s National Memorial for Peace and Justice and The Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama. If internet access is unavailable, share pictures of the sites for the class to discuss.
3. Distribute **Handout Four** and have students complete the survey at home or in class.

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## 5. BUILDING A NARRATIVE MAP

Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative believe that throughout history, false narratives have helped to create and sustain injustice, and that it is necessary to confront and change these narratives in order to create a more just society.

To engage students in the process of building a new narrative, each lesson culminates by having students synthesize their learning and map out this information into a form of their choosing. In Lesson Six students will compile these new narrative maps to complete a final assessment.

Here are some suggested narrative maps:

### > Storyboard

A sequence of drawings, typically with some directions and dialogue - that conveys their understanding of the lesson topic

### > Graphic Organizer

A relational way to present information in both a visual and text format

### > Sketchnotes

Often referred to as doodling, sketchnoting is defined as creative, individualized note taking that uses a mix of words and pictures together to create a personal story or narrative

### For Lesson Five: Truth-Telling, Reconciliation, Repair

Using the narrative map of your choice from Handout Five, organize your learning to reflect your impressions, insights, and understanding of the essential question from the lesson: “How does truth-telling, reconciliation, and repair pertain to the history of racial terror and injustice in the United States?”

## 6. CLOSING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In the Power of Memory interview thread, Bryan Stevenson says: “You know, we’re a country that takes great pride in our greatness. We have a lot of strategies, and tactics, and habits that go with achievement and victory. We do the Olympics well. We do military success well. We do accomplishment well. But we don’t do mistakes very well. We don’t own up to our mistakes very well.”

### Discuss

- Do you agree with this assessment of our country? Why or why not?
- What are the cultural forces that make it difficult to own up to our mistakes?
- How do we change our national narrative to include our greatness and our mistakes?
- What might a national narrative that includes our achievements while acknowledging our mistakes look like?



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## 7. EXTENDED LEARNING

1. Truth Commissions, Inquiry Commissions, and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions are non-judicial bodies that have helped sort through the truth of what happened after atrocities, human rights violations and armed conflicts.

Choose a commission from the list published by the [U.S. Institute of Peace](#) to learn about how a Truth and Reconciliation process worked in another country. Write an essay comparing and contrasting that response to what has happened in the U.S. in response to the periods of slavery, racial terror lynching, segregation and mass incarceration.

2. There have been many modern calls for Truth and Reconciliation Committees in the U.S. In Greensboro, N.C. a Commission studied a 1979 incident in Greensboro where anti-Ku Klux Klan protesters were shot and killed by white supremacists at a rally. The city empaneled a Truth and Reconciliation committee in 2004 in an attempt to heal the racial rifts that persist there. Read the Commission's [Executive Summary](#) to assess what the commission did, and research the effects in that community.

Another Truth and Reconciliation attempt took place in Maine between the Wabanaki tribes and non-natives in the area. Read about that effort in this [Yes! Magazine article](#) to learn about what this effort might look like in other parts of the United States.

### Common Core State Standards

#### Anchor Standards

##### [Reading Literature and/or Information: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas.](#)

RL/RI.X.7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

RL/RI.X.8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

RL/RI.X.9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

##### [Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration](#)

SL.X.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.

SL.X.2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally

SL.X.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

SL.X.5 Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

##### [Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge.](#)

W.X.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

W.X.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.



# HANDOUT ONE: **NOTE CATCHER, TRUTH-TELLING, RECONCILIATION AND REPAIR**

## **CLIP ONE**

What did Bryan Stevenson's grandmother want him to hear in the slave cabin where her father was born? Where does he hear the same sound in his work today?

Why is Bryan Stevenson leading a project to collect soil from lynching sites across the country?

## **CLIP TWO**

What does our society teach and remember about the periods of enslavement, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights movements?

What do Bryan Stevenson and EJI want us to remember about those eras?

How can hiding or "forgetting" the most painful moments of our past harm us individually and collectively?

