GRADE 11

THE PROBLEM OF OTHERING: TOWARDS INCLUSIVENESS AND BELONGING
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(Adapted)

1. The problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of "othering." In a world beset by seemingly intractable and overwhelming challenges, virtually every global, national, and regional conflict is wrapped within or organized around one or more dimensions of group based discussions.

2. We define "othering" as a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities. Dimensions of othering include, but are not limited to, religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status (class), disability, sexual orientation, and skin tone. Although the axes of difference may vary considerably each of these dimensions contain a similar set of underlying dynamics.

3. Group-based identities are central to each of these conflicts, but in ways that elude simplistic explanations. It is not just religion or ethnicity alone that explains each conflict but often the overlay of multiple identities with specific cultural, geographic, and political histories and grievances that may be rekindled under certain conditions.

4. "Othering" is a term that not only encompasses the many expressions of prejudice on the basis of group identities, but we argue that it provides a clarifying frame that reveals a set of common processes and conditions that propagate group-based inequality and marginality.

5. Othering and marginality can occur on a group basis or at the individual level. We have all likely experienced the discomfort of being some place or with people where we did not feel that we belong. For many of us, this feeling is transitory and relatively harmless, such as the discomfort of entering into a conversation in which we are not well versed or the embarrassment arising from being dressed inappropriately for a place or occasion.

6. "Othering" is a broadly inclusive conceptual framework that captures expressions of prejudice and behaviors such as atavism and tribalism, but it is also a term that points toward deeper processes at work, only some of which are captured by those terms. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear commentators refer to Islamophobia or ethnocentrism as "racism," although religion and ethnicity are not racial categories. Similarly, antigay, and lesbian marriage laws or exclusionary gender norms are expressions of othering, yet those who suffer under them are not defined by ancestry, nationality, religion, or tribe.

7. "Othering" is a broadly inclusive term, but sharp enough to point toward a deeper set of dynamics, about the nature of group-based exclusion. Similarly, the term "belonging" connotes something fundamental about how groups are positioned within society, as well as how they are perceived and regarded.

8. A call for belonging could be a solution to the problem of othering. As dispiriting as world events may seem, humanity has made tremendous progress toward tolerance, inclusion, and equality. We live in a period of dramatic social change and unprecedented openness in human history. The decision to march toward a more inclusive society while taming our "baser impulses and steadying our fears" depends on us.
    Adapted from: http://www.otheringandbelonging.org/the-problem-of-othering/