What is the value in remembering those painful moments?

What does Bryan Stevenson mean when he says that "truth and reconciliation are sequential?"



## HANDOUT TWO: **RECONCILIATION AND REPAIR THREAD, INTERVIEW ARCHIVE**

**Directions: Underline key phrases and new details as you watch and listen to the interviews.**

### **ANTHONY RAY HINTON**

The system, some people would say, "It worked because you got out," and to those people I say, "If the system had worked, I never would've went in." But how do you go on after spending 30 years to a system like this? I ask people these questions, "What would you do if they came for you? What would you do if you were charged for the crime you know you didn't commit? What would you do if you know you didn't have the money to hire a decent defense? What would you do if every day you had to live in a cell the size of your bathroom? What would you do if the system saw you more for the color of your skin than in the errors of the case? What would you do if you've been sentenced to death? What would you do if you was waiting all your life to die? How would you survive? What would you do? And what would you do after 30 years they finally set you free? Who would you be?

And 33 years later, nobody in the state of Alabama, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Senators, have had the decency to say, "Mr. Hinton, we're sorry.

Have they not apologized because they don't have to apologize? Have they not apologized because I'm black? Everyday I try my best to try and find an explanation why the state of Alabama haven't apologized. I truly don't want to believe that they haven't apologized because of the color of my skin. But that's the only thing I can think of, that they haven't apologized because I'm black.

### **BRYAN STEVENSON**

He spent nearly 30 years on Alabama's death row locked in a five by seven cell. There were 54 people who were executed while he was there. He watched them walk by. He talks about smelling the flesh burning when they used the electric chair. He lost his mother. You can't put somebody in a cage like that and ignore their humanity, and make things all right. You just can't do it. The fact that we had proved his innocence 15 years earlier just adds to the injury.

Sometimes you don't know, sometimes you really don't know. No one can definitively say who committed this crime. And then you give people the benefit of the doubt. But this was a case where we made it really clear he is innocent and attorneys general, prosecutors, judges just looked the other way. And so he's a remarkable person because he's come out of death row committed to talking about his experience, to changing people's minds about the death penalty. But he's come out unburdened by hate, which is no small accomplishment. It's an extraordinary accomplishment. I think Ray knows that if he hates these people, if he allows hatred to shape the rest of his life he'll still be in a prison, just a different kind of prison and that's what's so remarkable about him.

## BRYAN STEVENSON

You know, if I bump into someone and knock them down, and they are injured, I'm going to be disrupted by that. I want to make sure they know that I didn't intend to hurt them. I'm going to apologize. It will be important to me that they know and understand that I did not intend to hurt them, and I want them to do well. I want to do what I can to help them, not only because I want to make them whole, but because I want to be whole. I don't want to be burdened by something I did to another person that has caused them pain and agony. I want there to be repair in this country, not just for communities of color that have been victimized by bigotry and discrimination, but I want it to be for all of us.

When you offend another person, when you do something you shouldn't do, your peace quotient, your wholeness is also dependent on your commitment to repair. That's where I feel like we haven't learned, collectively, to apologize, and I think there's something in apology that is powerful. You know, we're a country that takes great pride in our greatness. We have a lot of strategies, and tactics, and habits that go with achievement and victory. We do the Olympics well. We do military success well. We do accomplishment well. But we don't do mistake very well. We don't own up to our mistakes very well.

The question, the notion, the idea of repair, I think, has something critical to do with how we move forward. We can't move forward without thinking about, "What does it mean to recover, to atone, to repair the damage that this history has created." I represent people in parole hearings, my clients. When I prepare a client for a parole hearing, the first thing I say to them is, "Look, when we get before the parole board, you're going to have to acknowledge the crime you've committed. You're going to have to apologize for that crime. And you need to express remorse for that crime." Because if you stole something from someone, if you robbed someone, if you injured someone, if you took from someone and you're unwilling to acknowledge the wrongfulness of that crime, if you don't show an understanding of the wrongfulness of that act, and express your remorse, the parole board's not going to trust you, if they let you out, to not offend again."

And one of the ways we have some hope that people won't re-offend is if they express a consciousness about the wrongfulness of those acts. I get it, but it's the same for us collectively as a society.

When you don't acknowledge the wrongfulness, the immorality, the sinfulness of segregation, and you don't feel implicated by that, we don't get to the conversation we need to get to about how do we recover, how do we repair? How do we overcome this history. What do we say? I don't think we should be afraid of words like repair or reparation.

I think we should actually be excited about it. That's why I think truth and reconciliation is sequential. Once you know the truth, then it actually ought to be exciting to you to figure out a way to overcome, to recover, to find a new future. I'm proud of my clients who did tragic things, violent things, when they were younger, who have come out and are committed to living decent lives, healthy lives, wholesome lives, moral lives. I think there's something inspiring about that. In that respect, we have regions in this country where the history of racial bias and bigotry is so extreme that we have an opportunity to do something that can be quite inspiring. But we're not going to do it if we just shut our ears and close our eyes every time somebody says, "Well, how do we repair this damage? How do we deal with the violence and destruction that this has created?"



## HANDOUT THREE: THE POWER OF MEMORY THREAD, INTERVIEW ARCHIVE

**Directions: Underline key phrases and new details as you watch and listen to the interviews.**

### **BRYAN STEVENSON**

“I mean, the kind of work that I think we need to do in this country, the truth work that I think will be followed by recovery, and restoration, and rehabilitation, and reconciliation, that truth work won’t be achievable if we’re not motivated, if we’re not pushed. We’re different than the other countries that have done effective truth and reconciliation work. In South Africa, there’s a consciousness about apartheid that you don’t see in this country. People are really clear. They had a formal truth of reconciliation process. The apartheid museum in Johannesburg is a narrative museum. It insists that you understand the damage done by apartheid.

And you’ll go there and you’ll see, even in the constitutional court, all these emblems that are designed to make you never forget apartheid. But in South Africa, a black majority took power. The people who had been victimized by apartheid had the capacity, had the authority to begin to shape the narrative. If you go to Rwanda, you’ll see a country where there is truth and reconciliation. The genocide museum there. There are human skulls in the space because people want to express their grief so powerfully, so clearly, that they’re comfortable with that. In that place, you can’t spend time in Rwanda without someone talking to you about the genocide. They want every person who visits to understand what happened there. That truth dominates, but the ethnic group that was terrorized and targeted is now kind of allied with the people in power. So there was this transition in power.

When I go to Berlin, Germany, I’m struck by the evidence of a commitment to truth and reconciliation. You can’t go 100 meters in Berlin without seeing markers and stones that have been placed next to the homes of Jewish families that were abducted during the Holocaust. The Holocaust memorial sits in the middle of Berlin, Germany. It speaks truth to power in very plain ways. But Germany lost the war. There was a transition in power. And even though it is Germans that are leading this effort, it comes from a point of humility. The challenge we face in this country is that there hasn’t been a change in power. It’s the children, and the grandchildren, and the great-grandchildren of people who owned slaves, people who participated in lynchings, people who were comfortable with segregation that still have enormous influence over what happens.

Who gets heard, who doesn’t get heard. If we’re going to change things. If we’re going to actually commit to truth and reconciliation, we have to be motivated by something. I think there are things we can hear in these spaces that can motivate us. I think there are things that we can feel. I do often sometimes believe that we are watched by those who were enslaved, those who were lynched, those who were segregated, and they want to see if we’re willing to bear witness to their suffering, and trauma, and injury. If we’re willing to give voice to what needs to be said about what a just society requires.

We have a lot of rhetoric in this country about equality, and fairness, and liberty, and we’re very proud, but we should also be ashamed that we tolerated slavery for two centuries. To what we did to native people, that we looked the other way where thousands were being lynched, that we codified and allowed the law to be a tool of segregation and oppression. We should be ashamed of that. But we shouldn’t fear that shame. Ya know, we got a faith tradition in America where we said to people, if you repent, if you confess, if you acknowledge what you’ve done wrong, there’s something beautiful waiting for you on the other side. There is redemption, there’s restoration, there’s restoration.

And in every faith tradition, we hold that motto out, but we just haven’t done it collectively with regard to this history. I think it’s time for us to do it. I’m really not interested in talking about this history because I want to punish America; I really want to talk about it because I want to liberate us. I think there’s something better waiting for us in this country than another century of conflict, and tension, and burden, and exclusion because we won’t face the history and the legacy of our past. There’s something better waiting for us, but to get there we’re gonna have to be willing to tell the truth. For me, that means being able to hear the things that I haven’t heard before, that I haven’t paid attention to before, to hear the sounds of suffering that our legacy creates.

# HANDOUT FOUR: **EXPLORING MEMORIALS AND SITES OF MEMORY AROUND THE WORLD**

**Directions:** Bryan Stevenson shares that each of these sites informed EJI’s work in building the National Memorial for Peace and Freedom, the Community Remembrance Project, and The Legacy Museum. Explore each website and answer each question in writing.

## **Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa**

What is the Apartheid Museum? What is its mission as a museum?

How does the Apartheid Museum accomplish its mission?

## **Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwanda**

What is the Kigali Genocide Memorial? Why does it exist?

Explore the “Our Work” section of the museum. What is one new thing you learned about this memorial site?

## **Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany**

Explore the memorial sites and the exhibition section on the website and in your own words, explain the mission and purpose of this memorial site.

## **stolpersteine project of “stumbling stones” around Berlin**

Explore the FAQ section of this website and describe what you think is the purpose of this memorial project.

# HANDOUT FIVE: TRUTH TELLING, RECONCILIATION, REPAIR

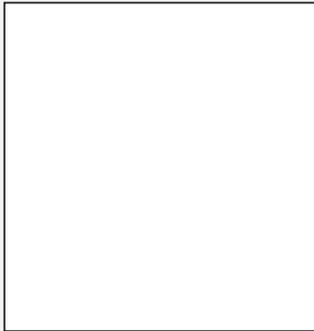
**FOR LESSON FIVE:** Organize your learning to reflect your impressions, insights, and understanding of the essential question from the lesson: “How does truth-telling, reconciliation, and repair pertain to the history of racial terror and injustice in the United States?”

## STORYBOARD

A sequence of drawings, typically with some directions and dialogue that conveys understanding of the lesson topic, and which may be then made into a graphic novel or film. Each of the squares represents a ‘scene’ of the story you want to tell. Give each box a title, choose a representative image, and write a sentence or two about the ideas and concepts this section of your overall story will communicate.

Scene Title:

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*Description:*

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Scene Title:

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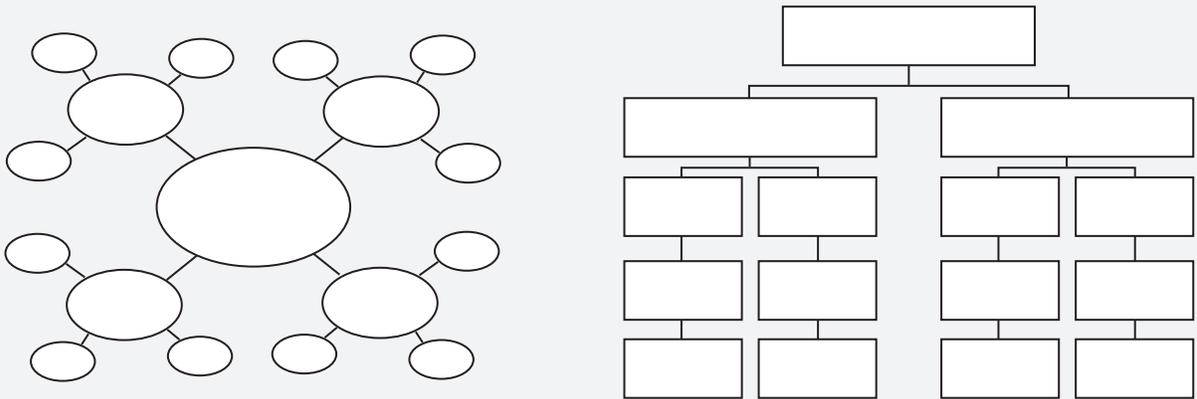
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## GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

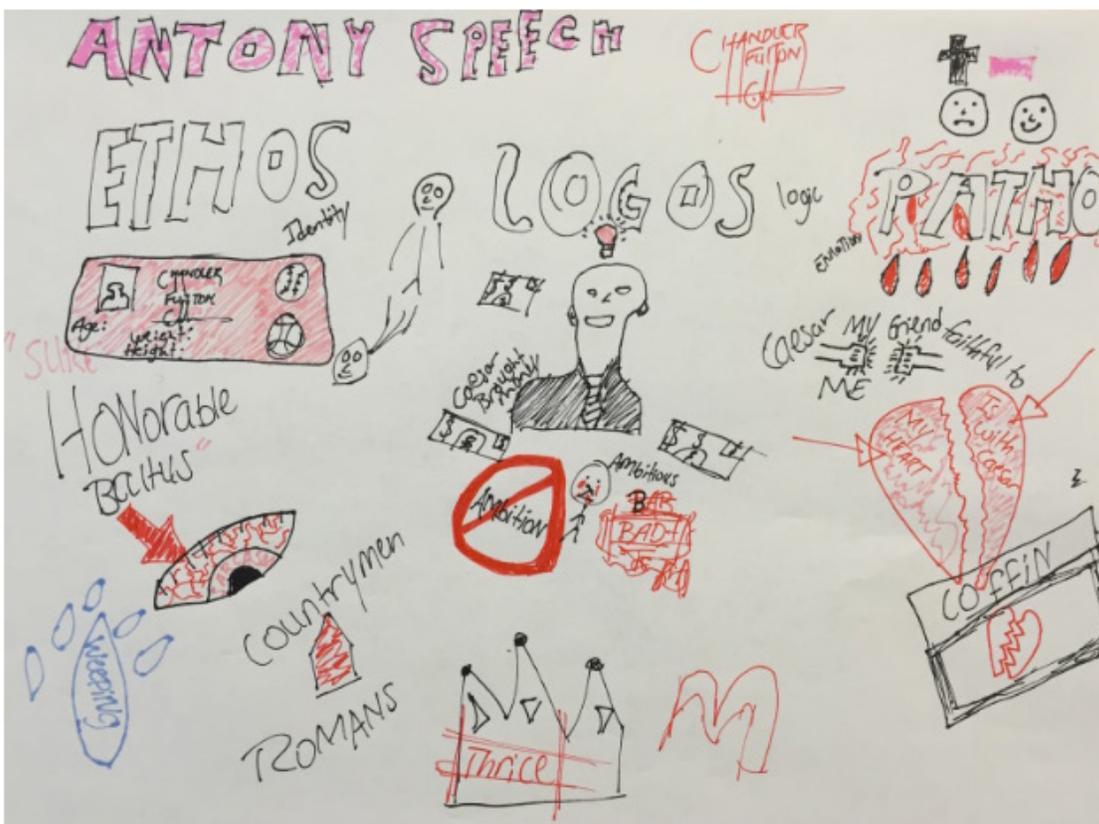
A visual method of organizing information that is sometimes called a mindmap, invites students to organize ideas and concepts in a non-linear, relational way using words and/or images.



Sample images from: <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/graphic-organizer/>

## SKETCHNOTE

Often referred to as doodling, sketchnoting is defined as creative, individualized note taking that uses a mix of words and pictures together to create a personal story or narrative.<sup>7</sup>



Sample Image from: <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/39941/making-learning-visible-doodling-helps-memories-stick>

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